

Scripture Studies

"Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord..." Isaiah 1:18

Scripture Studies in Matthew, pt 3 Chapters 18 through 28

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by
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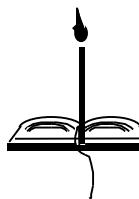


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Matthew 18:1-9

“Who is the Greatest?”

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²He called a little child and had him stand among them. ³And He said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

⁵“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me. ⁶But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

⁷“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

In recent sections, Jesus has been speaking frequently of His upcoming humiliation at the hands of His enemies. Jesus never preached self-advancement or self-aggrandizement. He always and ever preached (and indeed lived) humility. “As there never was a greater pattern of humility, so there never

was a greater preacher of it, than Christ; He took all occasions to command it, to commend it, to His disciples and followers” [Henry]. It is surprising then that the disciples would even dare broach this question: **“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”** (vs. 1). “The very fact that they asked that question showed that they had no idea at all what the Kingdom of Heaven was” [Barclay, in Morris, 458]. We learn in Mark and Luke that the disciples were arguing about who of *them* was the greatest (see Mark 9:33ff; Luke 9:46ff). One could only imagine the argument that they had. “They strive who it should be, each having some pretence or other to it. Peter was always the chief speaker, and already had the keys given him; he expects to be lord-chancellor, or lord-chamberlain of the household, and so to be the greatest. Judas had the bag, and therefore he expects to be lord-treasurer, which, though now he come last, he hopes, will then denominate him the greatest. Simon and Jude are nearly related to Christ, and they hope to take place of all the great officers of state, as princes of the blood. John is the beloved disciple, the favorite of the Prince, and therefore hopes to be the greatest. Andrew was first called, and why should not he be first preferred?” [Henry]. And all this took place in light of Jesus’ very recent teaching to them: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”** (Matt. 16:24). “Many love to hear and speak of privileges and glory, who are willing to pass by the thoughts of work and trouble. They look so much at the crown, that they forget the yoke and the cross” [Henry]. “They seem to have become increasingly sure that Jesus was the Messiah, which meant that the messianic kingdom was just around the corner, and that in turn meant for them that the top places in the kingdom were up for grabs” [Morris, 458].

Jesus, no doubt, surprised them with His answer: **“He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”** (vss. 2–4).

Ironically, the disciples, in their arguments about who was the greatest, were acting like schoolyard children; it is not that sort of child-like behavior about which Jesus was speaking. Rather, it is the humility displayed by a little child placed in the midst of grown men. Notice that Jesus called **“a little child and had him stand among them”** (vs. 2). The large, bearded, swaggering men must certainly have intimidated the little child to a state of humility before them. “Surrounded by grown men, the child must have looked insignificant, which of course is Jesus’ point” [Morris, 458]. “The kingdom of heaven is not like earthly kingdoms. In earthly kingdoms military might or earthly wealth is what counts. It is the ability to overthrow others or to outsmart them or to outbid them that matters. The person who asserts himself is the one who gets on. But Jesus’ kingdom is quite different. Paradoxically, it is the person who is like the little child who is the greatest. Being in the kingdom does not mean entering a competition for the supreme place, but engaging in lowly service” [Morris, 460].

With the child still among the disciples, as a prop, Jesus continues His teaching: **“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes Me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea”** (vss. 5–6). The child here is representing the humble believer. Jesus tells us that the way we treat a believer, He will consider us to be treating Jesus in the same way. If we **“welcome”** the believer into our homes, Jesus will consider that we are **“welcoming”** Him into our homes. Conversely, there will be serious consequences for us if we cause the believer to stumble into sin. Evil people in this world love to see Christians stumble into sin. They love to have the opportunity to trot out the saying, “See! All Christians are hypocrites!” “Wicked men often think it great sport to induce a Christian to sin, especially one who seems very meek and gentle. If they can make him violently angry, or lead him into excessive levity, to say nothing of gross vices, they are prodigies.” [Henry]

giously amused and gratified. Such persons ought to remember these solemn and awful words of the compassionate Savior" [Broadus, 384].

Jesus continues: "**“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”**" (vs. 7). God hates sin: make no mistake about this. Sadly, though, because of the state of fallen man, "**such things must come.**" However, just because sin is inevitable, this does not lessen the punishment for sinners: "**“...but woe to the man through whom they come.”**" "The world being what it is and people being what they are, it is inevitable that '**the things that cause people to sin**' will make their appearance. But that they are certain to come does not excuse the person who brings them about" [Morris, 462].

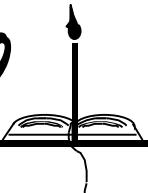
Jesus goes on with some teaching concerning the seriousness of sin: "**“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell”**" (vss. 8–9). Jesus repeats some of the teaching from the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:29). "Those hard sayings of Christ, which are displeasing to flesh and blood, need to be repeated to us again and again" [Henry]. This teaching of Jesus is shocking, and is, of course, meant to be shocking. Jesus is teaching us the seriousness of sin. "He is using picturesque language to make clear that He looks for a complete and thorough repudiation of evil" [Morris, 463]. None of us would ever want to cut a hand off, or gouge out an eye. Yet, we waltz lightly, willingly, knowingly into sin, day after day. Jesus is teaching us that we must make extraordinary effort to get rid of the cause of sin. "What it is that is here enjoined: We must part with an eye, or a hand or a foot, that is, that, whatever it is, which is dear to us, when it proves unavoidably an occasion of sin to us" [Henry]. Now, there are no examples in the Bible of people cutting off limbs to get rid of

the source of sin, but there are examples of people making extraordinary efforts to be rid of the cause of sin. "When Abraham quitted his native country, for fear of being ensnared in the idolatry of it, and when Moses quitted Pharaoh's court, for fear of being entangled in the sinful pleasures of it, there was [figuratively speaking] a right hand cut off. We must think nothing too dear to part with, for the keeping of a good conscience" [Henry].

Note in these last few verses, Jesus alludes to judgment for sinners after death. He implies that judgment is worse than having "**a large millstone hung around one’s neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea**" (vs. 6). He speaks of "**“eternal fire”**" (vs. 8), and "**“the fire of hell”**" (vs. 9). Jesus, being the Son of God, would know about eternal judgment, for judgment comes from God. "Jesus leaves His hearers in no doubt as to the seriousness of the eternal state of sinners" [Morris, 463]. We often hear teaching that waters down eternal punishment. Some say, "God would never do that!" But, who are you, O man, to say what God would or would not do. Again, Jesus, who knows about such things, speaks of eternal punishment for the unsaved. "Let no man deceive us with vain words upon this awful subject. Men have arisen in these latter days who profess to deny the eternity of future punishment and repeat the devil's old argument, that we '**‘shall not surely die’**' (Gen. 3:4). Let none of their reasonings stand fast in the old paths. The God of love and mercy is also a God of justice: He will surely requite" [Ryle, 222].

The good news is that, sinner though we are, we can avoid eternal punishment. Jesus has paid the price for our sins, if we would accept this great gift of His. God truly is love. He is the God of grace and forgiveness, through His Son Jesus Christ. May the Lord be praised!

Matthew 18:10-20



The Value of Each and Every Child of God

10"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

12"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? **13**And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. **14**In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

15"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. **16**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.' **17**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.

18"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. **20**For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Jesus had just warned us of the seriousness of causing others to stumble into sin: "**Woe to the world because of the**

things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (Matt. 18:7). God considers the causing of His children to stumble to be a great sin because He values each and every one of His children, and does not want any of them to wander away from Him. Jesus here speaks of how God values each of His children: "**See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven**" (vs. 10). The language "**their angels**" seems to imply that God assigns to each and every one of us one (or more) angels for our protection. And these angels have direct access to God for, as Jesus teaches, they "**always see the face of my Father in heaven.**" "**Whatever may be the meaning of the remarkable expression 'their angels'**—whether it be designed to teach us that each child of God is under the special care of one particular angel, or whether it mean no more than simply 'the angelic guardians of believers'—the information communicated here only, that they do always behold the face of Christ's Father in heaven, is surely designed to teach us how dear to God and how high in His favor each of them is, when even their guardians have uninterrupted and familiar access to their Father on their account" [JFB]. That angels interact with us is spoken of elsewhere in the Bible. In the book of Hebrews, the writer tells us: "**Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?**" (Heb. 1:14). "**Their agency is represented as both concurring with, and controlling, the action of physical causes.** They minister to God especially for the benefit of them that shall inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14, where '**minister for them**' really meant this, but is popularly misunderstood as meaning minister to them). They protect the human servant of God when in danger and difficulty (see Ps. 91:11; Matt. 4:6). They are present during our worship, and we are enjoined to preserve decorum through respect for them (see I Cor. 11:10). In the judgment they will be agents in separating the righteous from the wicked (Matt. 13:41; Matt. 24:31). They can doubtless reach and affect our minds in the same way as is done by Satan and his

subordinates, all of whom appear to be merely fallen angels; but like human teachers, they can influence the mind to spiritual good only by the help of the Holy Spirit, while our fallen nature offers itself readily to the influence of the fallen angels” [Broadus, 385].

Because of the great love that God has for each of His children, Jesus commands us that we are not to “**look down on one of these little ones**” (vs. 10). So, not only are we not to cause each other to stumble, but we are not even to “**look down**” on one another. As God values each and every one of us, so also we are to value each of our brothers and sisters. “We must not make a jest of their infirmities, not look upon them with contempt, not conduct ourselves scornfully or disdainfully toward them, as if we cared not what became of them... If Christ put such a value upon them, let us not undervalue them. If He denied Himself so much for their salvation, surely we should deny ourselves for their edification and consolation” [Henry].

Jesus goes on to illustrate the care God has for each and every one of His children through a parable: “**What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost**” (vss. 12–13). It seems that there is no greater joy in heaven than when one who is lost is saved, for we are told a number of times of the rejoicing in heaven that goes on when this happens. This should not surprise us, for Jesus’ primary mission on earth was to “**seek and to save what was lost**” (Luke 19:10).

In the same vein, Jesus goes on to instruct His followers how to deal with someone who has stumbled into sin: “**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**” (vs. 15). This method of dealing with those who sin against us is somewhat radical, and unworldly.

The way of the world is to hate those who sin against us. Jesus commands us to seek the good of those who do us wrong.

Note that we are to “**go**” to the sinning brother; we are not to wait until he first comes to us. We proactively go to him, just as the good shepherd goes out after the lost sheep.

First, we are to go to him in private. “Private admonitions must always go before public censures; if gentler methods will do the work, those that are more rough and severe must not be used” [Henry]. Our goal is not to embarrass our sinning brother by publishing his sin to the world, nor to show him up, nor is our goal to reproach him. No, our primary goal is, as Jesus said, to “**win our brother over.**” If his sin can remain private, and he repent of it, this is the best result.

However, if this does not work: “**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.’**” (vs. 16). Note, Jesus does not say, “But if he will not listen, then give up.” No, we are to persevere in seeking to return our stumbling brothers to the right path. “We must not be weary of well-doing, though we see not presently the good success of it” [Henry]. The next step is to bring along “**two or three witnesses.**” This will keep the matter reasonably private, while still giving the sinner the opportunity to repent. Further, the testimony of two or three witnesses will reinforce to the sinner that he is deviating from behavior befitting a Christian.

Then again, if this does not work: “**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**” (vs. 17). The continued stubbornness of the sinner warrants making the matter public. And then, if he, after all this, perseveres in his sin, the matter is closed: he is to be treated as if he no longer is part of the fellowship of believers, as determined by the judgment of the Church.

Jesus goes on to speak of the authority given the Church: “**I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**” (vs. 19). This somewhat enigmatic state-

ment seems to be saying that the Spirit-led decisions made by the Church are sanctioned in heaven. “While ministers preach the word of Christ faithfully, and in their government of the church strictly adhere to His laws, they may be assured that He will own them, and stand by them, and will ratify what they say and do, so that it shall be taken as said and done by Himself” [Henry]. “The point is that the church has God’s authority to decide. The reference here is especially to the settlement of a difficulty between brethren, but the statement is a general one” [Broadus, 389].

The decisions of the Church must be settled upon through prayer: **“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven”** (vs. 19). In context, it seems that Jesus is still speaking of the Church’s power to admonish a brother for his sin, and to seek his repentance. Such an important matter must be brought to God in prayer. “Prayer must go along with all our endeavors for the conversion of sinners” [Henry]. As James exhorts us: **“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”** (James 5:16).

Jesus then gives us a wonderful promise concerning His special presence among the fellowship of believers: **“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”** (vs. 20). Note, this statement is an explicit claim by Jesus of His own divinity. Only God, of course, can be in more than one place at a time.

This promise of Jesus underscores the importance and the value of believers coming together in fellowship and prayer. This is the Church. The Church is not the Church without the gathering together of the saints, in worship, in prayer, in fellowship.



Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiving

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

³⁰“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴In anger

his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Jesus had recently been speaking about how to deal with brothers who sin against you (see Matt. 18:15ff). This must have brought to Peter's mind a related question: **“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’”** (vs. 21). Some would fault Peter for putting a limit on forgiveness. It is an easy thing for us to fault him, because we already know Jesus' answer! I think we must give him some credit, for he was suggesting that, in forgiveness, he go beyond what was taught him by the religious leaders of the day. “Jewish rabbis are said to have taught people to bear injury three times and then to regard duty as done; if this is so, Peter's suggestion of ‘seven times’ was liberal extension and could be regarded as magnanimous” [Griffith Thomas, 272]. Peter was on the right track. Peter was taking for granted that he must forgive his brother, and that he must forgive him much.

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (vs. 22). The point in Jesus' answer is not that we are to keep count of forgiving, count up to seventy-seven, and stop at seventy-eight. No one in their right Christian mind would keep such a count. The point is, of course, to keep forgiving an innumerable number of times. I do think that many of us have problems with this and are not following the teachings of our Lord. Our Lord's attitude was to seek the best in people, and to be quick to forgive. The attitude of so many of us is to expose the worst in people, and to be quick to condemn. Such an attitude is not a proper Christian attitude. “What a happy world it would be if this rule of our Lord's was more known and better obeyed! How many of the miseries of mankind are occasioned by disputes, quarrels, lawsuits, and an obstinate tenacity about what men call ‘their rights?’” [Ryle, 230].

Jesus goes on to tell a parable that teaches us Christians,

who have been forgiven so much by our Lord, that we should also forgive others, or be guilty of the worst hypocrisy. He begins: **“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him”** (vss. 23–24). In this parable, the king represents God, and the servant, a Christian forgiven of his sins. **“Ten thousand talents”** is a huge amount of money. A **“talent”** was actually a weight, approximately 30 kg. (or around 60 lbs). So the debtor in the parable owed his master 10,000 talents of either gold or silver (which precious metal is not specified in the parable). In either case, the amount that he owed was enormous, into the millions of dollars. It was, effectively, unpayable by one employed as a servant. The servant's debt, of course, is representative of our debt to God: our sins are so numerous, and God is so holy, we can never repay this debt. **“Sacrifice and offering would not do it; our good works are but God's work in us, and cannot make satisfaction; we are without strength, and cannot help ourselves”** [Henry]. We must realize something: Every sin that we commit adds to our debt to God. There is an account kept of these debts, and they must be repaid, or forgiven by God (the creditor), upon His terms.

As was his right, the master in the parable initially set about to punish the servant harshly: **“Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt”** (vs. 25). Who would argue against the right that the master had to punish the debtor? Yet, there are many who would argue against God's right to judge His debtors. When reading the parable, one cannot help but thinking what a fool the servant must have been: to build up such a large debt. We, in thinking this, are condemning ourselves, though. What fools we are to sin so much and build up such a great debt to our loving God!

Naturally, the servant begs for leniency: **“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’”** (vs. 26). The

servant was either a fool or a liar, for it was quite impossible, given the enormity of the debt, for him to “**pay back everything.**” “This servant-debtor thought he only needed *patience*; but indeed he needed forgiveness! It seems strange that he did not see this, since the debt was so great, and he had nothing wherewith to pay, but was utterly bankrupt: yet it is a well-known fact, that men do not see their true condition before the Lord God, even when they perceive that in many things they come short” [Spurgeon, 256]. The servant asks for “**patience**”, but the master must already have shown great patience up to this point, given that the debt had built up to such an enormous sum. Our God too shows great patience with us, allowing us ample time to come to repentance. But there will be a time when we will be called to account for our debt of sin. As the writer of Hebrews teaches: “[M]an is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

The master responded to the servant’s plea: “**The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go**” (vs. 27). Reflecting the nature of God, the master’s mercy exceeded what was asked. Much more than a temporary reprieve of patience to pay off an unpayable debt, the servant was totally forgiven his debt. God is very ready to enact compassion and mercy. Significantly though, “the servant was not forgiven until he came to his lord in humility” [Griffith Thomas, 274].

It is also noteworthy, I believe, that we find here no response of gratitude by the servant to his master for the forgiveness shown him. Instead, “when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you own me!’ he demanded” (vs. 28). We can see right away, from the violence with which he accosts his debtor, that the forgiven servant was not humbled, or affected spiritually in any way by being forgiven. It is as if he did not understand the value of the great mercy he had been shown. Now, the amount owed him, “**a hundred denarii**”, though not insignificant, was much, much less than what he owed his master. A denari was typically the amount of wages paid for a

day’s work. So he was owed, at most, in the thousands of dollars (“**a hundred denarii**”), while he had owed his master millions of dollars (“**ten thousand talents**”).

The debtor plead his case: “**His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back’**” (vs. 29). Would not this plea have brought to mind his own to his master? The main difference between the pleas is that the servant’s debtor actually did have a possibility of paying back the debt, whereas the forgiven servant owed so much that there really was no chance that he could repay such a sum.

The forgiven servant showed no mercy: “**But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt**” (vs. 30). This parable is so accurate in its depiction of human nature. We are so ready to accept forgiveness from God. In fact, we act as though somehow God owes us His forgiveness. And then, by our subsequent actions, we demonstrate that we do not fully appreciate all that God has done for us. We are so ready to condemn our brothers, and hold grudges, for the wrongs they do us, rather than forgive them.

We should pay careful attention to the sequel of the forgiven servant’s actions: “**When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed**” (vs. 32–34). Jesus brings home the point of the parable: “**This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart**” (vs. 35). If we do not forgive our brothers, we demonstrate that we do not truly understand the forgiveness God has shown us, that we do not truly understand the Gospel message. “Those who receive extraordinary grace should act in accordance with the grace they re-

ceive” [Morris, 476]. “This is not intended to teach us that God reverses His pardons to any, but that He denies them to those that are unqualified for them. Though having seemed to be humbled, like Ahab, they thought themselves, and others thought them, in a pardoned state, and they made bold with the comfort of it” [Henry]. We must take to heart the words we say so often as we recite the Lord’s Prayer: **“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”** (Matt. 6:12).



Matthew 19:1-11

The Bond of Marriage

¹When Jesus had finished saying these things, He left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ²Large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

³Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce His wife for any and every reason?”

⁴“Haven’t you read,” He replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

⁷“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

⁸Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

¹⁰The disciples said to Him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Jesus was once again on the move: “**When Jesus had finished saying these things, He left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there**” (vss. 1–2). Although, this seems like a typical transitional sentence of Matthew’s, there is some significance here: Jesus is leaving Galilee, never to return, until after His resurrection. Much of His time of ministry and teaching was spent in Galilee. With His departure from there, we are moving on to the climax of the history of Jesus’ life on earth, as Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem.

“**Some Pharisees came to Him to test Him. They asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce His wife for any and every reason?’**” (vs. 3). These Pharisees “came to Jesus”; sadly, they came to Him for all the wrong reasons. They came to “**test Him**”, rather than to be ministered to by Him, rather than to learn from His great wisdom, rather than to be healed by Him, rather than to be saved by Him. “They came with a question, but they were not genuinely looking for information; they were *testing* Jesus, posing a question that they hoped He would not be able to answer satisfactorily” [Carson, 479]. You know you are far gone when you go to the Lord of the Universe, not to find answers, but to try to trip Him up.

Then as now, the Pharisees’s question on “**divorce**”, was a delicate and controversial question. It seems that any answer Jesus could give was bound to offend someone. Men would be offended if divorce was disallowed; women would be offended if divorce was too easy. Answering this question could even be dangerous, as John the Baptist found out. John was imprisoned (and eventually beheaded) because of his outspokenness with regard to King Herod’s marital situation (see Matt. 14:1–12).

It seems at that time, divorce was fairly prevalent, even among the Pharisees [Carson, 411]. For instance, Josephus the historian and Pharisee, who lived in the first century AD, was a divorcee. In fact, some of his comments on the law echo the question found here by the Pharisees. Josephus wrote: “He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any

cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men), let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more” [Antiq. IV, 253]. Today, sadly, we have the same attitude about marriage, even within the church. Divorce is by and large accepted, even approved, for any and every reason. One could even imagine, if Jesus were walking the earth today, the same question being asked of Him.

So, what did Jesus say? He answered: “**‘Haven’t you read,’ He replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?” So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate’**” (vss. 4–6). On matters of the Law, Jesus always referred to the Old Testament. “Let those who reverence the authority of Christ mark the divine authority which He ascribes to the Old Testament in general, and to the books of Moses in particular, in the settlement of all questions of divine truth and human duty” [JFB]. “Jesus refers to the account in Genesis as historical fact and bases His argument on literal expressions found therein” [Thomas, 278].

Here, Jesus cites as authority the earliest mention of marriage in the Bible. “If the sanctity of the marriage-tie, as the fountain of all social well-being, is to be upheld among men, it must be by basing it on the original divine institution of it” [JFB]. The essence of biblical marriage is that God Himself, the “**Creator**”, has “**made them male and female**”, and once “**united**” by marriage, the “**Creator**” makes them “**one flesh**”. With this view, to divorce would be equivalent to and as radical as ripping your arm off your body, for man and wife are “**one flesh**”. Jesus underscores this: “**So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate**” (vs. 6). Marriage, then, in its Godly ideal, is indissolvable. “Jesus cites Scripture, then, to bring out the truth that marriage is more than a casual arrangement for the convenience of the two parties. It is the

closest of earthly unities, and must be understood so" [Morris, 481]. "If God has joined them together, according to the structure of His own creation, divorce is not only 'unnatural' but rebellion against God" [Carson, 412].

The Pharisees follow up with another question: "**'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?'**" (vs. 7). The passage in Moses' law to which the Pharisees are referring is in Deuteronomy 24: "**'When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance'**" (Deut. 24:1–4, AV).

Jesus answers their question: "**Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery**" (vss. 8–9). Jesus teaches us that the passage in Deuteronomy was not sanctioning divorce, but rather defining a procedure for divorce, should it occur. To divorce, a man must write a certificate of divorce. This certificate freed the wife to marry another man. The law also stipulated that the woman was not allowed to remarry the first man. This procedure was a protection for women. If the husband, through the hardness of his heart, divorced the woman for a trivial reason, she would be able to remarry without blame (assuming she was not guilty of marital unfaithfulness). "What the Pharisees call

a command was only an allowance, and designed rather to restrain the exorbitances of it than to give countenance to the thing itself. The Jewish doctors themselves observe such limitations in that law, that it could not be done without great deliberation. A particular reason must be assigned, the bill of divorce must be written, and, as a judicial act, must have all the solemnities of a deed, executed and enrolled. It must be given into the hands of the wife herself, and (which would oblige men, if they had any consideration in them, to consider) they were expressly forbidden ever to come together again" [Henry]

The Pharisees, as teachers of the Law, should have realized, through the study of other passages in the Old Testament writings, that the procedure proscribed by Moses was not a sanction of divorce. For instance, God clearly states: "**'I hate divorce,' says the Lord God of Israel**" (Malachi 2:16). Jesus was "calling on His hearers to take seriously the Scripture that they professed to respect. If they did this they would realize that marriage was a much more binding relationship than they were making it. The typical attitude of the people of that time had reduced a God-given unity to a casual union, dissolvable at the whim of the male. This was not what Scripture meant when it spoke of what God did at the creation" [Morris, 482].

Jesus offers one and only one reason for divorce: "**I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery**" (vs. 9). The uniting in marriage of two into one flesh is tainted by marital unfaithfulness, for the unfaithful spouse becomes united with another. Jesus, therefore, releases the faithful spouse from the obligation of staying married, and allows that the faithful spouse may marry another without guilt.

Unfortunately, pre-marital sex, divorce, and even adultery are prevalent in today's society. One reason for this is that those of the world treat sex as just a physical act. However, the sexual union is not just a physical act. It is a mystical bond, forever uniting the participants. Thus, even pre-marital

sex can be harmful to a future marriage, tainting the union of the married couple. We Christians must be an example to those of the world, and follow Jesus' instructions on sex and marriage. We must resist the temptation of joining in the sexual union before marriage. There are rewards to resisting this temptation. The eventual marriage bond is greatly strengthened by the faithfulness of both participants. There is no bond stronger—the uniting into one flesh by God—no love deeper than that of married spouses whose only life-long sexual partner is their spouse.

Given the irrevocability of the marriage vows, we must never enter into marriage lightly. Those who are planning to be married must understand clearly the permanence of marriage. “It is clear, from the whole tenor of the passage, that the relation of marriage ought to be highly reverenced and honoured among Christians. It is a relation which was instituted in paradise, in the time of man’s innocency, and is a chosen figure of the mystical union between Christ and His Church: it is a relation which nothing but death ought to terminate. It is a relation which is sure to have the greatest influence on those whom it brings together, for happiness or for misery, for good or for evil. Such a relation ought never to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but soberly, discreetly, and with due consideration” [Ryle, 235].

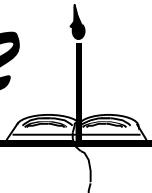
The disciples had a comment about this teaching of their Lord: **“The disciples said to Him, ‘If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry’** (vs. 10). “The remark made by our Lord’s disciples shows the deplorably low state of public feeling on the subject” [Ryle, 234]. This comment by Jesus’ disciples reflects that the ease of divorce was a relief to the men of the time. Clearly, they did not view marriage as a permanent bond. Moreover, if given the choice to accept the permanence of marriage, or to not marry, the disciples would choose not to marry.

The disciples, in a way, point out what all married people know: marriage is difficult; to stay married is a difficult thing; to live intimately with the same person for the rest of one’s

life requires constant acts of commitment. A good marriage is not so much a state of existence, as it is a series of chores to maintain the good marriage. A good marriage requires work on the part of both spouses. It is our Lord’s command to stay married. And this we must do. It is a command for our good, and for the good of society. For us individually, there is nothing better and more stabilizing than having a permanent ally, a partner in love, someone to trust, to talk to, to pray with, to share life with. For society, it is well known that children raised in a stable family are more likely to become productive members of society.

Jesus replied to the disciples’ remark: **“Jesus replied, ‘Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it’** (vs. 12). Jesus’ reply to the disciples is, basically, if you can’t accept that marriage is permanent, then don’t get married. If you can accept it, then do get married. Marriage is optional. Some are **“born eunuchs”**, i.e. not made for marriage. Some **“have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven”**, i.e., they have voluntarily decided not to get married in order to serve God more effectively.

Matthew 19:13-22



The Rich, Young Man Seeking Life

¹³Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. ¹⁴Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵When He had placed His hands on them, He went on from there.

¹⁶Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

¹⁷"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

¹⁸"Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, ¹⁹honor your father and mother," and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'

²⁰"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

²¹Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus ever and always spoke out in support of the lowliest in society. He had just finished speaking in support of the women in that society, forbidding men to divorce them for any and every reason. Here, He speaks up for the children: "Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to

place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' When He had placed His hands on them, He went on from there" (vss. 13–15). The disciples, I suppose, thought that Jesus was doing things too important to be interrupted by mere children. However, bringing people to Jesus should take precedence over everything else. Jesus overruled the "rebuke" that the disciples gave to those who brought the children: "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.'"

They are wise parents, who bring their children to Jesus. "Parents of these children brought to Christ were performing the high duty of offering their little ones to God in their infancy; for it is never enough to care only for family's health, education, and deportment. It is, indeed, an inadequate parent who is concerned merely for children's physical welfare or worldly success; his supreme duty is to consider their souls" [Griffith Thomas, 280]. So, parents should heed the words of Jesus throughout the childhood of their children: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them." Encourage your children in learning the things of God, and learning about the life and work of Jesus; encourage them in coming to Jesus in prayer; encourage them in the worship of Jesus. Note also, it is un-Christlike to be indifferent to the needs of children.

The children came to Jesus for prayer. Next Matthew relates an episode in which a rich, young man came to Jesus seeking eternal life: "Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?'" (vs. 16). "Oh, that more young men would ask a similar question!" [Spurgeon, 266]. This action, coming to Jesus for eternal life, is nothing but commendable. The man has come to the right place! "Salvation is an individual business: every one who wishes to be saved, must have private personal dealings with Christ about his own soul" [Ryle, 237]. "Here is one who in a day of abounding unbelief comes of his

own accord to Christ. He comes not to have a sickness healed; he comes not to plead about a child: he comes about his own soul” [Ryle, 237].

Let us note something here: “We see from the case of this young man, that a person may have desires after salvation, and yet not be saved... We must never forget that good feelings alone in religion are not the grace of God. We may know the truth intellectually; we may often feel pricked in conscience; we may have religious affections awakened within us, have many anxieties about our souls, and shed many tears: but all this is not conversion. It is not the genuine saving work of the Holy Spirit... Not only are good feelings alone not grace, but they are even positively dangerous, if we content ourselves with them” [Ryle, 238].

The rich, young man was under the illusion that he could be holy enough through his own good works to earn in the sight of God eternal life. He was not spiritually mature enough to know that “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” (Rom. 3:23). However, he must have felt in his conscience that he fell short of pleasing God, for he felt that he had not attained eternal life, and he felt that he needed to ask the question of Jesus: “**Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?**” His problem apparently was that, although he had paid strict attention to the commands of God, he still felt that he was coming short in some way” [Morris, 488].

Jesus first replied: “**Why do you ask me about what is good?**” Jesus replied. “**There is only One who is good**” (vs. 17). Some find this statement of Jesus troubling. It seems to them that Jesus is denying that He Himself is good. That would be the case if Jesus did not answer the man’s question, and said something like: “I am not qualified to answer that question.” However, Jesus did indeed answer the man’s question, and by doing so, was proclaiming that, yes, He Himself is the “**only One who is good.**” By asking the man, “**Why do you ask me about what is good?**”, Jesus was urging the man to reflect on the implications of asking the Son of God such a question. The conclusion the rich, young man

should draw is that he had come to right place in asking such a question. Jesus was also imparting to the young man the knowledge that only God is good, and that no man can live up to the standards to attain eternal life, for there is “**only One who is good**”. Thus, Jesus was preparing the man for the inevitable result: the man would not be able to do “**the good thing**” that Jesus would ask of him.

Jesus answered the man’s question: “**If you want to enter life, obey the commandments**” (vs. 17). The only way for a man to attain eternal life on his own is to be perfectly holy in the sight of God, by obeying each and every one of God’s commandments. The rich, young man must have felt that he came up short of obeying *all* the commandments, for he tried to get Jesus to narrow the task down. The young man asked: “**Which ones?**”

In answer to “**Which ones?**”, Jesus listed some of God’s commandments: “**Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,” and “love your neighbor as yourself”**” (vs. 18–19). Here, Jesus cited commandments concerning behavior to other people, the so-called second table of the law. “He stresses the importance of the ethical” [Morris, 490]. The last commandment He cited, “**love your neighbor as yourself**”, summarizes all of the commandments concerning dealings with our fellow man. To have obeyed perfectly this commandment is a tall order, and, I would say, impossible for fallen man. “The last-quoted command summarized the rest, and it ought to have opened the questioner’s eyes to his shortcomings; for who has loved his neighbor as himself?” [Spurgeon, 267].

Nevertheless, the young man told Jesus: “**All these I have kept,’ the young man said. ‘What do I still lack?’**” (vs. 20). “We discover something of his spiritual lack when he says that he has kept all these commandments” [Morris, 490]. The young man didn’t recognize his true spiritual state. “Perhaps he spoke the truth, as he understood the law” [Spurgeon, 267]. But his claim of keeping all those commandments came from ignorance: ignorance in

understanding God's law, and ignorance in understanding himself. "So utterly ignorant is he of the spirituality of God's statutes, that he never doubts that he has perfectly fulfilled them" [Ryle, 239]. "Note, a man may be free from gross sin, and yet come short of grace and glory. His hands may be clean from external pollutions, and yet he may perish eternally in his heart-wickedness" [Henry].

Though the young man believed he kept all of the cited commandments, his conscience told him that he "**still lacked**" the requisite holiness to enter eternal life. "Despite his misconception about his standing as a keeper of commandments, he was clearly conscious that something was missing" [Morris, 491]. Rather than continue citing commandments (which, no doubt, would have resulted in the man continuously claiming innocence), Jesus chose to show the man that he lacked the holiness required by God: "**Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'**" (vs. 21). Note, Jesus said, "**If you want to be perfect...**" Jesus was pointing out that total perfection in the eyes of God is required, if a person wants to attain eternal life by his own works. Such a holy perfection requires one to be one-hundred percent dedicated to God. Jesus apparently sensed that the man's riches were getting in the way of his dedication to doing the will of God. The man's love of his riches was causing him to violate the greatest commandment: "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind**" (Matt. 22:37). "Our Lord brings him to the first table of the law: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart'. If he did this, he would be willing, at a divine command, to part with his property, even as Abraham was ready to offer up his son" [Spurgeon, 268].

This request of Jesus' was not unprecedented. Jesus' Twelve Disciples were asked to do the same thing. "This is the challenge He had previously made to the fishermen as they were at their nets (see Matt. 4:19) and to Matthew as he sat at his place of work (see Matt. 9:9). They did not have the riches

of this young man, it would seem, but they left what they had and followed Jesus. They were prepared to sacrifice everything; that is the path of the service of God" [Morris, 492]. Then also, throughout the Bible, the holy men of God (as the young rich man thought he was) were asked to do similar things. "The principle involved is supreme devotion to Christ. The test of this is different for different people. Some find it harder to renounce hopes of worldly honor and fame for Christ's sake, than to renounce wealth; and for others the hard trial is to abandon certain gratifications of the various appetites or of taste. Abraham left his native country at God's command, but became rich and famous. Moses gave up the distinction and refined pleasures of court life, and tried patiently to rule a debased and intractable people. Elisha left his property at the call of God through Elijah. Paul abandoned his ambitious hope of being a great rabbi. All should be willing even to die for Christ (16:24ff), though not many are actually required to do so" [Broadus, 407].

Interestingly, Jesus pointed out to the man that by "**selling his possessions**", the man would not really lose his riches, but would just displace them. Jesus promised that he "**will have treasure in heaven.**" The man apparently did not believe this, or he did not sufficiently value "**treasures in heaven**" (the only true treasures), for he was quite unwilling to do what Christ asked: "**When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth**" (vs. 22). The young man came to Jesus willing to do whatever Jesus asked, so he thought. One might think that the young man, who thought he was so godly and perfect, might have welcomed such advice. On the contrary, "when he was faced with a really great deed, getting rid of all his wealth, the only thing he could do was go away grieving" [Morris, 492]. "At once the weak point in his character is detected. It turns out that, with all his wishes and desires after eternal life, there was one thing he loved better than his soul, and that was his money" [Ryle, 240]. "Those who have much in the world are in the greatest temptation to love it, and to set their hearts upon it. Such is the bewitching nature of worldly wealth, that those

who need it least, desire it most; when riches increase, then is the danger of setting the heart upon them (see Ps. 62:10)" [Henry].

The man's reaction to Jesus' advice is full of irony: "**When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.**" Those of the world think that a person cannot be sad and rich at the same time. How wrong they are! This man was young, and he was rich, yet, "**he went away sad.**" Moreover, it was his riches that made him sad, for "**he went away sad, because he had great wealth.**" Far from bringing happiness, often riches prevent one from attaining true happiness. I have no doubt that, had the young man followed Jesus' advice, he would have lived a blissfully happy, spiritually rich, life.

Nevertheless, though we are to strive always to do the will of God, it is a mistake for us to think that we can attain eternal life through our own works. Asking our Lord the question, "**what do I still lack?**", is to invite discovery of our shortcomings. We must come to God seeking mercy, finding eternal life only through His Son. Instead of saying, "**what do I still lack?**" (for the list will go on forever), we should plead with God: "You supply what I lack, through Your Son, Jesus Christ."



Matthew 19:23-29

The Disadvantages of Wealth

²³Then Jesus said to His disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

²⁷Peter answered Him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

²⁸Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

In the previous section, a rich, young man came to Jesus, asking: "**Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?**" (Matt. 19:16). In the end, sensing that the man's riches had too great a hold on him, Jesus said: "**If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me**" (Matt. 19:21). The rich, young man did not heed this request of Jesus. Instead, the rich, young man "**went away sad, because he had great wealth**" (Matt. 19:22).

In this section, Jesus responds to that episode: "**Then Je-**

sus said to His disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven’” (vs. 23). Jesus speaks of the difficulty for wealthy people to “enter the kingdom of heaven.” This difficulty stems from a variety of reasons: “Riches, which all desire to obtain—riches, for which men labor and toil, and become gray before their time—riches are the most perilous possession. They often inflict great injury on the soul; they lead men into many temptations; they engross men’s thoughts and affections; they bind heavy burdens on the heart, and make the way to heaven even more difficult than it naturally is” [Ryle, 242]. “How few of the rich even hear the Gospel! They are too great, too fine, too busy, too proud to regard the lower preacher of the Gospel of the poor. If, perchance, they do hear the heavenly message, they have not the necessities and tribulations which drive men from the present world to seek consolation in the world to come, and so they feel no need to accept Christ” [Spurgeon, 270].

So, with regard to spiritual matters—and spiritual matters are the most important that we, as human beings, deal with—it is much better not to be wealthy. “This teaching is very useful for everyone: for the rich, that they are warned to beware of their danger; for the poor, that they may be content with their lot and not greedily seek what would do them more harm than good” [Calvin, 259].

Jesus gives a picturesque illustration of the difficulty for the wealthy to enter heaven: “Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (vs. 24). Now, I have heard some preach sermons that water this illustration down by, for instance, saying that what Jesus meant by “needle” was actually a small gate leading into Jerusalem. These preachers are implying that, if one tries really hard (by, say, unloading the camel) that they could indeed get the camel through the “needle”. Such teaching misunderstands what Jesus is saying. This illustration is pointing out the *impossibility* (see vs. 26) for the rich to enter heaven by their own means. “There is no sense in hunting up abstruse metaphors where

the proverbial teaching is as plain as possible” [Spurgeon, 269]. “The camel was the largest beast familiar to the Jews, and the needle’s eye was the smallest opening in any familiar object... It is perfectly evident that Jesus was understood, and meant to be understood, as stating an impossibility” [Broadus, 408]. “This is a proverbial expression, denoting a difficulty altogether unconquerable by the art and power of man; nothing less than the almighty grace of God will enable a rich man to get over this difficulty” [Henry].

The disciples were surprised by this teaching: “When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’” (vs. 25). They were “greatly astonished” because their culture viewed riches as a sign of God’s favor. To them, the riches themselves were a sign that the wealthy man would enter heaven. “Most Jews expected the rich to inherit eternal life, not because their wealth could buy their way in, but because their wealth testified to the blessing of the Lord on their lives” [Carson, 425]. Thus, they asked the question: “Who then can be saved?” In their view, if it was difficult for the rich man to enter heaven, it would be impossible for anyone else to. Jesus corrected these beliefs concerning the spiritual state of the rich. “Where the people of His day saw riches as a manifest sign of the blessing God, Jesus saw wealth as a hindrance to spiritual progress” [Morris, 493]. “Note, it should be a satisfaction to them who are in a low condition, that they are not exposed to the temptations of a high and prosperous condition: If they live more hardy in this world than the rich, yet, if withal they get more easily to a better world, they have no reason to complain” [Henry, 631].

Jesus answered their question of astonishment: “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” (vs. 26). Though it be impossible by man’s ability for the “camel” to go through “the eye of the needle”, it is not impossible by God’s ability. In actuality, it is “impossible” for any man, rich or poor, to enter heaven by his own merits. Man is fallen, and all men “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). God, in His

love for us, made it possible for us enter heaven by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us. The salvation of our souls only becomes a “**possibility**” through God’s work, not ours. “God is mighty to save. **‘With God all things are possible.’** What a joyful truth for the writer and the reader! Our salvation, when we view our own weakness and the power of sin, ‘**is impossible with men.**’ Only when we turn to God and His grace, does salvation range among the possibilities” [Spurgeon, 270]. Jesus paid the price for our sins, so that we would not have to be punished for them, and so that we could attain the holiness, through Jesus Christ, to enter into God’s presence upon death, and live for eternity in heaven with Him. May the Lord be praised!

As stated above, the reason for Jesus’ teaching on the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom of God was to respond to the episode of the rich, young man who would not leave his wealth to follow Jesus. Peter points out to Jesus that the disciples did what the rich, young man would not do: **“Peter answered Him, ‘We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?’”** (vs. 27). This seems to be somewhat of a self-serving and mercenary comment of Peter’s. It even seems a bit childish, smacking of “Look what I have done, daddy!” “What Peter said was true, but it was not wisely spoken. It has a selfish, grasping look, and it is worded so barely that it ought not in that fashion to have come from a servant to his Lord. After all, what have any of us to lose for Jesus compared with what we gain by Him? **‘What shall we have?’** is a question which we need not raise, for we ought rather to think of what we have already received at our Lord’s hands” [Spurgeon, 271].

And yet, we must remember that the Twelve disciples *did* indeed “**leave everything**” to follow Jesus. “Little as these first believers had to leave, it was their *all*, and they had forsaken it to follow Jesus” [Spurgeon, 271]. “They had made real sacrifices, and were following Him in worldly destitution with dismal worldly prospects, for they were now near Jerusalem, where He would be rejected and put to death” [Broadus, 409]. Moreover, and certainly Jesus knew this, nearly all of

these disciples would later suffer a martyr’s death. So, in a very true sense, they “**left everything**” in this world to follow Jesus.

Jesus did not rebuke Peter in any way for his comment, but rather comforted the disciples greatly with His response: **“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life’”** (vss. 28–29). Jesus in this response showed great respect for the sacrifice of the Twelve disciples, and He let them know that they would be greatly rewarded for what they had given up to follow Him. The Twelve disciples in particular are to receive a special and glorious reward: **“You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”** (vs. 28). They are to receive a place of honor and authority in the kingdom of God.

And there are rewards in store, not just for the Twelve disciples, but for anyone who makes a sacrifice to follow Jesus: **“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life”** (vs. 29). “We may rest assured that no man shall ever be a real loser by following Christ. The believer may seem to suffer loss for a time, when he first begins the life of a decided Christian; he may be much cast down by the afflictions that are brought upon him on account of his religion: but let him rest assured that he will never find himself a loser in the long run” [Ryle, 244]. What a magnificent and loving Lord we have! Our lives should be His for the taking, and we should gladly leave anything just for the privilege of serving Him, and yet, He rewards us for any sacrifice made by us, even a hundred-fold. May the Lord be praised! Let us lift up our praises to Him!

Matt. 19:30-20:19



God's Grace

³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

¹For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ²He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵So they went.

"He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

⁷"Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

"He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

⁹The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹²These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat

of the day.'

¹³"But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

¹⁶"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

¹⁷Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ¹⁸"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death ¹⁹and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!"

Jesus had just been telling the Twelve disciples of the rewards in store for them, for following Him. However, the disciples were speaking as if the rewards were in direct proportion to what they had done. Peter had said: "**We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?**" (Matt. 19:27). Now here, in Matthew 20, Jesus tells a parable that points out that the rewards for those who follow Him are allotted according to God's grace, not according to man's expectations: "**But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first**" (Matt. 19:30).

Jesus begins the parable: "**For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard**" (vss. 1–2). In the parable, the "**landowner**" represents God, as He seeks people to do His work, in "**the vineyard**". Those who serve God are promised in the Bible to be rewarded, just as the "**landowner**" agreed to pay the workers "**a denarius for the day**". A "**denarius**" was the generally accepted wage for a full day's work.

Let us point out here that the workers who were chosen early must have felt fortunate. They were assured of wages

for the day. And indeed, when called for work in the Kingdom of Heaven, “it is a choice privilege to be allowed to begin holy service early in the morning... Young believers have a blessed prospect: they may well be happy to do good work, in a good place, for a good Master, and on good terms” [Spurgeon, 273].

The parable continues: **“About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went”** (vs. 3). There is something interesting in the way this parable is told. Note that it does not say that the **“landowner”** was desperate for workers, and that that was the reason more workers were hired. Rather, it says that there were people **“standing in the marketplace doing nothing”**, and so, the landowner hired them. This is the way of the Kingdom of Heaven. God does not *need* us. He is sovereign, and His work will get done. But by His grace, He asks us to serve Him, so that our lives would have meaning and fulfillment, so that we would not spend our lives **“standing in the marketplace doing nothing.”** In the Kingdom, work is better than idleness. It gives meaning to life. “They would work only three-quarters of a day; but it was for their good to cease from loafing at the street corner” [Spurgeon, 274]. “Till we are hired into the service of God, we are standing all the day idle; a sinful state, though a state of drudgery to Satan, may really be called a state of idleness; sinners are doing nothing, nothing to purpose, nothing of the great work they were sent into the world about, nothing that will pass well in the account” [Henry].

The landowner continued to find idle workers in the marketplace: **“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’”** (vss. 5–7). The calling of the

workers later in the day symbolizes the calling of men to serve God later in life. “God in the greatness of His love calls into His service men from whom the exuberance of useful vigor has departed; He accepts the waning hours of their day. He has work for the weak as well as for the strong. He allows none to labor for Him without the reward of grace, even though they have spent their best days in sin” [Spurgeon, 274].

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ (vss. 8–15). I dare say that there is not one of us who does not sympathize a bit with the complaining workers. It is the way of the world of commerce (and rightly so), that the one who works the hardest and longest should receive the higher wages. However, the Kingdom of Heaven is not the kingdom of this world, and is certainly not a kingdom based on the rules of commerce. This is the point of the parable. The Kingdom of Heaven is based on the grace of God. It is based on God saying, **“I want to give...”** (vs. 14). God, in His sovereignty, doles out rewards, as only He sees fit. “God acts toward us in sheer grace. Don’t think of salvation being an arithmetical process, adding up the good deeds and the bad ones and coming out with salvation or loss according to whether the

balance is on the credit or debit side. That is not the way to understand the dealings of a gracious God” [Morris, 499]. And certainly, the one who receives even the least reward from God is very well paid. We deserve nothing from Him. No amount of work we do will make Him a debtor to us. He has already given us so much.

The landowner rebukes the complaining workers: “**Or are you envious because I am generous?**” (vs. 15). We must never be envious of the work of God’s grace in another person’s life. Rather, we should praise God for His work of grace in all of our lives. “There is a great proneness in us to think that we have too little, and others too much, of the tokens of God’s favor; and that we do too much, and others too little, in the work of God. Very apt we all are to undervalue the deserts of others, and to overvalue our own” [Henry]. “Let us never envy late converts their joy or their usefulness, but applaud the sovereignty which blesses them so largely. We share the mercy with them; let us give them an equal portion of our joy” [Spurgeon, 278].

Jesus sums up the parable: “**So the last will be first, and the first will be last**” (vs. 16). In other words, we should not expect the Kingdom of Heaven to follow the ways of the world. The unexpected will happen.

Next, Jesus once again works to prepare the disciples for what was to happen: “**Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!’**” (vss. 17–19). Jesus did not want His Twelve disciples to be unprepared for what was to happen, and so He often attempted to prepare them for it (see also Matt. 16:21; 17:22ff). Also, by stating the details of what was to happen, Jesus was declaring His supernatural foreknowledge of His death and resurrection. He is letting His disciples know that what was to happen would not be a surprise to Him. This also demon-

strates “the resolute willingness of the Redeemer to suffer for us; for He knew all that He was to suffer, and was never dashed” [Dickson]. Foreknowledge of what was to happen could have only made Christ’s suffering even harsher, and more drawn out. Yet, He willingly chose to go through with His sacrifice. And make no mistake, it was his *choice*. “The Lord Jesus was a voluntary sufferer. When He died on the cross, it was not because He had not power to prevent it: He suffered intentionally, deliberately, and of His own free will” [Ryle]. As Jesus Himself said: “**No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again**” (John 10:18).

Note one more thing: they were “**going to Jerusalem.**” It is ironic, and sad, that at the center of Jewish worship, Jerusalem, the crucifixion of the Messiah would take place.

Matthew 20:20-34



Seeking Glory

²⁰Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of Him.

²¹"What is it you want?" He asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at Your right and the other at Your left in Your kingdom."

²²"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

²³Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

²⁹As Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. ³⁰Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

³¹The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

³²Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" He asked.

³³"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."

³⁴Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him.

In the previous section, Jesus pulled His disciples aside and told them about the suffering He would endure at the hands of the Romans. This appears not to have had the desired effect upon the disciples, as can be seen by the request made by the mother of John and James: "**Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of Him. 'What is it you want?' He asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at Your right and the other at Your left in Your kingdom'**" (vss. 20-21). "While the mind of Jesus was occupied with His humiliation and death, His followers were thinking of their own honor and ease" [Spurgeon, 280].

We must admit that John and James displayed faith in their request. They foresaw and believed that Jesus would come into His kingdom in power. However, by seeking for themselves a place of glory and power, they were not demonstrating an attitude appropriate for disciples of Jesus, for Jesus set aside His exalted place, and forsook all power in the Universe to serve, and even die, for sinful man. The disciples's request "teaches that ambition or some other fault of the flesh is often entwined in a right and godly zeal, so that Christ's followers have a different aim from what they should" [Calvin, 270]. "Consistently Jesus had taught His followers that there was no place for pride and self-seeking of any sort in the life to which He called them; equally consistently they failed to learn the lesson... It was not a minor misunderstanding, but an error at the heart of what service in the kingdom means" [Morris, 508]. "They ask not for employment in this kingdom, but for honour only; and no place would serve them in the kingdom, but the highest, next to Christ, and above everybody else" [Henry].

In response, Jesus first points out to them that to be at Jesus' right and left hand would entail sharing in His sufferings, as well as His glory: “**You don't know what You are asking,**” Jesus said to them. ‘Can You drink the cup I am going to drink?’ ‘We can,’ they answered” (vs. 22). When Jesus said, “...drink the cup”, He was referring to the cup of His sufferings. “To ask that they might reign with Him was asking that they might suffer with Him” [Broadus, 417]. Did John and James know what they were saying when they said “**We can**”? “They were much in the dark concerning the way to that kingdom. They know not what they ask, who ask for the end, but overlook the means, and so put asunder what God has joined together. The disciples thought, when they had left what little all they had for Christ, and had gone about the country awhile preaching the gospel of the kingdom, all their service and sufferings were over, and it was not time to ask, ‘What shall we have?’ As if nothing were now to be looked for but crowns and garlands; whereas there were far greater hardships and difficulties before them than they had yet met with. They imagined their warfare was accomplished when it was scarcely begun, and they had yet but run with the footmen. They dream of being in Canaan presently, and consider not what they shall do in the swellings of Jordan” [Henry]. “**We can**,” they said, without hesitation, without understanding, and without seeking clarification of exactly what the *cup* involved. That they claimed too much was made plain when they ran away in Gethsemane (see Matt. 26:56). And yet – in due course they did drink the cup: James by martyrdom (see Acts 12:1–2) and John by exile to Patmos” [Morris, 510].

Note that the “**cup**” was the cup that Jesus “**was going to drink.**” He went before us in suffering. Whatever we may suffer for His sake, He suffered more.

The other disciples reacted to the request: “**When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers**” (vs. 24). Why were they indignant? Well, surely because they themselves wanted the same asked-for glory.

Seeing this, Jesus had to set them all straight: “Jesus

called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many’” (vss. 25–28). Jesus first points out that His followers must not have the same priorities as those of the world. Those of the world desire to “**lord it over**” others, and to “**exercise authority**”. Jesus says concerning this, “**Not so with you.**” “In the pagan world humility was regarded, not so much as a virtue, but as a vice. Imagine a slave being given leadership! Jesus’ ethics of the leadership and power in His community of disciples are revolutionary” [Carson, 432]. Jesus says, “**instead**” we must seek to serve. The greatness we aim for must be greatness in service—in serving others, in helping our brothers, in sacrificing our needs to make life better for others. “To rise in Christ’s kingdom we must descend” [Spurgeon, 283]. Again, Jesus is our example in this: “**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.**” Jesus chose to give up His throne of power and come into the world to serve humanity, and to save humanity. And He served even to the point of death. “The example of our Lord’s humiliation of Himself serves to curb all ambition in His ministers” [Dickson].

Jesus and the others moved on: “**As Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’**” (vss. 29–30). In faith, the two blind men, obviously not having *seen* any of Jesus’ miraculous works, believed that He could heal them, based only on what they heard. They also believed He was the Messiah, for they addressed Jesus as “**Son of David**”. Those following Jesus apparently felt that the blind men were not worthy of receiving “**mercy**” from Jesus: “**The crowd rebuked them**

and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’” (vss. 31). It is quite sad that the crowd, followers of Jesus, would attempt to deprive these men of their chance to be healed by Jesus. “Did they upbraid them for ill manners, or for noise, or for harshness of tone, or for selfishly wishing to monopolize Jesus? It is always easy to find a stick when you wish to beat a dog” [Spurgeon, 284]. Perhaps the followers of Jesus felt discomfort with the desperate blind men, who were no doubt poor, dirty, even a bit disgusting in their appearance. Perhaps the followers of Jesus did not want such as the blind men to come to Jesus. If so, this is surely a sinful and most un-Christlike attitude. Jesus desires that *all* should come to Him, especially those who are in the most desperate of circumstances. We must be careful that we do not display the same sinful attitude as those followers of Jesus.

The blind men were not deterred by the rebukes of the crowd. They “shouted all the louder.” The blind men knew that they would probably never get another chance to have their sight restored. Their persistence paid off: “Jesus stopped and called them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ He asked. ‘Lord,’ they answered, ‘we want our sight.’ Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him” (vss. 32–34). It is somewhat strange that Jesus would ask the blind men, “What do you want me to do for you?”. Certainly, the whole crowd knew that they wanted their sight back, and certainly Jesus knew this as well. But it is God’s will that we ask for (through prayer) what we need from Him, even though He knows our needs. Prayer establishes a relationship to God by faith, and thus, qualifies us to receive God’s mercy.



Matthew 21:1-17

Palm Sunday

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

¹²Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³“It is written,” He said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are mak-

ing it a ‘den of robbers.’”

¹⁴The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things He did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

¹⁶“Do You hear what these children are saying?” they asked Him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, ‘From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?’”

¹⁷And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where He spent the night.

Earlier, Jesus had told His disciples: “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!” (Matt. 20:18–19). So, one wonders, as here “they approached Jerusalem”, if the disciples were filled with a sense of dread. Or were they paying attention to their Lord? We tend only to hear what we want to hear from our Lord’s Word. We must endeavor to heed it all.

As they approached Jerusalem, Jesus had instructions for the disciples: “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away” (vs. 2). This was unusual, and must have been somewhat surprising to the disciples, that Jesus, who (from all we know) went on foot everywhere, desired a donkey to ride into Jerusalem. But Jesus had a purpose, and His purpose was to be declared, as He entered Jerusalem, the King that He is. This ride into Jerusalem would fulfill prophecy: “This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ‘Say to the Daughter of Zion, “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a

colt, the foal of a donkey’”” (vs. 4). “Therefore when His journey to heaven was near, He wished to inaugurate His Kingdom openly on earth” [Calvin, 291]. “Our Lord Jesus traveled much, and His custom was to travel on foot from Galilee to Jerusalem, some scores of miles, which was both humbling and toilsome. Yet once in His life, He rode in triumph; and it was now when He went into Jerusalem, to suffer and die, as if that were the pleasure and preferment He courted” [Henry].

Yet, though Jesus did not walk into Jerusalem, He also “did not come on a chariot or on a war horse, but riding as rulers did in time of peace” [Broadus, 425]. “He was, as a King, all gentleness and mercy” [Spurgeon, 289]. “Therefore for those with eyes to see, Jesus was not only proclaiming His messiahship and His fulfillment of Scripture but showing the kind of peace-loving approach He was now making to the city” [Carson, 437].

“The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!', ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!', ‘Hosanna in the highest!'” (vss. 6–9). Previous to this, Jesus discouraged public declaration of His being the Messiah or any type of King (see Matt. 16:20; et. al.). Presumably, He did this to avoid confrontation with various political factions, Jewish and Roman. But the time had now come for Jesus to declare Himself as the King that He is. Given that the Passover was soon, there was a large crowd in Jerusalem. Many of them saw Jesus’ work and heard His teachings, and believed in Him as their Messiah and King. They did what they could—spreading their cloaks and branches on the road before Him—to give Him a King’s welcome, as they yelled shouts of praise to Him. Their shouts of praise were foreordained, prophesied in the Psalms (see Ps. 118:25–26).

"Matthew deliberately recites the Hebrew words, so that we may know that the praises and prayers which the disciples were crying out were not given thoughtlessly to Christ, nor poured out without deliberation, but reverently followed a set form of prayer which the Holy Spirit had dictated to the whole Church by the mouth of the prophet" [Calvin, 293].

The praises of the crowd stirred up the whole city of Jerusalem. There were some in the city, though, who did not know Jesus: "**When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this? The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee'**" (vss. 10–11). The question they asked, "**'Who is Jesus?'**", is the most important question anyone could ask. "**'Who is this?'** is a proper, profitable, personal, pressing question. Let our reader make this inquiry concerning Jesus, and never rest till he knows the answer" [Spurgeon, 291].

In Jerusalem, Jesus visited the temple: "**Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves**" (vs. 12). "When Christ came into Jerusalem, He did not go up to the court or the palace, though He came in as a King, but into the temple; for His kingdom is spiritual, and not of this world; it is in holy things that He rules, in the temple of God that He exercises authority" [Henry].

Jesus gave a reason for His actions: "**'It is written,' He said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'”**" (vs. 13). In the temple, to accommodate the large crowd of visitors, there were "**money changers**" (who exchanged foreign money that would be used to pay the temple tax), and "**benches of those selling doves**" (who would sell to the visitors animals for sacrifice). Apparently, these tradesmen were corrupt (Jesus called them "**a den of robbers**"), taking advantage of the travelers who desired to worship God in the proper way. "The traders had put profit above worship. And when Jesus speaks of 'a robbers' den', He indicates not only that they were trading in the wrong place, but that they were trading

dishonestly" [Morris, 528]. Also, the clamor caused by the buying and selling made it impossible for the temple to be "**a house of prayer.**"

This is the second time that Jesus had cleared the temple of merchants. He had done so before at the beginning of His ministry (see John 2:14–15), but sadly, He had to do so again. "Note, buyers and sellers driven out of the temple, will return and nestle there again, if there be not a continual care and oversight to prevent it, and if the blow be not followed, and often repeated" [Henry]. And even today, those whose primary interest is in making money find their way into the house of God. They should not be supported; their actions must not be condoned. Oh, Lord Jesus, drive them out of Your house!

Jesus took time to serve the people who were in need at the temple: "**The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them**" (vs. 14). Ironically, these miracles and good works of Jesus, rather than causing the religious authorities to honor Jesus, caused them to want to criticize Jesus, presumably to bring Him down in the eyes of the crowd: "**But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things He did and the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant. 'Do You hear what these children are saying?' they asked Him**" (vss. 15–16). The religious authorities could not, in good conscience, criticize Jesus for clearing the temple (for they knew that the commerce carried on there was wrong); nor could they criticize Jesus for healing the blind and the lame. So they chose to criticize Jesus for accepting the praise of children. "It is not without its interest that they picked on the easiest target they could find—little children. They had no criticism of the unholy traders who defiled the sacred places, but they objected to the praises of children." [Morris, 529].

It is interesting and instructive that the children were shouting, "**Hosanna to the Son of David!**". The children had picked up on the chant that they heard the adults shouting to Jesus upon His entry into the city. This teaches us

adults of the importance of a good example in what we do in front of children. “Children will learn of those that are with them, either to curse and swear, or to pray and praise” [Henry].

Note well Jesus’ response to the criticism: “‘Yes,’ replied Jesus, ‘have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants You have ordained praise”?’” (vs. 16). Jesus cites Psalm 8:2, in which David refers to the praises of God coming from the lips of children. Jesus here, by accepting the praise of children, is declaring Himself to be God, for only God is worthy of such praise. “Jesus is therefore not only acknowledging His messiahship but justifying the praise of the children by applying to Himself a passage of Scripture applicable only to God” [Carson, 443].



In Jerusalem

¹⁸Early in the morning, as [Jesus] was on His way back to the city, He was hungry. ¹⁹Seeing a fig tree by the road, He went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then He said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.

²⁰When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

²¹Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. ²²If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

²³Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. “By what authority are You doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then He said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

In His last week on earth, Jesus spent much time in Jerusalem teaching the crowds that were gathered for the Passover. Jesus had spent the night in Bethany (see Matt. 21:17) and woke up early to return to Jerusalem: “**Early in the morning, as He was on His way back to the city, He was hungry**” (vs. 18). Apparently, in His zeal for service, He had not eaten breakfast, for “**He was hungry.**”

“**Seeing a fig tree by the road, He went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then He said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered**” (vs. 19). There is more to this episode than a display of anger by Jesus against a tree that could not provide His breakfast. Jesus, we believe, was teaching a lesson by His cursing of the fig tree. “Our Lord sought illustration of religious truth from all sources; from food and water, patching clothes and bottling wine, sowing and reaping, and changes of weather, birds and flowers, plants and trees, as well as the doings and sayings of men around Him—all were made to teach lessons” [Broadus, 435]. “We should understand this story as an acted parable: the fig tree in leaf gave promise of fruit but produced none. The result was that it was accursed. Those who profess to be God’s people but live unfruitful lives are warned” [Morris, 530]. “Its leaves advertised that it was bearing, but the advertisement was false. Jesus, unable to satisfy His hunger, saw the opportunity of teaching a memorable object lesson and cursed the tree, not because it was not bearing fruit, whether in season or out, but because it made a show of life that promised fruit yet was bearing none” [Carson, 445].

Note that the punishment given the fig tree was appropriate to the transgression. The tree made a show of having fruit, yet had none. The punishment was that it continue and remain fruitless, as Jesus said: “**May you never bear fruit again.**” So, those who make a show of godliness, and yet bear not the fruits of godliness in their lives, are in danger of the same punishment. They are in danger of living “fruitless” lives forever: lives devoid of the sense of fulfillment; lacking success in all endeavors.

Now, some have said that the cursing of the fig tree was

the only destructive miracle that Jesus performed. Yet, though the fig tree was destroyed, the miracle was actually a constructive one, in that it has taught us a valuable lesson. The fruitless fig tree became something of value by participating in the live parable. “To fell a whole forest has never been considered cruel, and to use a single barren tree as an object lesson can only seem unkind to those who are sentimental and idiotic. It was kindness to the ages to use a worthless tree to teach a salutary lesson” [Spurgeon, 295].

The disciples were surprised at the miracle: “**When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. ‘How did the fig tree wither so quickly?’ they asked**” (vs. 20). Jesus used the occasion of their surprise to teach about faith: “**Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer’**” (vss. 21–22). As Jesus teaches, the power of faith is unlimited. Anything is possible. And so, we may ask, why don’t we see mountains being moved by faith? I can’t even lift this pencil, by faith, and throw it across the room (let alone into the sea). Why not? There are two reasons: my faith is weak; and I’m not given the faith to do such things. There are two aspects to faith: God’s side, and my side. Faith is “**a gift of God**” (see Eph 2:8). Faith comes from God, and God (spiritually practical as He is) sees no spiritual reason to give me the faith to hurl this pencil across the room. And then there is my side. Even if God gives me the faith to do something magnificent, I must take hold of that faith, make it my faith, and “**not doubt**”.

Jesus gave the example of hurling a mountain into the sea, “not as a thing likely or proper to be actually done, but as an extreme case of a conceivable miracle, to illustrate more vividly the miraculous possibilities presented to unwavering faith” [Broadus, 435]. “There is no record of any disciple ever moving a literal, physical mountain; for that matter, Jesus Himself is not said ever to have done such a pointless thing.

But throughout the history of the Christian church mountainous difficulties have often been removed when people have prayed in faith” [Morris, 532]. “Before a living faith, barren systems of religion will wither away; and by the power of undoubting confidence in God, mountains of difficulty shall be removed, and cast into the sea” [Spurgeon, 296].

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He went to the temple to serve by teaching: **“Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. ‘By what authority are You doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave You this authority?’”** (vs. 23). These questions are reasonable for the religious leaders to ask. However, as we shall see in what follows, they did not ask the questions to get a true answer; rather, they asked them to trip up Jesus. If Jesus had given them a straight answer, they would likely have charged Him with blasphemy, and sought to turn the crowd against Him.

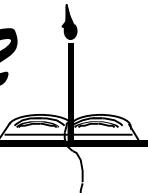
“Jesus replied, ‘I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?’ They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” He will ask, “Then why didn’t you believe him?” But if we say, “From men”—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.’ So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’ Then He said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’” (vss. 24–27). Jesus answered by asking them the question, **“John’s baptism—where did it come from?”** This may, at first glance, seem like Jesus was avoiding their question. But on the contrary, Jesus was trying to get them to answer their own question. If they would have acknowledged that John’s baptism was from God, then they would have to acknowledge that Jesus’ authority came from God, for this is what John preached. In order to answer their own question, Jesus wanted them to look at the evidence, and conclude themselves by what authority Jesus came. Similarly, when we speak to others about Jesus, we can let the evidence laid out in

the Bible answer questions about Jesus’ authority and Lordship.

The chief priests and elders were not interested in the truth, as can be seen by their discussion among themselves. When seeking to give Jesus an answer, they were concerned with how Jesus and the crowd would respond. They weren’t seeking to answer truthfully, but were seeking to answer in a way that was (for them) politically correct. “Men-pleasers are obliged to be politicians, and see which way the land lies... The question our Lord put to the chief priests and elders was simple enough had they been honest men; but as they had a game to play, they could not reply without great difficulty” [Spurgeon, 298].

Note especially that they did not even discuss what the true answer to Jesus’ question was, and so, when they did not respond to Jesus’ question, it was proper that He not respond to theirs. “Their equivocation gave Jesus a reason for refusing to answer their question. Rejection of revelation already given is indeed a slender basis on which to ask for more” [Carson, 448]. “Note, those that imprison the truths they know, in unrighteousness (either by not professing them, or by not practicing according to them), are justly denied the further truths they enquire after” [Henry].

Matthew 21:28-32



The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

²⁹"I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

³¹"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

The opposition to Jesus by the religious leaders of the day was reaching a crescendo. Matthew has reported two run-ins with them already in this Holy Week (see Matt. 21:15 and Matt. 21:23ff). In this section, Jesus continues His conversation with "**the chief priests and the elders of the people**" (see Matt. 21:23). Jesus uses parables to instruct and rebuke them. He begins by asking them to pay special attention (there will be a quiz at the end): "**What do you think?**" "As Christ instructed His disciples by parables, which made the instructions the more easy, so sometimes He convinced His adversaries by parables, which bring reproofs more close, and make men to reprove themselves. Thus Nathan convinced David by a parable (see II Sam. 22:1), and the woman of Tekoa surprised him in like manner (see II Sam. 14:2). Re-

proving parables are appeals to the offenders themselves, and judge them out of their own mouths. This Christ designs here, as appears by the first words, '**What do you think?**' [Henry].

Jesus tells the parable: "**T**here was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go" (vss. 28–30). We learn, parenthetically here, that one and the same father can beget children of vastly differing characters. And indeed, we all have one Heavenly Father, and there are great differences in the characters of men.

The first son was initially, not only obstinate, but also somewhat rude. His answer to his father was "rough and curt" [Broadus, 438]. Simply, he said, "**I will not.**" Contrast this with the (apparent) respect shown by the second son: he said, "**I will, sir.**" The first son was truly and stubbornly adamant against doing his father's will. But at least he was honest to his father. He told him outright that he had no intention of working for him. The second son's words, in contrast, were pure hypocrisy, an attempt to, for the moment, make himself sound like a loyal son. The father must have remembered bitterly the word "**sir**", when he later learned of the result.

The first son repented: "**L**ater he changed his mind and went." "This was true repentance, for it led to practical obedience. He did not offer a verbal apology, or make a promise of future good behavior; he did far better, for he went about his father's business without more ado" [Spurgeon, 299]. The second son simply "**did not go.**" "His fine phrases and fair promises were deceit and falsehood" [Spurgeon, 299]. "He represents easy going, self-complacent people, who take their own virtue for granted; they make promises quickly, expressing warm feelings and good intentions" [Thomas, 310]. "Many with their mouth show much love, but their heart goes another way. They had

a good mind to be religious, but they met with something to be done that was too hard, or something to be parted with that was too dear, and so their purposes are to no purpose. Buds and blossoms are not fruit” [Henry]. This, interestingly, ties into the recent episode with the fig tree (see Matt. 21:18-22). “The same fault had been illustrated that morning by the fig-tree, which made great show of leaves, but had no fruit” [Broadus, 438].

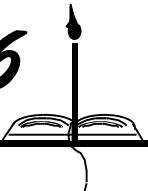
Jesus next asks the religious leaders, “**Which of the two did what his father wanted?**” (vs. 31). Here we see the great value of the parable, for the answer to Jesus’ question is so obvious. Men are much more ready to point out the faults of others, before they see their own. “He compels them to realize and even to declare their own guilt” [Thomas, 309]. “**The first,’ they answered.**”

Jesus shows frankness and honesty in telling the interpretation of the parable: “**Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him’**” (vss. 31b-32). Jesus begins His interpretation of the parable with a statement that He is to say something important and, of course, true: “**I tell you the truth.**” Jesus pulls no punches. He makes it quite clear that the religious leaders of the day are the rebellious second son in the parable. “Here for the first time our Lord makes an open, personal application of a parable to the Jewish authorities (also in vs. 43ff). The time has come for speaking out unreservedly to them, and also to the people concerning them, as He will do later in the day (see Matt 23)” [Broadus, 439]. Then also, much (I’m sure) to the chagrin of the chief priests and elders, he declares that the repentent “**tax collectors and prostitutes**” (proverbial for all evil of the time) are the obedient first son, who do the will of the Father.

So, this parable becomes a warning to all those who show lip-service to the Father—they may be regular churchgoers,

they may even be pastors—but do not in the end obey His Word and serve Him. “We learn that faith does not consist merely in a person giving subscription to true doctrine, but also includes something greater and deeper: the hearer is to deny himself and commit his whole life to God” [Calvin, III-14]. Then also, this parable is a gift of hope to those who had sinned in the past—even grievous sinners—but who repent, and obey and serve the Father. “Let it be a settled principle in our Christianity that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is infinitely willing to receive penitent sinners. It matters nothing what a man has been in time past. Does he repent, and come to Christ? Then old things are passed away, and all things are become new (see II Cor. 5:17)” [Ryle, 274].

Matthew 21:33-46



Parable of the Evil Tenants

³³ "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

³⁸"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

⁴¹"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

⁴²Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?

⁴³"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Je-

sus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.

⁴⁶They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

In the previous section, Jesus told the first of a series of parables aimed specifically at the hypocritical religious leaders of the day. Here, He begins another parable, telling the religious leaders to pay special attention: "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey" (vs. 33). Immediately, we see here a similarity (certainly purposeful) between this parable of Jesus' and the parable of the vineyard in the book of Isaiah: "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit" (Isa. 5:1–2). Later, we learn: "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight. And He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" (Isa. 5:7). Here in Matthew also, the vineyard is "the house of Israel". So then, the "tenants" in Jesus' parable are the religious leaders over Israel. As we will see, in Jesus' parable also, there is no "justice" or "righteousness", just "bloodshed" and "cries of distress".

Note also, in both parables, the landowner made all the necessary preparations so that the vineyard would be successful. He "put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower" (vs. 33). Thus, the renters could not excuse their poor behavior by saying that it was they who did all the work to make the vineyard successful. No, it was the Lord, the landowner in the parable, who did the work that would guarantee prosperity for the vineyard.

Jesus continues: "When the harvest time approached, he

sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way" (vss. 35–36). Reflected here in the parable is the mistreatment of God's prophets by the leaders of God's people. This is spoken of directly in Hebrews: "They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them" (Heb. 11:36–38). It is a demonstration of God's love that he sends prophets who speak for Him to us, when we need to hear them. Obviously, it is a great affront to God for us to ignore those prophets, and worse still, of course, to persecute them. In the parable, it is the "tenants" (who represent the religious leaders of the people) who mistreat God's servants. Certainly, religious leaders should be in tune with what God is trying to say. Their role should always be one of support for those who are speaking God's word. In this, the "tenants" gravely failed.

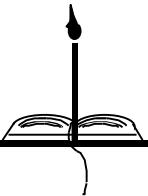
It was time for the landowner to take even more drastic action: "Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him" (vss. 37–39). It was an act of great patience and grace for the landowner to send his son. Certainly, he could have had the tenants punished severely by the law for beating, killing and stoning his servants. In fact, the patience of the landowner is quite absurd. And indeed, the patience of God is (to put it coarsely) quite absurd, in that He gives us opportunity to repent far beyond what we deserve. His absurd patience is due to His great love for us, and His desire that none of us perish.

The actions of the tenants are also quite absurd. Don't they consider the consequences of their actions? Don't they see that great judgment will come on them for mistreating the son of the landowner? Any listener to the parable would rec-

ognize that they are evil and foolish, even those who are represented in the parable. Jesus asks them directly: "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" The religious leaders, about whom the parable is speaking, condemn themselves: "'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time'" (vs. 41).

Lest his listeners misinterpret the parable, Jesus applies the parable directly to them: "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed'" (vss. 42–44). The religious leaders thought, by virtue of their genealogy and their status as religious leaders, that the kingdom of God was theirs. We must be careful not to fall into the same trap. We think we have a right to God's blessing because we live in a Christian land, or we live among Christians, or we go to church, or our parents are Christians, etc. We feel we have appropriated the blessings of God because those around us have. However, though we worship as a congregation, God looks at the heart of each person. Each person individually must heed God's Word, call on the name of the Lord Jesus, and accept Him as his or her Lord.

Matthew 22:1-14



Parable of the Wedding Banquet

¹Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴"Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

⁵"But they paid no attention and went off— one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

¹³"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

¹⁴"For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Jesus had been confronting the chief priests and Pharisees with parables that describe people who fail to do God's will. The chief priests and Pharisees were so offended by the parables that they "**looked for a way to arrest Him**" (Matt. 21:46).

This did not stop Jesus, who continued with His parables: "**Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come'**" (vss. 1-3). Here we see the Gospel invitation compared to invitations given out to a prince's wedding banquet. The invitations had been sent out, and it was time for the banquet, but those who had received invitations "**refused to come**". This parable is again directed at the chief priests and Pharisees, and speaks about the actions of their people, the children of Israel. They had been given the invitation to be God's chosen people, and the coming of their Messiah to earth should have been their "**wedding banquet**". But, by and large, they ignored the invitation and "**refused to come**".

The king in the parable, showing great patience and grace, continued to extend the invitation to those who had rejected it, telling them of the great preparations made for the banquet: "**Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet'**" (vs. 4). An invitation by a king should never be rejected, and so the king was going far beyond normal protocol in continuing to extend the invitation. "A royal invitation is a command that is disobeyed at the refuser's peril" [Spurgeon, 308]. The king had all rights to punish those who rejected his invitation. But in his grace, he continued to extend the invitation, even to the point of practically begging the invitees to accept it.

And what was the reaction of the invitees: "**But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another**

to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them” (vss. 5–6). Some of the invitees were indifferent to the invitation, too busy with the things of the world to heed it. The invitation was “counted of less importance than the worldly affairs in which their hearts were engrossed” [Spurgeon, 309]. Others received the invitation with violence, and **“seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.”** This speaks of the reaction of the children of Israel to the prophets sent by God. God’s prophets were, at best, largely ignored, and at worst, **“mistreated and killed”**. This would all culminate in the mistreatment and killing of no-less-than God’s Son.

Though this parable seems to speak specifically about the reaction of the children of Israel to the coming of Jesus, it also echoes various responses to the preaching of the Gospel message today. Day in and day out, all over the world, the Gospel invitation is extended by servants of God (with the help of the Holy Spirit) to lost souls. While some respond positively to the Gospel message, many more reject the invitation. Some treat it with indifference, too concerned with the things of this world, and they go off, **“one to his field, another to his business.”** Others respond to the Gospel invitation with hostility, sometimes with violence. Sadly, they do not realize that the preaching of the Gospel is a supreme act of love.

Back to the parable, the reaction of the king to the indifference that his invitation found should not be surprising to anyone: **“The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city”** (vs. 7). This was fulfilled against the children of Israel when, in 69 AD, the Romans besieged Jerusalem, and destroyed the city and many of its inhabitants. Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived through the destruction of Jerusalem, realized that God was the “author of the destruction” [Josephus, *Wars*, 5:1:3 (19)]. Ironically, many of the captured Jews were crucified by the Romans: “So the soldiers out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest; when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for

the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies” [Josephus, *Wars*, 5:11:1 (451)].

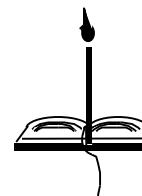
Jesus continues with the parable: **“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’** So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests” (vss. 8-9). The rejection of the Messiah by the children of Israel opened up the **“wedding banquet”** to everyone. There is no limit to those who are **“invited”**. The Gospel message is to go everywhere, to be shouted on the **“street corners”**. It is to be heard by both **“good and bad”**.

However, those who are invited must come to the banquet worthy as guests of the king: **“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’** The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, **‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’** For many are invited, but few are chosen” (vss. 11–14). Though **“both good and bad”** were invited, the guests, when attending the prince’s wedding banquet, must appear at the banquet worthy as guests. They cannot appear at the banquet in their work clothes or street rags. And for the Gospel **“banquet”**, how would one prepare? We are told elsewhere: **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”** (Acts 16:31); **“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”** (Rom. 10:9). Those who believe in the Lord Jesus are clothed in His righteousness, and worthy of the King’s banquet. They will be able to say, with Isaiah, **“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness”** (Isa. 61:10).

In the end, the number of those clothed in righteousness,

worthy of the king's banquet, will be smaller than one might expect. As Jesus said: "**For many are invited, but few are chosen**" (vs. 14). The invitation has been shouted from the street corners. The Gospel message has gone out to all nations of the world. Indeed, "**many are invited**". And yet, relatively few respond to the invitation, "**...but few are chosen.**" Jesus purposely used the word "chosen", lest we forget that God is sovereign in the matter. Though, from our point of view, we must respond to the Gospel message, and we ourselves must "**believe in the Lord Jesus**" and "**confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord**", yet God is sovereign in this decision. This is a difficult concept for our small minds to fully grasp. How can we be accountable for our response to the Gospel, and at the same time, God be sovereign over the decisions that are made? Perhaps, we will understand this fully after we go to dwell with our Lord in the mansion He has prepared for us.

It is best for us as humans, I think, to consider the matter from the human point of view, that is, we are responsible for the decisions we make in life. When we hear the Gospel message, when we feel the Holy Spirit tugging at our hearts, we must choose to respond, and turn our lives over to our Lord Jesus Christ. Then we can look forward to the wedding banquet, not of a mere earthly prince, but of the Lamb of God, Lord of All (see Rev. 21:2). At that banquet, we will not be mere guests, but we, the Church, will be the bride of Christ. What a glorious day that will be!



Matthew 22:15-22

Render Unto Caesar

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to Him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought Him a denarius, ²⁰and He asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

²¹"Caesar's," they replied.

Then He said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.

In the previous few sections, Jesus has been telling parables, directed primarily at the chief priests and Pharisees. These parables have been depicting the rejection of the prophets and the Messiah by the children of Israel, under the leadership of the chief priests and Pharisees.

The Pharisees, apparently offended by this, set to action: "**Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words. They sent their disciples to Him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us**

then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (vss. 15–17). The Pharisees, knowing that Jesus was a man of wisdom, foresaw how difficult it would be to “trap Jesus in His words”, so they saw it necessary to “go out and lay plans” of how to accomplish such a thing. It’s somewhat unusual that religious leaders, who should guide people to the truth, would go out of their way to entrap someone in their talk. But the desire of the Pharisees was to discredit Jesus before the crowds, and possibly even get Him to say something for which He could be arrested.

Their allies, in this episode, were the “**Herodians**”. The Herodians were “a party among the Jews, who were for a cheerful and entire subjection to the Roman emperor, and to Herod his deputy; and who made it their business to reconcile people to that government” [Henry]. This alliance between the Pharisees and Herodians was quite surprising. The Pharisees (and indeed most Jews of the time) hated being subjected to Rome; the Herodians encouraged cheerful subjection to Rome. Only the common bond of strong opposition to Jesus could bring such diverse groups together in alliance. “How bitter the Pharisees’s hostility was [toward Jesus] is shown by their willingness to unite with Herodians” [Thomas, 320].

They try to hide their corrupt motives with flattery: “**Teacher, you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are**” (vs. 16). Flattery can be a powerful weapon on mere men. Jesus knows the heart, though. “They are not genuinely seeking an opinion from Jesus; they speak flattering words to Him and proceed to ask a question aimed at destroying Him. That is not the action of honest men but of hypocrites” [Morris, 557]. Granted, what they said in their flattery was actually true. Jesus, of course, was a “**man of integrity**”, He taught “**the way of God in accordance with the truth**”, He was not unduly “**swayed**” by powerful, wealthy or influential men.

Having primed Him (so they thought) with flattery, they go on and ask their question: “**Tell us then, what is your opin-**

ion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (vs. 17). They believed they had found the perfect question to trap Jesus. There was (seemingly) no answer He could make that would not get Him into some sort of trouble. If He said that it was right to pay taxes, the crowds would despise Him, for (by and large) they hated being under the oppressive power of Rome. No one really enjoys paying taxes. But the Jews of that time especially hated it, for it reinforced their submission to Rome. For the Jews, “paying the head-tax to Roman authorities was the most immediate and humiliating recognition of subjection to the heathen” [Broadus]. In fact, not too long before that, in the year AD 6, a revolt against taxation was led by a man named Judas of Galilee (not the apostle Judas). The historian Josephus (who lived at that time) tells us: “Under [Archelaus’s] administration it was that a certain Galilean, whose name was Judas, prevailed with his countrymen to revolt; and said they were cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans, and would, after God, submit to mortal men as their lords.” (Judas of Galilee is also mentioned in the Bible, see Acts 5:37). So, this subject was much on the mind of Jesus’ listeners. If Jesus said “yes” to the question, many (probably most) of his hearers would find it distasteful. “We may therefore be sure that among the easily excited crowds who filled the temple courts when Jesus was asked this question, there were many who regarded paying the poll-tax as the very badge of slavery to the heathen, and as treason against Jehovah, the theocratic king of Israel” [Broadus, 452].

On the other hand, if He said “no” to their question, the Herodians would, no doubt, seek to have Him arrested (which is what the Pharisees desired). The tax revolt of Judas of Galilee must certainly have put the Romans on-guard against any stirring of the crowds concerning taxation.

Note, the way that the questioners posed the question was very lawlerly. They demanded a yes or no answer: “**Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?**” They wanted the first word out of Jesus’ mouth to be “yes” or “no”. That one word would have caused a stir, giving Jesus no time to explain Himself further.

Jesus did not fall into their trap: “**But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?’”** (vs. 18). Jesus saw behind their stratagem, and instead of “yes” or “no”, the first words out of His mouth were: “**You hypocrites!**” “They hoped that they had disguised their real purpose so cleverly, that they must have been surprised to have the mask so quickly torn from their faces and to be exposed to public gaze in their true character as ‘**hypocrites**’” [Spurgeon, 320]. “It is impossible to deceive the Lord; He knows the hypocrite, whatsoever [garb] he puts on... And He will let the hypocrite know sometime that He will not be mocked” [Dickson].

Jesus did not only see their trap, His masterful answer avoided the trap they were trying to set: “**Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought Him a denarius, and He asked them, ‘Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then He said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’**” (vss. 18–21). Can there have been a better answer to the question? In a couple of sentences, Jesus clarified the whole matter; He settled years of controversy. Many of the Jewish people of the time felt guilty in paying the tax to Caesar’s government. They thought it was giving worship to Caesar, and thus, in violation of the first commandment. With His answer, Jesus put to rest all the guilt and apprehension they may have felt concerning paying the taxes. Give Caesar the coins! They are his. Look! His face and name are on the coins. God cares not that you give Caesar-headed coins to Caesar. Paying taxes is not an act of worship, but an act of civil obedience. “The Christian religion is no enemy to civil government, but a friend to it... It is the duty of subjects to render to magistrates that which, according to the laws of their country, is their due” [Henry].

Note well, that Jesus did not stop at the statement, “**Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s**”. Importantly, He went on to say, “**...and to God what is God’s**”. Far more important than the question of whether you are giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s, is the question of whether you are giving to God

what is God’s. And it is not mere coinage that God wants. It is hearts, souls and minds that God wants. As Jesus will say towards the end of this very chapter in Matthew: “**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**” (Matt. 22:37).

We humans, most times, think way too small. We concentrate on the trivial, at the expense of the profound. We focus so much on where our coins end up, who will get our paper money. It sadly is the center of our lives: who ends up with our Ben Franklins. But God wants you to get your focus off your Ben Franklins, and to put your focus on His Son, Jesus Christ. He wants you to stop worrying so much about where you spend your pennies, and to worry rather how you are spending your life for Him.

Matthew 22:23-33



The Resurrection

²³That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him with a question. ²⁴“Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷Finally, the woman died. ²⁸Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”

²⁹Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, ³²‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

³³When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

In the previous section, the Pharisees and Herodians accosted Jesus with the purpose of entrapping Him by asking Him a question the answer to which was sure to offend someone. Here in this section, the Sadducees confront Him with a question designed to undermine His teachings.

“**T**hat same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him with a question. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘Moses told us that if a man dies without hav-

ing children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?’” (vss. 23–28). First note that this confrontation occurred “**t**hat same day”: there was no rest for Jesus, even at a time when His heart must surely have been heavy due to His impending suffering.

This time, it’s the Sadducees who confront Him. “Men came from different camps to wage war on Christ” [Calvin, III-29]. The Sadducees were the materialists of that time. They accepted the moral teachings of the Scriptures, but rejected the supernatural elements. They did not believe in the miracles of God, nor did they believe in such things as the resurrection of the dead, or angels, or the afterlife. Such a belief system necessarily leads to problems with respect to one’s view concerning the nature of God. If God is righteous and just, and there is only life on earth, then either all God’s justice must be carried out on earth, or God is powerless over the events of men’s lives. Yet, on earth, we often see the wicked prosper, and the good suffer. “The Sadducees restricted the reward of the godly and the due punishment of the wicked to this present life. Even if it had been true that each man is treated equally according to his deserts, it was too outrageous to confine the promises of God to such narrow limits. Experience clearly shows their crass stupidity. Plainly the reward laid up for the good is kept back till a future life, and the penalties of the wicked are not paid off in this life” [Calvin, III-29]. Again, if one holds that there is no life after death, then one must conclude that God is either powerless on earth, or that God does not care to exercise His righteousness or to be just. So we see, belief in the resurrection of the dead, and life after death, is a cornerstone of Judeo-Christian faith. Such a belief is necessarily tied to understanding the true character of God: His righteousness, His holiness,

ness, His justice.

The Sadducees approached Jesus calling Him, “**Teacher**”. However, they had no desire to be taught. Rather, they wished to teach Jesus of their own views. They begin by citing the Biblical teachings concerning the levirate marriage. The levirate marriage was a pre-Mosaic custom that was codified in the Mosaic law. “The law of Moses, in this as in many other matters, recognized existing custom and imposed certain regulations upon them” [Spurgeon, 322]. The custom held that if brothers lived together, and a married brother died, the younger brother was to marry the widow, and carry on the elder brother’s name (see Deut. 25:5-10). Now, this custom may seem a little odd to people in modern, non-agrarian cultures, but in the family structure of that time, it made perfect sense. The custom was a protection for the widow. She had left her family to join another family, and live among the other family. When her husband died, her connection to the family she joined was severely weakened. By marrying a younger brother, her connection to the family would be re-solidified. Contained in the law was a provision that allowed the younger brother to bow out of marrying the widow (see Deut. 25:7), but it was considered a lapse of familial duty for him to do so.

The Sadducees brought up the levirate marriage custom so as to set up (they thought) a contradiction in the Bible. They spoke of a family of seven brothers, who followed the levirate custom down to the seventh brother (though I’m sure the seventh brother had some misgivings, after seeing six of his older brothers die... Could it be her cooking?...). Since Moses codified the levirate custom, the seven marriages of the woman were all right and good. So the Sadducees asked, “**Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?**” To the Sadducees, this was an argument against the resurrection. They felt that life after the resurrection would be chaos, because situations in this life would have made it so. “There never probably will be wanting unreasonable men, who will intrude into things unseen, and make imaginary difficulties their excuse for unbelief... Such a mind will often refuse to look at the overwhelm-

ing mass of plain evidence by which Christianity is supported, and will fasten down on some one single difficulty, which it fancies is unanswerable” [Ryle, 289].

Quite possibly, the Sadducees and Pharisees would argue over and over concerning the issue of the resurrection. Most likely, “this was one of the stock stories the Sadducees were in the habit of telling in order to cast ridicule upon the resurrection” [Spurgeon, 323]. Jesus, quite completely and succinctly, put the whole issue to rest: **“Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living”** (vss. 29–32). According to Jesus, the error of the Sadducees, by disbelieving the resurrection, was rooted in two things: they did not know **“the Scriptures”**, and they did not know **“the power of God”**. If they knew and believed **“the Scriptures”**, they would know that there is a resurrection, and life after death. References to these things are rife, of course, in the New Testament, and in the Old Testament (which is what the Sadducees had), there are numerous references to these things, implicitly and explicitly. For instance, Isaiah prophesied to God’s people: **“But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead”** (Isa. 26:19); and Daniel: **“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt”** (Dan. 12:2); and Job: **“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”** (Job 19:25–27); and the Psalmist: **“But God will redeem my life from the grave; He will surely take**

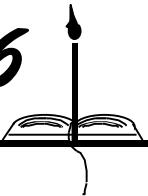
me to Himself” (Ps. 49:15).

The Sadducees erred in another way concerning not “**knowing the Scriptures**”. They read into the Scriptures something that was not there. They thought that life after the resurrection would continue, in a way, as it is on earth. Jesus corrects this notion: “**At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like angels in heaven**” (vs. 30). “Note, it is not strange that carnal minds have very false notions of spiritual and eternal things” [Henry]. When dealing with spiritual and eternal things, we must realize that there are some things that we humans just do not know. There are mysteries which are kept hidden from us. This is one of them. Paul tells us: “**I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell**” (II Cor. 12:2–4). The way of life in heaven is kept a mystery to men, purposely by God. We do know, as related here by Jesus, that life will not continue as it is in this fallen world. When we recognize this, we see that the foundation of the Sadducee’s argument is destroyed. “Their supposed argument was based on their own erroneous notions about the unseen world; and when the light of God’s Word was poured upon their seven men of straw, they vanished into thin air” [Spurgeon, 323].

The Sadducees also erred because they did not know “**the power of God**”. “The ignorance, disbelief, or weak belief, of God’s power, is at the bottom of many errors, particularly theirs who deny the resurrection” [Henry]. The Sadducees disbelief in the resurrection, resulted from their disbelief in the power of God. However, the one who created us, the one who conceived and constructed this vast universe, does have the creative power to raise us from the dead, into the realm of heaven, into those many mansions that have been prepared for us. God did not create us just to have us be destroyed. As

Jesus points out, God is the God of the living: “**But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead but of the living**” (vs. 31–32).

Matthew 22:34-46



The Greatest Commandment

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question: ³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴²"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?"

"The son of David," they replied.

⁴³He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls Him 'Lord'? For he says, ⁴⁴'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet.'" ⁴⁵If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can He be his son?" ⁴⁶No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Jesus has had a busy day, answering questions meant to trap Him. This continues: **"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'"** This question, again, seems to have been one that the Pharisees disputed among each other. Undoubtedly, there were some who preferred one law, and others who preferred

others. So again, the asker was certain that Jesus would offend someone with His answer. "The design was to try Him, or tempt Him; to try, not so much His knowledge as His judgment. It was a question disputed among the critics in the law. Some would have the law of circumcision to be the great commandment, others the law of the Sabbath, others the law of sacrifices, according as they severally stood affected, and spent their zeal; now they would try what Christ said to this question, hoping to incense the people against Him" [Henry].

Now, the Pharisees were correct in one thing: there are greater and lesser commandments. However, their discernment as to which are which was faulty. In the next chapter of Matthew, Jesus chides them for this: **"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*"** (Matt. 23:23). It is good for us that they asked this question, no matter how wrong their motives, for now we have the answer. "It drew from our Lord an answer full of precious instruction. Thus we see how good may come out of evil" [Ryle, 292].

Jesus answers the question: **"Jesus replied: '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" (vss. 37-40). What better answer could there be to this question? "Love is the grand secret of true obedience to God" [Ryle, 293]. Jesus not only answers the question, He gives us a guideline for interpreting the whole law: **"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."** Do you have a question about the law of God? Test it using these two commandments. They will point you toward the correct interpretation of the law. You can't go too far wrong when love for God and your neighbor guides your steps. "Anyone who loves God and people wholeheartedly is not going to come short in religious observances, nor in doing what is proper to

other people. In short, when anyone loves in the way Jesus says, there is no need for a host of hair-splitting definitions of when an obligation has been discharged and when it has not” [Morris, 564].

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?” (vs. 41–42). After fielding questions from His opposition, Jesus took His turn to ask questions. Jesus’ purpose, though, in asking His questions was different than theirs. He had no desire to trick them, or humiliate them, or show them up. Rather, He asked in order to instruct. “His purpose is not to win a debate but to elicit from them what the Scriptures themselves teach about the Messiah, thus helping people to recognize who He really is” [Carson, 466].

The questions Jesus asked are crucially important for all of us to ponder. The first question, **“What do you think about the Christ?”**, is so important, that the eternal destiny of each person on earth depends upon his answer to it. Do you consider Christ your Savior and Lord? If so, then you will dwell in heaven forever in the presence of the Lord of the Universe. It is quite an important question, and one that we all must reflect on.

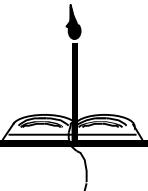
The second question, **“Whose son is He?”**, is intimately related to the first, and its full and correct answer will steer one to the correct answer to the first. The Pharisees give a partially correct answer: **“The son of David,’ they replied.”** To steer the Pharisees to a fully correct answer to this question, Jesus cites Psalm 110: **“He said to them, ‘How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls Him ‘Lord’? For he says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet.’”** **If then David calls Him “Lord”, how can He be his son?”** Jesus wanted to make clear to the Pharisees (and to us) that He is more than just the son of David. He is the son of God. If the Messiah was merely the son of David, David himself (especially in that culture) would not have called Him **“Lord”**. “It could only be explained by conceding the pre-existence and divinity of the Messiah” [Ryle, 295]. “Jesus’

question is not a denial of the Messiah’s Davidic sonship but a demand for recognizing how Scripture itself teaches that the Messiah is more than David’s son” [Carson, 468].

Notice also, that in the verse that Jesus cited, the exaltation of the Messiah is noted: **“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet.’”** The Pharisees were looking to have Jesus the Messiah arrested, and put to death. In the prophecy by David, God will exalt the Messiah to sit at His right hand and put **“His enemies under His feet.”** By citing this verse, Jesus, it seems, was warning the Pharisees against what they were about to do, letting them know that they, as His enemies, will be put **“under His feet.”**

Finally note, Jesus affirmed that David was **“speaking by the Spirit”**. The Bible is more than just human authors spouting opinions. The Bible writers **“spoke”** by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God directed the writings in the Bible. As Paul told us: **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”** (II Tim. 3:16, AV).

Matthew 23:1-12



Jesus Denounces the Religious Leaders

1Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples: **2**"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. **3**So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. **4**They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

5"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; **6**they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; **7**they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

8"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. **9**And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and He is in heaven. **10**Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. **11**The greatest among you will be your servant. **12**For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus had been teaching in the Temple, during the Passover week. In chapter 23 of the book of Matthew, Jesus ends His teaching session in the Temple with a discourse against the religious leaders of the time: the Pharisees, and the Teachers of the Law. As we shall see, His discourse is very frank and pointed, containing harsh denunciations against the religious leaders. "The whole chapter is a signal example of boldness and faithfulness in denouncing error. It is a striking proof that

it is possible for the most loving heart to use the language of stern reproof" [Ryle, 297]. Primarily, Jesus excoriates the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. "We find not Christ, in all His preaching, so severe upon any sort of people as upon these Scribes and Pharisees; for the truth is, nothing is more directly opposite to the spirit of the gospel than the temper and practice of that generation of men, who were made up of pride, worldliness, and tyranny, under a cloak and pretence of religion" [Henry].

The section here, the first twelve verses of the chapter, is addressed to Jesus' followers, telling them how to respond to the religious leaders: "**Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples:** 'The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them'" (vss. 1-4). Interestingly, Jesus seems to acknowledge the authority of the religious leaders to teach the people. He said that they "**sit in Moses' seat**", meaning, they held the office of instruction in matters concerning the Law of God. Jesus also said, "**So you must obey them and do everything they tell you.**" It is a sad fact that, since all men are sinful, it is sinful men who must be put in authority to teach the things of God. But their sinfulness does not necessarily nullify the truth of what they teach. "Note, we must not think the worse of good truths for their being preached by bad ministers; nor of good laws for their being executed by bad magistrates. Though it is most desirable to have our food brought by angels, yet, if God send it to us by ravens, if it be good and wholesome, we must take it, and thank God for it" [Henry]. Paul noted that there were those preaching the truth of Christ, yet not from pure motives: "**It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill... The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it**

matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (Phil. 2:15–18). Paul rejoiced that God’s message could still get out, even though it was spoken by those with impure motives.

Often one hears from non-Christians that one reason they don’t go to church, or don’t believe in Jesus Christ, is that the church is full of hypocrites. But in the eyes of God, this is not a valid excuse. His truth gets out, by His Spirit, even through hypocrites and sinful men. The hypocrisy of the messenger is no excuse for ignoring sound teaching. If anything, the hypocrisy and sinfulness of even the best of Christians, validates the Christian world view: all men are sinful, and in great need of a Savior.

Although the Jews of the time were to heed the valid teaching of the religious leaders, they were not to follow their bad example of living. Jesus said: **“But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach”** (vs. 3). “We must often disregard a teacher’s evil example, and heed his correct precept” [Broadus, 468]. Of course, this does not excuse teachers who live less than exemplary lives. All teachers of the things of God must strive to teach, not only through their words, but also through their actions. “How much better, for teacher and for hearers, when he that says, also does!” [Broadus, 468]

It seems also that the religious leaders, though they were teaching some of the truths of God’s law, they were lacking in their teaching concerning the grace and love of God: **“They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them”** (vss. 4). Apparently, they would condemn the people for not following the law, but would offer no grace, love or encouragement in guiding the people to carry out God’s precepts. Their mode of teaching the Law was to **“tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders”**. They taught the law as a heavy burden. The law of God, however, is not meant to be a heavy burden. Rather, it is meant to be the way to a pure and fulfilling life. Jesus taught the law the way it

should be taught. Living a life of sin is a heavy burden. Living a life of obedience to God’s law trades the heavy burden of the life of sin, for the light burden of living a life in purity and holiness in obedience to God. As Jesus said, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”** (Matt. 11:28–30).

Jesus faulted the religious leaders for making a show of their religion: **“Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi’”** (vss. 5–7). “Jesus expects His followers so to live that they bring glory, not to themselves, but to God (see Matt. 5:16). Many of the things the Pharisees did were undoubtedly worthy, but they did them with their attention fixed on what people would think of them. They did them for show, and such deeds are not meritorious in the sight of God” [Morris, 574]. “We must do such good works, that they who see them may glorify God” [Henry].

Jesus continued His instruction, speaking on humility: **“...they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi’. But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and He is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”** (vss. 8–12). Jesus faulted the religious leaders for glorying in their titles. They loved the ego-boost they received when they were called **“Rabbi”**. This is the wrong attitude. We are instructed by Jesus to strive for humility. We are not to be called **“Rabbi”**, or **“Master”**, or **“Father”**, or **“Teacher”**, as a means of

showing our superiority over others. Rather, as Jesus said, we “**are all brothers**”, equals in the family of God, our heavenly Father. To Him belongs all the obeisance and glory; to Christ all the exaltation.



Matthew 23:13-24

“Woe to You”

¹³“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

¹⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

¹⁶“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.’ ¹⁷You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁸You 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.’ ¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²²And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

²³“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. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”

Earlier in this chapter, Jesus advised His disciples on how to respond to the religious leaders of the time, the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. He warned His disciples, “**Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach**” (Matt. 23:3). Here, in these verses, Jesus speaks directly to the religious leaders, severely admonishing them. Sadly, it is this admonishment of the religious leaders which is the last address to the general public by Jesus.

Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus was extremely patient with evil-doers, quick to extend grace to sinners. So, His harsh words here come somewhat as a surprise. “He came to bless, and loved to bless; but, if His wrath be kindled, there is surely cause for it” [Henry]. We see here the hatred Jesus has for hypocritical religious leaders, those who lead astray people who are trying to live a godly life. Those who are in positions of leadership in the church must surely take this admonishment to heart, and redouble their efforts to present a godly example to their flock.

Jesus begins: “**Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to**” (vs. 13). The primary purpose for ministers of God’s word is to lead people to God. The religious leaders whom Jesus was admonishing, rather than leading people to God, were “**shutting the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces.**” Jesus seems to be, here, speaking specifically of the religious leaders’s rejection of the Messiah. They rejected the Messiah, thus, they themselves “**did not enter**”, and they discouraged others from accepting Jesus as their Messiah, thus, they did not “**let those enter who were trying to.**” “These religious teachers ought to have set men in general the example of promptly and joyfully entering the Messianic kingdom, but they actually prevented others from entering” [Broadus, 469].

It is a grievous thing when religious leaders “**shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces.**” Sadly, this happens quite a lot, even today, when Christians focus on *condemnation* (as the Pharisees did), rather than *salvation*. There is a lot of

sin in this world. There are plenty of things to *condemn*. However, the best way to get rid of sin, is to turn people to God, to get them to wash away their sins by the blood of Jesus, and to let His Spirit work in their lives.

Jesus continues: “**Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are**” (vs. 15). It seems the religious leaders were evangelists, of sorts. However, they weren’t seeking, in their evangelism, to turn people toward belief in the truth of God’s Word. Rather, they were seeking to “**convert**” them to their own cause. “They did this from no desire to benefit men’s souls in the least, or to bring them to God; they only did it to swell the ranks of their sect, and to increase the number of their adherents, and their own importance” [Ryle, 303]. “Their converts retained the essential faults of the heathen, and took on the faults of the Pharisees” [Broadus, 470]. Evangelism is only a good thing if the purpose of the evangelism is to lead people to God’s truth. There are many evangelists in the world, who lead people away from God’s truth. They will, like the Pharisees, receive a “**woe to you**” from Christ on judgment day.

Jesus continues: “**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**” (vss. 16–21). The religious leaders, who were supposed to be teachers of the Law, lacked respect for the Law of God, as seen in these verses. They made a mockery of the laws that said that

men were bound by oaths. They allowed oaths to be broken, under certain semantic conditions. “Our Lord condemns the subtle distinctions they made as to the sanctity of oaths, distinctions invented only to promote their own avaricious purposes” [JFB, V-109]. “It is preposterous to think that God is going to be concerned with the precise form of words a man uses in swearing an oath, so that He would take seriously an oath sworn by the gold of the temple, but would not regard an oath by the temple itself in the same way. To maintain such a distinction is both foolish and blind. Anyone who does so takes insufficient notice of the fact that God demands complete truthfulness in His people so that any pledge is to be discharged. We cannot escape any legitimate pledge by quibbling about the form of words in which the pledge is expressed, oath or not” [Morris, 581]. The purpose of oaths was to give assurance to the receiver of the promise that one’s word would be kept. The purpose of oaths was not to allow loopholes to be devised to make it easier to break promises. Any such use of God’s Law is absurd and blasphemous. It shows a lack of respect for God’s truthfulness. Do they think they are fooling God with evasive semantics?

Jesus continues: “**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. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel**” (vss. 23–24). Here Jesus chides the religious leaders for making a show of holiness, while “neglecting the more important matters of the law.” They made a show of their holiness by publicly tithing their smallest possessions, even the spices they received. It was easy to (supposedly) prove their holiness in this way. In their eyes, this was *objective*, measurable proof that they obeyed God’s law. But God wants obedience, not only in the *objective* matters of the law (such as tithing), but also in the *subjective* matters of the law, such as justice, mercy and faithfulness. “To be just to the priests in their tithe, and yet to cheat and

defraud everybody else, is but to mock God, and deceive ourselves” [Henry]. To be seen as a just man, or as a merciful man, or as a faithful man, requires not just one objective act of obedience to God, but a life-long way of life, lived in obedience to God. This is much more difficult, and in these “**more important matters of the law**”, the religious leaders failed.

Many people mistakenly perceive that God wants material gifts, and that material gifts will cover a multitude of sins. This faulty perception is the result, in many cases, of the over-emphasis given by many ministers of God’s Word to the importance of giving material gifts to the church. Many ministers, in effect, say “Give money to our church, and God will be pleased with you.” Such a message is un-Biblical, and misrepresents God as a money-grubbing mercenary. Through the prophet Micah, in the Old Testament, God expressed His desire that people live a holy life, over His desire that they give gifts to the church: “**With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with you God**” (Micah 6:6–8).

Matthew 23:25-39



“Woe to You” - pt. 2

²⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

²⁷“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. ²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

²⁹“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³²Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

³³“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiyah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

³⁷“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Jesus continues pronouncing woes upon the religious leaders of the time: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (vss. 25–28). Jesus here speaks of the importance of purity of heart, over the outside show of purity. The religious leaders made a show of purity, but inside were “full of greed and self-indulgence” and “full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” God, of course, sees the heart, and that’s what counts for Him. In any case, a corrupt heart will, sooner or later, be manifest in one’s outside actions. As Jesus taught: “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). And likewise, a pure heart most naturally leads to pure actions. “If due care be taken in first cleaning the inside, the outside will be clean also” [Henry].

The next woe: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the

prophets” (vss. 29–31). Here Jesus points out a specific instance of the religious leaders’ hypocrisy. They feigned honor for the martyred prophets of the past, claiming that they “**would not have taken part... in shedding the blood of the prophets**”, and yet, that very week (even that very day), they were scheming to have Jesus arrested (see Matt. 21:46). “They pretended a deal of kindness for the memory of the prophets that were dead and gone, while they hated and persecuted those that were present with them” [Henry]. “While piously claiming to be different, they were already plotting ways to put an end to Jesus” [Carson, 483]. “They were boasting of superiority to their fathers who killed prophets, and yet they were showing by both actions and attitudes that they were lineal descendants of these same murderers” [Thomas, 340]. This was how they were “**testifying against themselves.**”

Now, they revered the dead prophets, not for any respect for the teachings of the prophets, but because their constituents revered the prophets, and also because dead prophets cannot admonish them for their behavior. “Carnal people can easily honor the memories of faithful ministers that are dead and gone, because they do not reprove them, nor disturb them, in their sins” [Henry]. “This is the way of hypocrites to honor God’s holy ministers and true-living teachers after they have died, but in their lives to abhor them. This results partly from envy, and partly because dead men’s ashes can no longer give trouble with hard and austere reproof” [Calvin, III-61]. “Ask in Mose’s times who were the good people: they will be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not Moses—he should be stoned. Ask in Samuel’s times who were the good people: they will be Moses and Joshua, but not Samuel. Ask in the times of Christ who were such: they will be all the former prophets, with Samuel, but not Christ and His apostles” [Berlenberger, in Ryle, 304].

Jesus speaks of how the Pharisees and teachers of the Law would imitate the behavior of their forefathers who persecuted and killed the prophets: “**Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! You snakes! You brood of**

vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town” (vss. 32–34). As if in order to prove His estimation of their character, Jesus was to “**send them prophets and wise men and teachers.**” Those “**prophets and wise men and teachers**” would be the early Christian leaders, whom the religious leaders would “**flog**”, “**pursue from town to town**”, and even “**kill and crucify.**” In this way, they would “**fill up the measure of the sin of their forefathers**” and be rendered inexcusable before God.

By the way, note that Jesus said, “**I am sending you prophets...**” This is an explicit claim by Jesus to be God. It is He who will guide and direct these prophets of God.

Jesus continues by telling them of the judgment that will befall them: “**And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation**” (vss. 35–36). Severe judgment would come upon them, and those in Jerusalem whom they lead, for killing the Christian “**prophets and wise men and teachers**”, and especially, for killing their Messiah. This judgment did come upon Jerusalem, as foretold, in the year 70 AD, when the Romans utterly destroyed the city. The Jewish historian Josephus (who was born in 37 AD) wrote of the destruction of Jerusalem: “When they went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses whither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest... They ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men’s blood” [Wars, 6.8.5].

Though this destruction would be brought upon them-

selves, nevertheless, Jesus laments over it: “**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.** Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’” (vss. 37–39). Here we have a glimpse of the heart of God, poured out in verbal terms, full of emotion. The Lord has shown nothing but love for Jerusalem, expressed in His desire to “gather” His people to Him, yet they had responded by “killing the prophets and stoning those sent to them.” Perhaps the saddest words in the Bible are found here: “...but you were not willing.” The sentiment expressed in those words is the root cause of interminable human suffering, in this life and in the afterlife. Because we humans “are not willing” to respond to God’s love, to be gathered to Him when He reaches out to us, O how much misery we bring upon ourselves.



Matthew 24:1-3

The Olivet Discourse – pt. 1

¹Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. ²“Do you see all these things?” He asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

³As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

In this section begins the Olivet Discourse, which Jesus delivered to His disciples on the Mount of Olives (see vs. 3), concerning things future. In general, prophetic writings in the Bible can frustrate the reader. The reader would like that future events be laid out as in History Class: step-by-step; chronologically; with an accompanying time-line. This is not the way with prophetic writings in the Bible. Often, prophets in the Bible intertwine multiple, related events, such as when Isaiah spoke of both the first and second comings of Christ. Also, there are frequently multiple fulfillments of prophecies in the Bible. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus delivers prophecy in the style of the Old Testament prophets, using the devices that they used. To our dismay, He does not lay out His prophecies with an exact time-line. On the contrary, it is somewhat difficult to figure out which prophecies go with which events, or even if they apply to multiple events. Obviously, Jesus purposely prophesied in this way. It causes us to approach His words humbly, earnestly seeking guidance by the Holy Spirit for a proper interpretation. The absence of a time-line for events such as the second coming of Christ

encourage us to always be ready for His coming, for He could appear at any time.

Specifically, in this discourse, Jesus, in response to questions by His disciples, prophesies about the then-future destruction of Jerusalem, and His own bodily return to earth. “We should not approach these chapters with the conviction that everything in them applies to only one of these judgments. The intermingling of prophecies referring to the events leading up to AD 70 with those applying to the end of all things makes this discourse particularly difficult to interpret” [Morris, 594]. “Our Lord appears to have purposely mingled the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and His own second coming, so that there should be nothing in His words to satisfy the idle curiosity, but everything to keep His disciples always on the watch for His appearing” [Spurgeon, 350].

This prophetic discourse was prompted by the admiration of the disciples for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem: **“Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings”** (vs. 1). First note the opening phrase: **“Jesus left the temple”**. There seems to be symbolism in this phrase. Here, Jesus left the temple for the last time, as if to abandon it. The Messiah would no longer teach there. Moreover, the temple sacrifices were soon to be rendered meaningless by Jesus’ sacrifice. The entire significance of the Jerusalem Temple as the house of God was nullified when Jesus left it. All that was left was the earthly materials that made up its construction. These, the disciples marveled at, **“calling [Jesus] attention to its buildings.”** “Jesus had said, in the close of the foregoing chapter, **‘Your house is left to you desolate’** (Matt. 23:38); and here He made His words good, **‘Jesus left the temple’**. The manner of expression is observable; He not only went out of the Temple, but departed from it, took His final farewell of it; He departed from it, never to return to it anymore; and then immediately predicted its ruin” [Henry]

Jesus responded to the disciples’s marveling at the construction of the temple: **“Do you see all these things?”** He

asked. ‘I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (vs. 2). “The disciples were doubtless moved by admiration for the magnificent building, and they probably expected some expression of appreciation from Jesus” [Morris, 595]. Rather than an expression of appreciation on the workmanship of the temple, Jesus gave the disciples a prediction of the destruction of the temple. The destruction of the temple was necessary to physically do away with the system of temple worship, which ceased to be valid when Jesus died on the cross, as the ultimate sacrificial Lamb. When the temple lost its spiritual significance, the beauty of its edifice became meaningless. Worse, the continued use of the temple for spiritual purposes would mislead the people into thinking that the temple rituals and sacrifices were still valid. “A believing foresight of the defacing of all worldly glory will help to take us off from admiring it, and overvaluing it. The most beautiful body will be shortly worms’ meat, and the most beautiful building a ruinous heap. And shall we then set our eyes upon that which so soon is not, and look upon that with so much admiration which ere long we shall certainly look upon with so much contempt?” [Henry]. “His supernatural vision enabled Him to see what could not have occurred to any human being, namely, that the overthrow of Temple worship was certain, and that the entire Jewish nation would find its future determined by its present relation to Himself” [Thomas, 345].

Jesus’ prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple induced some questions by the disciples: **“As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?’”** (vs. 3). We can infer from their questions that the disciples assumed that the second coming of Christ, and the **“end of the age”**, would happen at about the same time that the destruction of Jerusalem occurred. The disciples lumped all these events together. The disciples thought that the chance that the temple would be destroyed was very remote; so much so, that they assumed that its destruction sig-

nified the end of the world. "We must note, since they had considered from childhood that the temple would stand to the end of time and had the idea deeply rooted in their minds, that they had not thought that the temple could fall down as long as the world's created order stood" [Calvin, 75].

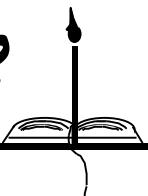
Jesus, in His answer to the questions, does nothing to divest the disciples of their mistaken notion that those events would occur very close to each other. On the contrary, in answering, Jesus speaks of the three events, without giving a delineation of which one He is speaking. This has caused countless hours of frustration over the years for interpreters of the Bible. It is best to take humble view when it comes to prophecy in the Bible, and assume that we cannot exactly correlate to its fulfilling event each and every prophetic statement. In any case, though, the words of Jesus are clear enough so that we can get a general sense of what He is prophesying.

One might ask, why didn't Jesus make more clear the signs and times of what He was prophesying? It is a consistent theme in the New Testament that Christians are to live their lives in expectation that Jesus could return at any time (see Matt. 24:44; I Cor. 1:7; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 10:37; James 5:8; I John 2:28; et. al.). If Jesus had specified that His coming would be hundreds or thousands of years after the destruction of the temple, that would obviously have dampened the feeling of expectation for early Christians that He would return soon. "The main object of His answer was to establish His disciples in good hope, in case they should fail in courage at the ensuing chaos. For this reason He does not speak of His coming in simple terms but helps Himself to prophetic forms of speech, which the more men scrutinize, the harder they must struggle to understand the paradoxical character of events" [Calvin, 93]. "Christ wishes the day of His coming to be so hoped for and looked for that yet no one should dare to ask when it will come. He wants His disciples to walk in the light of faith and, without knowing times with certainty, to expect the revelation with patience. Beware then not to worry more than the Lord allows over details of time... It would be threefold, fourfold madness to grudge submission to the igno-

rance which even the Son of God refused to accept, for our sake" [Calvin, 98].

The great wisdom of Christ is demonstrated by the way He gave this prophecy. No Christian throughout the ages has been denied the feeling of expectation for His soon return. That is how God wants it. And certainly, this feeling of expectation is not wasted on anyone, even though Christ has not returned as we sit nearly two thousand years later. For though He has not bodily returned to earth in all these years, He could come individually for any of us, at any time. The fragile flame of our lives can be snuffed out at any time, and without any warning. So, the feeling of expectation of His soon coming is by no means wasted, for He may come at any time: either magnificently visible to all of the world as He ushers in the end of the age; or individually, as He calls us home at the end of our lives on earth.

Matthew 24:3-22



The Olivet Discourse - pt. 2

¹Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. ²"Do you see all these things?" He asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

³As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

⁴Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹²Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

¹⁵"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through

the prophet Daniel— let the reader understand— ¹⁶then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. ¹⁹How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

²¹For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now— and never to be equaled again. ²²If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

The disciples responded to Jesus' prophecy that the Jerusalem Temple would be destroyed (see vs. 2), by asking: "**'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?'**" (vs. 3). As we discussed in the previous issue, it seems that the disciples thought that the destruction of the temple would occur at or near the time that Jesus returned, and at or near the "**end of the age**". Jesus' answer to their question contains prophecies about all three events, without clearly distinguishing between them, and without giving a time-line concerning when they will occur.

In fact, much of Jesus' response contains general directions to the disciples about distressing events that would occur in the future. "It is observable, that what Christ here says to His disciples tends more to engage their caution, than to satisfy their curiosity; more to prepare them for the events that should happen, than to give them a distinct idea of the events themselves" [Henry]. Jesus begins: "**Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the begin-**

ning of birth pains” (vss. 4–8). Here Jesus gives a general warning to His disciples that they be not deceived by false Messiahs. There will come times of distress—“**wars and rumors of wars**”, “**famines and earthquakes**”—but Jesus’ disciples are not to be “**alarmed**” by these things. Also, Jesus warns of false Messiahs during such times of political and environmental upheaval. “One of the greatest temptations in times of difficulty is to follow blindly any self-proclaimed savior who promises help” [Carson, 497].

Indeed, Jesus in these verses prepares His disciples in all ages, not just those who lived near the time of the destruction of the temple, and not just those who will live near the time of the end of the age. Sadly, at all times in history, there are “**wars and rumors of war**”, and there are also great natural disasters, such as “**famines and earthquakes**”. In the past year, we have seen all of these things, as well as great storms and floods, tsunamis and pestilences. Jesus’ message to us, His disciples, as we hear of such things, is: Do not be alarmed; He is in control; do not seek after other ‘Christs’; He is the Lord forever. “We have one thing going for us that the general public has not: we know that God is over all and that His purpose will in the end be worked out” [Morris, 598].

“All these are the beginning of birth pains” (vs. 8). The wars and rumors of war, the turbulence in the world, are evidences of a fallen world, a world that has, for the most part, rejected Christ, and the salvation He offers. These are “**birth pains**”, leading up to the eventual new heaven and new earth, which will come about at the end of the age. “Since the disciples confused the [destruction of the Temple with the end of the world], as though the Temple could not be put down without the ruin of the whole earth, Christ replies to the question put to Him with the caution that a long and sad epic of woes was upon them, that they must not hasten to seize the prize before they had gone through many contests and troubles” [Calvin, 83].

Along with these political and environmental upheavals, as Jesus warns His followers, there will be persecution of believers: “**Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and**

put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” (vs. 9). “He wanted to warn the disciples that the teaching of the Gospel (whose witnesses and heralds they were to be) would never win them the world’s favor and applause” [Calvin, 80]. “It is one of the things that puzzle Christians in every age that, although they are doing their best to love God and their neighbor and to put love into practice by ministering to whatever needs they discern in those they encounter on their way through life, they are so often the butt of ridicule and the objects of hatred” [Morris, 599].

Jesus continues: “**At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come**” (vss. 9–14). Here is verse 9, and also in verse 30, Jesus uses the phrase “**At that time...**” In verse 30, Jesus is clearly referring to the end of the age, and here in these verses, I believe Jesus is also referring to the times just before the end of the age. Jesus speaks in general terms about the spiritual conditions at that time: “**many will turn away from the faith**”, “**many false prophets will appear and deceive**”, “**the love of most will grow cold**”. In order to assure His disciples that the Christian religion is not a passing fad, Jesus assures them that, before the end of the age, “**this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations**” (vs. 14). Despite the impediments described previously—the wars, the earthquakes, the persecution, etc.—the gospel will still be preached “**in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.**”

Next, Jesus warns His disciples about a specific event: “**So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one**

on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath" (vss. 15–20). Jesus warns His disciples to flee Jerusalem when they see "standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation'". We are not sure, at this time centuries later, to which specific event this refers in the destruction of Jerusalem. Presumably, the Romans entered and defiled the temple. This was to be a sign to the disciples that they were to leave the city because great destruction was to be coming.

Jesus uses the phrase '**the abomination that causes desolation**' to tie His prophecy with a prophecy in the book of Daniel, where the same phrase is used. Speaking of the conqueror, Daniel prophesied: "**His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation**" (Dan. 11:31; see also, Dan. 8:13; 9:27; and 12:11). It is quite amazing, even miraculous, how the prophecies in the Bible tie together, and relate to each other. Jesus uses Daniel's phrase to teach us that He is speaking of the same events that Daniel was.

As I said, it seems that the immediate fulfillment of this prophecy occurred during the destruction of Jerusalem. But, as occurs so much in prophecy, it seems that there will be a more complete fulfillment in the future. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, but with an eye also toward the end-times. "We must not suppose that this part of our Lord's prophecy is exhausted by the first taking of Jerusalem. It is more than probable that our Lord's words have a further and deeper application still. It is more than probable that they apply to a second siege of Jerusalem, which is yet to take place; ... and to a second tribulation on the inhabitants thereof, which shall only be stopped by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ" [Ryle, 317-318]. Jesus next seems to speak of this 'second tribulation', which will be even more horrible than the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70: "**For then there will be**

great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (vss. 21–22).

Matthew 24:23-31



The Olivet Discourse – pt. 3

²³"At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. ²⁵See, I have told you ahead of time.

²⁶"So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. ²⁷For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

³⁰"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. ³¹And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Jesus continues to answer the questions posed by His disciples in verse 3: "**Tell us**", they said, '**when will [the destruction of the Temple] happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?**' (Matt. 24:3). In this section, Jesus addresses two aspects of the question: "**His coming**", and the "**end of the age**".

Again, Jesus warns His disciples not to be deceived by false

Messiahs: "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time" (vss. 23–25). As the distress and tribulations of the end-times approach, there will be many claiming to be the returning Christ. Their deception will be supported by "**great signs and miracles**". The "**signs**" and "**miracles**" will be a great aid in deceiving those who do not know the true Christ. We humans are overly preoccupied with the miraculous. We are always desiring to experience the supernatural. How many countless times have the unsaved said, "Well, I would believe in God if He would just show me a miracle"? Apparently, in the end-times, they will get their wish for the miraculous, but the "**signs**" and "**miracles**" will serve to lead them to false Christs. Rather than basing our allegiance on the presence of "**signs**" and "**miracles**", we who know the true Christ, must lean on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through prayer. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the "**elect**" will not be deceived by the false Christs and the "**miracles**".

Jesus tells us that His return will be public, clear, and obvious: "**So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather**" (vss. 26–28). In His first coming, Jesus came to the chosen people of God in Israel, as one of them. From a global perspective, it was a private event, restricted to one geographic region. Jesus then spent time in the "**desert**" and in "**the inner rooms**". But Jesus' second coming will not be private and regional; it will be public and global. And it will be as clear and obvious as "**lightning**"; anything else is not to be believed. No Christian who knows this verse should be deceived by any false Messiah. If it is not obvious and clear that it is Jesus, then it is not. We will all know; there will be no doubt. The deceived will "**gather**" around a

“carcass”, like “vultures”; the godly will wait for Christ’s evident return.

Jesus next speaks of the signs in the heavens during the end-times tribulations: **“Immediately after the distress of those days, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken”** (vs. 29). Jesus here is citing a passage in Isaiah that prophesies the judgment of the Lord in the end-times: **“See, the day of the Lord is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins”** (Isa. 13:9–11). The darkening of the sun and skies, spoken of here, could be the result of smoke and debris in the air (presumably due to wars and fires), but the wording seems to indicate that it will be the supernatural work of the Lord.

Jesus next speaks directly of His glorious bodily return to earth: **“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory”** (vs. 30). His second coming will be startlingly different than His first coming was. “He is speaking of His coming back to this earth, a return that will be so striking that it will leave no doubt as to His majesty... Jesus is speaking of the majestic appearance of a King, the very antithesis of His first coming, a lowly coming in the form of a servant” [Morris, 610]. The **“great glory”** and **“power”** with which Jesus will return will leave no doubt to anyone that it is He. A result of His coming will be that **“the nations of the earth will mourn”**. The unsaved nations will mourn for themselves, at having rejected Christ, and having failed to serve Him.

His coming will be followed by a significant event: **“And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one**

end of the heavens to the other” (vs. 31). Those who serve the Lord will be taken from the tribulations of the earth, and gathered by the angels to Jesus. What exactly this means, and physically how it will all come about, is a mystery. But, it will no doubt be a glorious event for the children of God.

Matthew 24:32-41



The Olivet Discourse – pt. 4

³²"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁴I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁶"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

Jesus is in the midst of a discourse in which He answers a question from His disciples about "**when [the destruction of the Temple will] happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age**" (Matt. 24:3). In verses 32 and following, Jesus speaks of how His disciples should react when they witness the signs Jesus has spoken of.

First, Jesus gives a parable that teaches us that His disciples should not be taken by surprise as they see God's plan for the

last days begin to unfold: "**Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door**" (vss. 32-33). Jesus' disciples should be attuned to the spiritual signs of the times. They should be able to perceive and recognize when God is working in the world, for His eternal purpose. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus chided the Pharisees for not recognizing God's work through Jesus: "**When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.'** You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Matt. 16:2-3). Jesus' followers must not be like the Pharisees, but rather must be able to see God's hand at work in the happenings on earth.

Jesus continues: "**Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened**" (vss. 33-34). When He uses the term "**all these things**" in verse 33 (as opposed to "**that time**", in verses 23 and 30), Jesus seems to be referring back to the signs He mentioned in verses 5 through 8—false Christs; "**wars and rumors of wars**"; "**famines and earthquakes in various places**"—about which He said, "**All these are the beginnings of birth pains**" (vs. 8). So, in verse 34, Jesus seems to be indicating that that "**generation**" would witness the "**beginnings of birth pains**". And indeed they did. That generation did not pass away before the city of Jerusalem itself was utterly destroyed. "Within fifty years the city was wiped out, the Temple razed, the whole region reduced to appalling devastation, and the world's obstinacy rose up against God. A furious passion raged to destroy the doctrine of salvation, false teachers came up to pervert the true Gospel with their impostures, religion was shocked in amazing ways, and the whole company of the godly was wretchedly harassed. Although the same evils continued without a break

for many centuries to follow, Christ still spoke truly, saying the faithful would actually and openly experience before the end of one generation how true His oracle was, for the Apostles suffered the same things as we see today” [Calvin, 97].

And so, the “**beginnings of birth pains**” has already occurred. Ever since those times, all of Christ’s followers should be in a constant state of excitement and expectation that His return will be soon. Just as the “**beginnings of birth pains**” has already occurred, so also will everything Jesus has prophesied be fulfilled. Jesus assures us: “**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away**” (vs. 35). “The accomplishment of these prophecies might seem to be delayed, and intervening events might seem to disagree with them, but do not think that therefore the word of Christ is fallen to the ground, for that shall never pass away: though it be not fulfilled, either in the time or in the way that we have prescribed; yet, in God’s time, which is the best time, and in God’s way, which is the best way, it shall certainly be fulfilled. Every word of Christ is very pure, and therefore very sure” [Henry].

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (vs. 35). Note that with this verse, Jesus accomplishes two things. First, He declares the certainty that what He proclaimed will be accomplished. Second, He declares the temporal nature of this universe: “**Heaven and earth will pass away.**” This agrees with John’s prophecy in the book of Revelation: “**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away**” (Rev. 21:1).

Now, about “**that day**”, Jesus tells us: “**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father**” (vs. 36). “Christ wishes the day of His coming to be so hoped for and looked for that yet no one should dare to ask when it will come. He wants His disciples to walk in the light of faith and, without knowing times with certainty, to expect the revelation with patience. Beware then not to worry more than the Lord allows over details of time... It would be threefold, fourfold madness to

grudge submission to the ignorance which not even the Son of God refused to accept, for our sake” [Calvin, 98].

There are some who are bothered that Jesus, in His incarnation, did not know the “**day or hour**” of His return. They ask, “Is not Jesus deity? Does He not know everything?” Certainly this is true of His heavenly existence. But on earth, Jesus chose to take on limitations of humanity. In His human body, He did not have full knowledge. “We read of Him at twelve years of age that He ‘**advanced in wisdom and stature**’ (see Luke 2:52). If He then advanced in wisdom, He did not cease advancing at the age of twenty or of thirty. If His knowledge was incomplete at twelve, it was still incomplete at thirty” [Broadus, 493]. “This is clearly associated with those limitations of Deity that were not only inevitable during the earthly life of our Lord, but inherent in the very idea of the Incarnation; for the Gospels seem unanimous that our Lord suspended use of His Godhead during most of His earthly life and that His utterances partook of this accepted position” [Thomas, 352]. “As for Christ the man not knowing the last day, it detracts in no way from His divine nature, other than that He was mortal” [Calvin, 99]. As He took on death, so He also took on other aspects of humanity. “There is something beautiful in the thought that He lived His life on earth as man, not using His own Divine power but receiving knowledge and power every moment from His Father (see John 5:19-20)” [Thomas, 352]. In this way, we live as He did.

But this, Jesus does tell us: “**As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man**” (vss. 37-39). In general, and to most of the world, the end will come as a total surprise, just as the flood came as a total surprise to those who were destroyed by it. “Christ’s coming, like the flood, will be sudden, unexpected, universal in its effects, and terrible to the ungodly, although they will be

utterly unconcerned” [Spurgeon, 354]. Concerning when it will happen, “we only know that it will be a very sudden event. Our plain duty then is to live always prepared for His return” [Ryle, 321].

One reason that the return of Christ will come as a great surprise to the world is because the world chooses not to believe that He will return. In fact, those of the world mock Christians who believe such a thing. Peter foresaw that this would be the case: **“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ He promised?’ Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men”** (II Peter 3:3–7).

Christ’s return will be accompanied by an extraordinary event: **“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left”** (vs. 40–41). This is the **“gathering of the elect”**, spoken of in verse 31. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, each party shall be separated from the other forevermore. Wives shall be separated from husbands, parents from children, brothers from sisters, masters from servants, preachers from hearers. There shall be no time for repentance, or a change of mind, when the Lord appears: all shall be taken as they are, and reap according as they have sown” [Ryle, 327–328]. This **“gathering of the elect”** (popularly known as “the rapture”) is also similar to what happened in the **“days of Noah”**, God’s people were taken away and sheltered from the judgment of God. As Paul tells us: **“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (I Thess. 4:9).



Matthew 24:42–51

The Olivet Discourse – pt. 5

42“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. **43**But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. **44**So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.

45“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? **46**It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. **47**I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. **48**But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ **49**and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. **50**The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. **51**He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

One of the questions that the disciples asked of Jesus to prompt this discourse was: **“When will this”**, that is, the destruction of the Temple, and the end of the age, **“happen?”** (Matt. 24:3). Jesus did not answer this part of the question. Instead of telling them **“when”** these things would happen, He tells them: **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come”** (vs. 42). It is the wisdom of God that we should not know when

the end will come, or when Jesus will return. And since we do not know “**when**” these things will happen, we must be ready at all times, as Jesus illustrates: “**But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him**” (vss. 43–44).

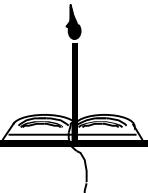
It is a test of our faith that we do not know when Jesus will return. Jesus tells a parable to illustrate this: “**Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**” (vss. 45–51).

It is the “**faithful and wise servant**” that lives his life as if the Lord could return at any time. As Jesus says, “**It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns**” (vs. 46). The faithless ones assume, because of the long delay before His return, that He will never return. Their lack of faith leads to sin. “The delay of Christ’s coming, though it is a gracious instance of His patience, is greatly abused by wicked people, whose hearts are thereby hardened in their wicked ways” [Henry]. The servant reasons, “Why should I obey the Master if He will not return to hold me accountable for disobedience?” The wicked servant “**says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards**” (vss. 48–49). However, mere disbelief in the Master’s return will not keep Him away: “**The**

master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of” (vs. 50). At that time, the wicked servant will pay the price of his disobedience: “[The Master] will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (vs. 51).

There are some in the church, even some pastors and leaders in the church, who do not believe in Jesus’ literal return to earth. This is a dangerous and unbiblical position to take. It is dangerous because, as we see in Jesus’ parable, such a view leads to sin. It is unbiblical because Jesus promised us many times that He would return. If Jesus’ own promises are invalid, the entire Christian religion collapses to ruin. Jesus will return. He said He would. He will return at a time when we are not expecting Him. We must all be prepared for His return, and obey His command to, “**Therefore keep watch**” (vs. 42).

Matthew 25:1-13



The Parable of the Ten Virgins

¹"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

⁷"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

⁹"'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

¹⁰"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

¹²"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

¹³"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

In this section, Jesus tells another parable concerning His return. This is the third of a three parable set: "The first parable (24:42-44) warns of the unexpectedness of Messiah's coming. The second (24:45-51) shows that more than passive

watchfulness is required: there must be behavior acceptable to the master, the discharge of allotted responsibilities. This third parable (25:1-13) stresses the need for preparedness in the face of an unexpectedly long delay" [Carson, 512]. "Jesus continues to teach His followers the necessity of continual readiness as they await His coming again. From the emphasis He put on watchfulness He clearly regarded it as very important" [Morris, 619]. The expectant attitude of Christians (constantly expectant of Christ's return) is a theme throughout the New Testament. In Hebrews, we are called "**those who are waiting for Him**" (Heb. 9:28). In Timothy, Paul speaks of the rewards for "**all who have longed for His appearing**" (II Tim. 4:8). In Thessalonians, Paul commands the Thessalonians for how they "**wait for [God's] Son from heaven**" (I Thess. 1:10).

So here, Jesus tells a parable of how His disciples should be ever and always prepared for His return. He begins: "**At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep**" (vs. 1-5). Though the exact customs concerning weddings at that time are somewhat sketchy to us (and certainly they evolved over time), we can glean enough from historical sources to set up the background for this parable. D. A. Carson summarizes: "Normally the bridegroom with some close friends left his home to go to the bride's home, where there were various ceremonies, followed by a procession through the streets—after nightfall—to his home... Everyone in the procession was expected to carry his or her own torch. Those without a torch would be assumed to be party crashers or even brigands. The festivities, which might last several days, would formally get under way at the groom's house" [Carson, 513]. Matthew Henry speaks of a particular custom that apparently is referred to in this parable: "It was a custom sometimes

used among the Jews on that occasion, that the bridegroom came, attended with his friends, late in the night, to the house of the bride, where she expected him, attended with her bridesmaids; who, upon notice given of the bridegroom's approach, were to go out with lamps in their hands, to light him into the house with ceremony and formality, in order to the celebrating of the nuptials with great mirth" [Henry].

We can see from this historical background that the lighted lamp of the participants in the wedding was an important, even indispensable, accessory. Without a lighted lamp, participation in the festivities would be impossible. All of the virgins brought lamps, but only the "**wise**" virgins brought "**oil in jars**" to resupply the lamp, should it go out. The "**wise**" virgins were labeled "**wise**" because they were prepared for the possibility that the bridegroom would tarry.

The metaphorical elements of this story can be fairly easily laid out. The bridegroom's coming represents the second coming of Christ, and the delay is the tarrying of Christ. The ten virgins are the expectant Christian community, and the burning lamps represent their state of readiness for Christ's return. "Sincere Christians are the wise virgins, and hypocrites the foolish ones, as in another parable they are represented by wise and foolish builders" [Henry]. From the outside, all ten virgins look the same: All are waiting; all have lamps; all even "**became drowsy and fell asleep**". The difference would only be seen when the lamp is needed for use. Mr. Spurgeon points out the similarities between the foolish virgins, and hypocritical Christians (Christians in name only): "They may have thought that, if they had lamps that were similar to those carried by others, it would be sufficient. Perhaps they judged that the secret store of oil, being unseen, was unnecessary. They were willing to carry a lamp in one hand; but to devote the other hand to the care of an oil flask was more than they were willing to do. It is the want of the oil of grace that is the fatal flaw in many a professor's lamp. Many have a name to live, but have not the life of God within their souls. They make a profession of attachment to Christ, but they have not the inward supply of the Spirit of grace to keep it up. There is

glitter or a flash, but there is no permanent light, and there cannot be any, for although they have '**lamps**', they have '**no oil with them**'" [Spurgeon, 360].

"The bridegroom was a long time in coming", just as, to us it seems, Christ is a long time in coming. "Christ, as to us, seems to tarry, and yet really does not (see Hab. 2:3). There is good reason for the Bridegroom's tarrying; there are many intermediate counsels and purposes to be accomplished, the elect must all be called in, God's patience must be manifested, and the saints' patience tried, the harvest of the earth must be ripened, and so must the harvest of heaven too. But though Christ tarry past *our* time, He will not tarry past the *due* time... Though Christ tarry long, He will come at last; though He seem slow, He is sure. In His first coming, He was thought long by those that waited for the consolation of Israel; yet in the fullness of time He came; so His second coming, though long deferred, is not forgotten; His enemies shall find, to their cost, that forbearance is no acquittance; and His friends shall find, to their comfort, that '**the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak, and not lie**' (Hab. 2:3). The year of the redeemed is fixed, and it will come" [Henry].

In the parable, at last, the bridegroom did come: "**At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'**" (vs. 6). "Christ's coming will be at our midnight, when we least look for him, and are most disposed to take our rest" [Henry]. Imagine the stir in that household when the "**cry rang out.**" Even the soundest asleep would have been aroused and scurrying about, getting ready, for this is what they were all eagerly anticipating. So also, at the return of Christ, there will be quite a to-do, to put it mildly.

"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, '**there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves**'" (vss. 6–9). The "**foolish**" ones regretted that they were not better prepared. To them, the bridegroom's coming

was a time of great stress and anxiety, while it should have been a time of great joy and anticipation (as it was for the “wise” virgins). The “foolish” ones recognized their unpreparedness and folly, and turned to the “wise” virgins, “Give us some of your oil.” This mirrors the attitude of many “foolish” relatives of Christians, who somehow think that the faith of their “wise” relatives will account for something for them in the eyes of God. However, on judgment day, we will be on our own, if we do not have Christ. We will stand before God quite miserably alone. “Note, the day is coming, when carnal hypocrites would gladly be found in the condition of true Christians. Those who now hate the strictness of religion, will, at death and judgment, wish for the solid comforts of it. Those who care not to live the life, yet would die the death, of the righteous. The day is coming when those who now look with contempt upon humble contrite saints, would gladly get an interest in them, and would value those as their best friends and benefactors, whom now they set with the dogs of their flock” [Henry].

Much as the “wise” virgins would have liked to help the “foolish”, it was quite impossible: “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you.’” And this is quite true. “Those that have most grace, have none to spare; all we have, is little enough for ourselves to appear before God in. The best have need to borrow from Christ, but they have none to lend to any of their neighbors” [Henry].

The “foolish” virgins went off, belatedly, to get prepared, “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’” (vss. 10–12). The “foolish” virgins came, but too late. Before the coming of the bridegroom, they did not foresee (or believe) the serious consequences of their unpreparedness. “In that day, there will be two consequences only – entrance or exclusion” [Thomas, 359]. “When once the door is shut, it will never be opened” [Spurgeon,

362]. “The vain confidence of hypocrites will carry them very far in their expectations of happiness. They go to heaven -gate, and demand entrance, and yet are shut out; lifted up to heaven in a fond conceit of the goodness of their state, and yet thrust down to hell” [Henry]. The folly of the “foolish” virgins was especially pronounced by the fact that they expected to be admitted to the wedding banquet, despite their lack of preparedness. Likewise, there are many people who say, “Oh, I’m a good enough person...”, though they do not meet God’s requirements for entrance into heaven. God demands perfect holiness, which is only available through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 25:14-30



Parable of the Talents

¹⁴"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²²"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

²³"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²⁴"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and

went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

²⁸"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus begins this section, "**Again**", tying it contextually to the previous sections, which contained parables concerning the second coming of Christ. The previous parable, the parable of the ten virgins, spoke of the readiness of the Church for Christ's return. This one speaks of the service required of God's people while they wait for His return. "The story of the virgins calls on the Church to watch; the story of the talents calls on the Church to work" [Ryle, 336]. "The preceding parable has taught the importance of being ready; this one carries on that theme by showing what readiness means" [Morris, 627]. "This parable goes beyond the first three in that it expects the watchfulness of the servants to manifest itself during the master's absence, not only in preparedness and performance of duty, even if there is a long delay, but in an improvement of the allotted 'talents' till the day of reckoning" [Carson, 515].

The parable begins: "**Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey**" (vss. 14–15). Our Lord is pictured here as a Master of a

large household, “**going on a journey**”. Followers of Christ are pictured as “**his servants**”. The Master, while on “**his journey**”, “**entrusted his property**” to his servants. So also, we are “**entrusted**” with the advancement of the work of Christ here on earth during His absence. “As all that slaves have belongs to their master, so Christ has a claim to everything which belongs to His people, everything which may be turned to good, and He demands its appropriation to His service” [JFB, 118].

The servants were given a varying number of “**talents**”. In that day, a talent was a sum of money; in fact, it was a great sum of money. “The talent was first a measure according to weight, between fifty-eight and eighty pounds (twenty-six to thirty-six kg), and then a unit of coinage, one common value assigned it being six thousand denarii... If a talent was worth six thousand denarii, then it would take a day laborer twenty years to earn so much—perhaps three hundred-thousand dollars [in today’s values]” [Carson, 516]. And so, even the servant who was given but “**one talent**”, was given a very large sum of money. Note the great trust the master has committed to the servants, entrusting them with such a large sum of money.

In the parable, the “**talents**” represent “anything and everything that our Lord has given to us for use here as His stewards” [Spurgeon, 365]. I think it is quite fascinating, that our English word “talent” was derived from the interpretation of the word here in this parable (see OED). “As talents in the parable represent whatever God gives us to use and improve, and as beyond comparison the most important of such gifts are our mental powers, so it has become common in English to call a man’s mental powers his ‘**talents**’, and hence to speak of a man of talent, or a talented man” [Broadus, 503]. “Anything whereby we may glorify God is ‘**a talent**’. Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ’s Church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible—all, all are talents” [Ryle, 337].

Importantly, in the parable, the “**talents**” were distributed to each, “according to his ability” (vs. 15). Paul assures us that our “**talents**” too, are distributed according to our ability: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Rom. 12:6–8). “We learn, in the first place, from this parable, that all professing Christians have received something from God. We are all God’s ‘**servants**'; we have all ‘**talents**' entrusted to our charge” [Ryle, 336].

The parable continues: “**The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money**” (vss. 16–18). Notice that the man with five talents went “**at once and put his money to work**”. “Those that have so much work to do, as every Christian has, need to set about it quickly, and lose not time” [Henry]. And, no doubt, the servants worked hard. Anyone who runs a large (or even small) business, knows how much work it takes. The last servant, by stark comparison, was lazy: “**But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money**” (vs. 18).

Continuing: “**After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them**” (vs. 19). The master did not return for “**a long time**”, so also we have plenty of time to make use of our God-given talents. The “**long time**” hearkens back to the theme of the previous parables, that Christ will return, and that we should long and wait for His return, but that it will be a “**long time**” coming.

Upon the master’s return came a review of the work of the servants: “**The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted**

me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'” (vss. 19–20). Note the tone of joy that the servant had for serving his master well: “**See, I have gained five more.**” His joy and hard work was rewarded: “**Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!**” Note the elements of the reward. There are three. First, there is a commendation by the master: “**Well done, good and faithful servant!**” Will we not be overjoyed to hear those words from our Master, whom we have served in this life? The words themselves will be a treasured and great reward. Second, they are given further and greater responsibilities: “**You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.**” Interestingly, the “reward for good work is the opportunity of doing further work” [Morris, 629]. All indications are that we will be put to some use after this life. We won't be just sitting around on clouds, as cartoons depict the heavenly life. Note also, that the master called the five talents “**few things**”, though they constituted (from an earthly perspective) a great sum of money. “The greatest sum of money is ‘**few things**’ from a heavenly perspective” [Morris, 629]. The third reward received was a share in the master's happiness: “**Come and share your master's happiness!**” Note that the faithful service of the servants brings joy to the master. Our service on earth does not go unnoticed, but brings joy to God, when well done.

“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’” (vss. 22–23). Note well that the rewards given to the man with two talents, after he had put them to good use, were identical to those of the

man who was given five talents. The rewards were not based on the quantity returned, but rather they were based on what the servant did with what he was given. “It is not the number of our talents, but the use we make of them, that is the essential matter. He does not expect as much from the man with two talents as from the one to whom he has given five; what he does expect is that they should both be faithful over the few things he has committed to their care” [Spurgeon, 366]. The man with two talents was not expected to make five talents. The two talents he made were enough, based on what he was given. The master was pleased with what he did, and gave him the exact same rewards that the man with five talents received.

It is an erroneous assumption made, at times, by those who are given lesser talents by God, that they are useless to God. We think that, well, if we cannot be that nationally-famous evangelist, or death-defying missionary, then there is no use in serving God. Poor excuse! We all, every one of us, have some sort of talent with which we can serve God. “Some make it an excuse for their laziness, that they have not the opportunities of serving God that others have; and because they have not the wherewithal to do what they say they would, they will not do what we are sure they can, and so sit down and do nothing; it is really an aggravation of their sloth, that when they have but one talent to take care about, they neglect that one” [Henry]. No one lacks talent to serve God; many lack desire to serve God.

This was the case in the parable for the man with one talent, though he claimed other excuses for not putting his talent to use: “**Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you’**” (vss. 24–25). There is no greater failure in life than for one to go through life never having utilized one's God-given talent, to hide it in the ground. “To do no good in the world, to be simply useless and worthless, is to sin

grievously against Christ; and only by incessant efforts to do good can we avoid doing positive evil” [Broadus, 507].

And note whom this man blames for his uselessness: “**Master, I knew that you are a hard man**”, he says. It is all -too common for men to blame God for their own shortcomings. What he said “bespeaks the common reproach which wicked people cast upon God, as if all the blame of their sin and ruin lay at his door, for denying them His grace” [Henry]. “The sense is obvious, ‘I knew You are one whom it was impossible to serve, one whom nothing would please; exacting what was impracticable, and dissatisfied with what was attainable.’ Thus do men secretly think of God as a hard Master, and virtually throw on Him the blame of their fruitlessness” [JFB, 119].

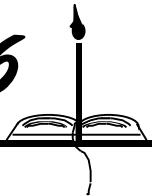
Then also, what this man said about his master was patently untrue. The master demonstrated that he was not a “**hard man**” at all, for he gave his other two servants great rewards for their reasonable service. Moreover, the master did not “**harvest where he had not sown**”. On the contrary, he sowed the seed of his harvest by staking the servants with the talents.

The master was, reasonably, upset with this last servant: “**His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest’**” (vss. 26–27). The servant is chided for not even making minimal use of what he was given. “If we cannot trade directly and personally on our Lord’s account, if we have not the skill nor the tact to manage a society or an enterprise for Him, we may at least contribute to what others are doing, and join our capital to theirs, so that, by some means, our Master may have the interest to which He is entitled” [Spurgeon, 367].

This servant would live to regret his laziness: “**Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even**

what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (vss. 28–30). Note, he was punished for merely not using his talent; it was not that he actively misused it; he was punished for burying his talent. He did not actively sin with it; he merely did nothing. “We should bear in mind that this is not here pronounced over someone who has done some particularly heinous crime. It is the final result for the man who had only one talent and who steadfastly refused to use it” [Morris, 632]. “To be ‘**cast out**’ at the great day, it is not necessary that we prostitute our powers to a life of positive wickedness: it is enough that our Christianity be merely negative, that we do nothing for Christ, that we are found to have been unprofitable, or useless servants of the Lord Jesus” [JFB, 120]. “Let us leave this parable with a solemn determination, by God’s grace, never to be content with a profession of Christianity without practice” [Ryle, 340].

Matthew 25:31-46



Separation of the Sheep from the Goats

³¹"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

³⁴"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

⁴¹"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and

in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

This discourse was initiated by the disciples asking about the destruction of the Temple, and (what the disciples thought would happen at the same time) the end of the age (see Matt. 24:3). The focus now, and in the previous few parables, is the return of Christ at the end of the age. While the prediction of the destruction of the Temple was a great prophecy, and the destruction itself a significant event, the coming return of Christ is a much more significant event, especially to us today. "The reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, with which this great discourse began, has now passed out of sight, and we think only of the final coming of Christ" [Broadus, 507]. Specifically, here we see that, with the return of Jesus, will come the final judgment: "**When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left**" (vss. 31–33).

Note that, though in the previous sections Jesus spoke in parables, He here does not use a parable, but speaks directly about the end-times judgment, "**When the Son of Man comes in His glory...**" This is a description of what will happen on Judgment Day. We learn that "there is a judgment to come, in which every man shall be sentenced to a state of everlasting happiness, or misery, in the world of recompence or retribution, according to what he did in this world of trial and probation, which is to be judged of by the rule of the ev-

erlasting gospel” [Henry]. The significance of this cannot be understated. “There are few passages in the whole Bible more solemn and heart-searching than this. May we read it with the deep and serious attention which it deserves” [Ryle, 341].

It is somewhat ironic that Jesus here spoke of Himself as being exalted, for very soon, He would face His greatest humiliation. “Within three days He was to be crucified; yet He spoke of the time ‘when the Son of man shall come in His glory’” [Spurgeon, 369]. “That same Jesus who was born in the manger of Bethlehem, and took upon Him the form of a servant; who was despised and rejected of men, and often had not where to lay His head; who was condemned by the princes of this world, beaten, scourged, and nailed to the cross—that same Jesus shall Himself judge the world, when He comes in His glory” [Ryle, 341]. “No longer will He be a homeless wanderer, with a handful of followers,” rather, “all the angels” will be with Him [Broadus, 508].

And let us all take note that it is Jesus who will be Judge. “The administration of the judgment of the great day is committed to the Son of man; for by Him God will judge the world (see Acts 17:31), and to Him all judgment is committed” [Henry]. Our eternal destiny will be determined by Him. Did we please Him when on earth? Did we accept His great gift of sacrifice? Will He be a stranger to us when we stand before Him?

Note that Jesus will be Judge over, not just those from so-called Christian nations, but rather, “**All the nations will be gathered before Him**” (vs. 32). No matter what religion you profess, you will stand before Jesus in judgment. “Not only Jews, but Gentiles, not only some nations, but all... Though His personal mission was exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:24), yet He was destined to draw all men unto Him (John 12:32), and the proclamation of His work was to be made to all nations (28:19)” [Broadus, 508]. Note also that, the separation in judgment of people will be “**one from another.**” The judgment will be made on an individual basis. The actions of your godly mother will not apply to your account. “The division will be very close and personal: ‘one

from another.’ They will not be separated into nations, nor even into families; but each individual will be allotted his or her proper place among the sheep or among the goats” [Spurgeon, 370].

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?’ ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (vss. 34–39). Jesus here refers to Himself as “**the King**”. This is somewhat unusual. He usually referred to Himself as “**the Son of Man**”. But here, He is looking forward to when He will come to earth to reign.

The “**King**”, presiding over the judgment, will bestow an “**inheritance**” on the “**righteous**”. Their righteousness was evidenced in their actions. They fed the hungry, clothed the needy, and visited the imprisoned. They had compassion for the afflicted, and did their best to ease their afflictions. Their compassion proved that they were true disciples. “The good works here described imply three things, which must be found in all that are saved: Self-denial; love to our brethren; a believing regard to Jesus Christ” [Henry]. At the judgment, “the question to be ascertained will not merely be what we said, but what we did; not merely what we professed, but what we practiced. Our works unquestionably will not justify us: we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law; but the truth of our faith will be tested by our lives. Faith which hath not works is dead, being alone (see James 2:11)” [Ryle,

342]. “The essence of the passage is that the actions in question will be accepted as indicating personal relation to Christ; and it is really personal relation to Christ, as acted out in the life, that will fix eternal destiny” [Broadus, 510]. “We must bear in mind that it is common to the whole scriptural picture that we are saved by grace and judged by works (for this latter point, cf. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; II Cor. 5:10, etc). The works we do are the evidence either of the grace of God at work in us or of our rejection of that grace” [Morris, 634]. “Are we, then, after all, to be saved by our works? By no means. Yet are our works the evidences of our being saved. If our actions are such as Christ will commend at the day of judgment, they prove that we are saved by grace, and that the Holy Spirit has wrought effectually in us, and through us” [Spurgeon, 371].

The rewarded ones were surprised at the King’s words: **“Lord, when did we...”**. Christ answered them: **“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”** (vs. 40). Notable here is that when we show our compassion for others, and help them out, our Lord accounts the action as if we had helped Him. “Christ is more among us than we think... Christ espouses His people’s cause, and interests Himself in their interests, and reckons Himself received, and love, and owned in them. If Christ Himself were among us in poverty, how readily would we relieve Him? In prison, how frequently would we visit Him?” [Henry]. “They will bashfully disclaim the praise pronounced by the King. They had no idea that there was anything meritorious in what they had done; they never dreamed of being rewarded for it” [Spurgeon, 371]. They weren’t doing the works to be saved. The works were natural, outflowing acts from their lives as children of God. “They did it because they delighted to do it, because they could not help doing it, because their new nature impelled them to it” [Spurgeon, 372]

Many wonder, how can I serve Christ? Well, here’s your answer. The simplest act on behalf of the needy is accounted as if done for Christ. One doesn’t have to fly to the far reaches of a jungle to serve Christ. One doesn’t have to found a

mega-church to serve Christ. There is no shortage of affliction in the world, and so there is no shortage of opportunity to serve our Lord.

Let us not move on from this passage without taking note of the reward given the righteous. Jesus said, **“Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”** (vs. 34). The kingdom, which will be our inheritance, was **“prepared”** for us. What a blessing! It was **“prepared”** especially for us. This demonstrates the care, and love God has for us. “The Father designed it for us in His thoughts of love, and provided it for us in the greatness of His wisdom and power” [Henry].

The unrighteous will face a different fate: **“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life”** (vss. 42–46). They are judged for neglecting to give aid to the **“hungry”**, the **“thirsty”**, the **“stranger”**, the unclothed, and those **“in prison”**. “All that is charged upon them, on which the sentence is grounded, is omission; as, before, the servant was condemned, not for wasting his talent, but for burying it” [Henry]. Their omission demonstrated that they were not true children of God. “This omission on their part was no small matter; it was fatal, and it was visited with the eternal death sentence” [Spurgeon, 372]. “They are not sentenced for omitting their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, but for omitting the weightier matter of the law, *judgment, mercy, and faith...* Note, sinners will be condemned, at the great day, for the

omission of that good which it was in the power of their hand to do. But if the doom of the uncharitable be so dreadful, how much more intolerable will the doom of the cruel be, the doom of persecutors!" [Henry].

Just as the righteous were surprised at what they were commended for, so this group is surprised at what they are condemned for. They asked: "**Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?**" (vs. 44).

Their punishment is severe: "**Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life**" (vs. 46). Take note of this. "He leaves His hearers in no doubt as to the solemnity of what He is saying. Eternal issues are involved, and this is so for both those on His right hand and on His left" [Morris, 641]. The state of things after the judgment is changeless and without end. The misery of the lost, and the blessedness of the saved, are both alike for ever: let no man deceive us on this point" [Ryle, 344]. "It will at once be taken for granted, by any unprejudiced and docile mind, that the punishment of the wicked will last as long as the life of the righteous; it is to the last degree improbable that the Great Teacher would have used an expression so inevitably suggesting a great doctrine He did not mean to teach; those who deny the doctrine must establish here a difference of meaning, and with an overwhelming presumption against them" [Broadus, 512].



Matthew 26:1-13

Preparation for Jesus' Death

¹When Jesus had finished saying all these things, He said to His disciples, ²"As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill Him. ⁵"But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, ⁷a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table.

⁸When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. ⁹"This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

¹⁰Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

After Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, "**the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority**" (Matt. 7:28-29). In chapter 8, Matthew begins a section that details some of the miracles

that Jesus performed. In this way, Matthew shows that Jesus, indeed, had authority to teach.

Matthew begins this chapter: “**When Jesus had finished saying all these things...**” (vs. 1). This is a quite appropriate opening, because this chapter brings to a close Jesus’ teaching and ministering to the public at large. Never again would Jesus personally sit on the side of a hill and teach the people; never again would He walk through a crowd, healing all whom He touched. This was surely a sad day in human history.

In this chapter, the focus is not on the teachings of Jesus; rather, the focus shifts to preparations for Jesus’ arrest and death: Jesus speaks again to the disciples of what is going to happen (vss. 1-2); the rulers begin to plot how to arrest Jesus (vss. 3-5); a woman anoints Jesus in preparation for His sufferings and death (vss. 6-13); Judas meets with the rulers, and arranges to deliver Jesus to them (vss. 14-16). Things come to a head, as events align toward the most significant event in human history.

Jesus tells the disciples: “**As you know, the Passover is two days away – and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified**” (vs. 2). Significantly here, Jesus connects His death with the Passover, “not only as indicating the day and hour, but to mark the typical meaning and importance of this solemnity, when He, our Passover, should be sacrificed for us.” (Pulpit Commentary). At the original Passover, in the midst of the plagues of Egypt, during the time when the Israelites were enslaved by Pharaoh, a lamb was sacrificed in each Israelite household to save the people (see Exodus 11 and 12). This event was typical of (pointing ahead to) the sacrifice of Jesus to save the people from their sins. When John the Baptist was ministering, and saw Jesus coming toward him, he said: “**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world**” (John 1:29). Paul explicitly tells us: “**Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed**” (I Cor. 5:7). That Jesus was indeed sacrificed during the Passover feast underscores for us that Jesus’

death and resurrection has been part of God’s plan from time immemorial. Peter tells us: “**For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake**” (I Pet. 1:18-20). In the book of Revelation, Jesus is called “**the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world**” (Rev. 13:8). And so, it was foreordained that Jesus be sacrificed, and it was foreordained that His death come during the Passover. “[The disciples] probably did not fully comprehend [that] the one great Passover was about to be observed” (Spurgeon).

Jesus had spoken of His death a number of times before (see Matt. 16:21; Matt. 17:22; Luke 9:22; Luke 12:50; Luke 22:37; et. al.). In this case, Jesus tells of the exact time, and method of His death. This demonstrated that Jesus was going to His death voluntarily. “Two purposes were thus served by this statement: first, that the Son of God willingly surrendered Himself to die, in order to reconcile the world to the Father, (for in no other way could the guilt of sins have been expiated, or righteousness obtained for us) and, secondly, that He did not die like one oppressed by violence which He could not escape, but because He voluntarily offered Himself to die... And it was necessary that He should do so, because God could not be appeased but by a sacrifice of obedience.” (Calvin). “With what amazing calmness and precision does our blessed Lord speak of this awful event... What a proof does He here give of His prescience in so correctly predicting it; and of His love in so cheerfully undergoing it!” (Clarke). Not only does Jesus go to His death willingly, His death is planned within the counsels of the Trinity, and carried out according to the will of the Father. It is more God’s plan than it is the plan of the evil ones on earth carrying it out. “Before the consultations of the chief priests had taken place, Jesus speaks of it as a settled thing. Afterwards the priests, the scribes, and the elders assemble to concert

their plans for obtaining possession of His person, and ridding themselves of Him. In a word, first, the marvelous counsels of God, and the submission of Jesus, according to His knowledge of those counsels and of the circumstances which should accompany them; and, afterwards, the iniquitous counsels of man, which do but fulfill those of God." (Darby).

Next, Matthew tells of the planning of the conspirators against Jesus: "**T**hen the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill Him. 'But not during the Feast,' they said, 'or there may be a riot among the people'" (vs. 3-5). How perfectly does this fulfill the prophetic words in Psalm 2: "**T**he rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One" (Ps. 2:2). Ironically, as mentioned above, the plotting of the rulers was foreordained by God, and according to His perfect plan, though the plotters themselves were uncertain about it. "While Christ was announcing His approaching death, the rulers were plotting its accomplishment. He was certain; they were in doubt and perplexity about it" (Pulpit Commentary). The plotters did not want the arrest and murder "**d**uring the Feasts", but God had already ordained that it be during the Passover. And as we know, Jesus was killed during the Feasts, so even as the plotters strived to do things their own way, God worked things out according to His plan. "God Himself and not man appoints the time that Christ should be crucified... [I]t came to pass through God's providence, that Christ suffered at that time, so that all the people of Israel might be witnesses of his everlasting sacrifice." (Geneva Bible). "The providence of God frustrated their artful machinations; and that event which they wished to conduct with the greatest privacy and silence was transacted with all possible celebrity, amidst thousands who resorted to Jerusalem, at this season, for the keeping of the Passover... It was, doubtless, of the very first importance that the crucifixion of Christ, which was preparatory to the most essential achievement of Christianity, viz. His resurrection from the grave, should be exhibited before many witness-

es, and in the most open manner, that infidelity might not attempt, in future, to invalidate the evidences of the Christian religion, by alleging that these things were done in a corner" (Clarke). As we shall see in vss. 14-16, it will be according to the proposition of Judas that the rulers change their plans and arrest Jesus during the Feasts.

As the rulers prepare for Jesus' arrest, a humble servant of our Lord prepares for Jesus' burial: "**W**hile Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table" (vs. 6-7). Simon the Leper was, most probably, a man whom Jesus healed (he could not still have leprosy, or the Jewish laws would prevent the gathering at his house). From John's gospel, we learn that it was Mary, sister of Martha (not Mary Magdalene, as some think), who anointed Jesus here (see John 12:3). Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus raised from the dead, was also in attendance.

Mary, we have learned, had a heart for the worship of her Lord, and the desire to ever be with Him. She was previously commended by Jesus (after being chastised by Martha) for sitting at His feet listening to Him (see Luke 10:39ff). Here, she is chastised again for her act of worship: "**W**hen the disciples saw this, they were indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked. 'This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor'" (vss. 8-9). Poor Mary! Always rebuked for her desire to sit at our Lord's feet, and worship! Yet, Jesus always comes to her defense, as He does here: "**A**ware of this, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me'" (vss. 10-11). Jesus here emphasizes the value, and necessity to worship the Lord, even at the expense, at times, of doing other good works. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied: "**L**ove 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” (Matt. 22:37-38). Then He said, “**And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**” (Matt. 22:39). So, we are “first” to “**love the Lord our God with all heart, soul and mind**”, and then tend to our neighbors. Worship trumps service. The world mocks, and rebukes, pure worship of our Lord. Worshippers are called fanatics. They are thought of as lunatics. But Jesus, our Lord, commends those who worship. This was a lesson even the disciples had to learn. “Whatever fitly manifests, and by reaction strengthens, devout affection—true religious sentiment—is in itself acceptable to Christ and useful to us; for these sentiments are a necessary part of developed and symmetrical Christian character. Nor should they be hastily condemned as unpractical, for they stimulate to corresponding action.” (Broadus). “What she had done was done out of a principle of love to Christ, and for His honor and glory, so it was a good work” (Poole).

Matthew tells us that the “**disciples**” were “**indignant**”. This implies that the disciples did not merely give some sort of suggestion to Mary about the use of the perfume, but rebuked her sharply and angrily. They did not understand the importance of Mary’s act of worship. “It is so hard for some people to allow others liberty for their own personalities to express themselves. It is easy to raise small objections to what we do not like and do not understand” (Robertson). “When you do the best you can do, from the purest motives, and your Lord accepts your service, do not expect that your brethren will approve all your actions” (Spurgeon).

In the parallel passage of this event in the book of John, John tells us that “**Judas**” rebuked Mary; in the book of Mark, it says that “**some**” of the disciples did so; here, Matthew implies more of a general indignation by the disciples. We can reconcile these accounts by inferring that it was first Judas who made the rebuke, and then the other disciples, eventually one-by-one, joined in. “One murmur may infect a whole company” (Dickson). We must take care that we do not join in with the unjust murmurers, in order to be part of the crowd. Err on the side of grace.

Jesus approved of the action: “**Aware of this, Jesus said to them, ‘Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me’**” (vss. 10-11). The clause “**Aware of this**” implies that Jesus “came to know” about the rebukes of the disciples, which further implies that the disciples rebuked Mary outside of Jesus’ presence (presumably at a later time). The disciples demonstrate by this a bit of cowardice, and lack of surety about their rebuke, to show their indignation when they thought Jesus wasn’t looking.

Far from rebuking Mary, Jesus accepted her act of worship as a “**beautiful thing**”. The disciples will have plenty of opportunities for good works, for “**the poor we will always have with us**”. The opportunity to perform such an act of worship, in the direct physical presence of Jesus, would never come again. Moreover, in light of the coming events, the anointing of Jesus served a symbolic purpose: it was done in preparation for the burial of Jesus, in anticipation of His death. Jesus said: “**When she poured the perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial**” (vs. 12). Mary alone, it seems, grasped the import and gravity of Jesus’ statement that He would “**be handed over to be crucified**”, and she responded with this beautiful act of worship. Ironically, if Mary had performed this anointing after Jesus’ death, the disciples probably would not have objected. We seem to give more grace to acts benefitting the dead, than those benefitting the living.

Finally, Jesus rewards Mary with a prophetic statement about this act of love: “**I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her**” (vs. 13). This prophecy, of course, has been fulfilled. In fact, our very study of this passage partially fulfills it. Though at the time she was rebuked, she has been commended over and over throughout the ages for her act of worship, and she has taught us, by her act, a lesson about true worship, and its importance. “It was worthy to be recorded in all ages that one heart estimated the

Saviour, when the world was gone against Him" (Darby). "He gives a commendation beyond all other words of praise He ever spoke; looking down the ages, and out to the ends of the earth, and recognising that this love to Himself, this personal devotion to a dying Saviour, was to be the very central force of the gospel, and thus the hope of the world" (Gibson).

Parenthetically, I find fascinating the similarity of these events, and those referenced in the fifth verse of the beloved 23rd Psalm: "**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**" (Ps 23:5). The reference in this Psalm to "enemies" (Judas), and "anoint", and the "cup" (of communion possibly), could lead one to a whole new reading of that Psalm. I leave this as a valuable exercise in meditation for the reader!



Matthew 26:14-25

Preparation for Jesus' Death – pt. 2

¹⁴Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. ¹⁶From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand Him over.

¹⁷On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹⁸He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

²⁰When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹And while they were eating, He said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

²²They were very sad and began to say to Him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?"

²³Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." ²⁵Then Judas, the one who would betray Him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

Matthew here documents Judas's treachery: "**Then one of the Twelve – the one called Judas Iscariot – went to the chief priests and asked, 'What are you willing to give me**

if I hand Him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand Him over" (vss. 14-16). This passage begins "Then...", which implies a connection to the previous episode. Recall that in the previous episode, the disciples, led by Judas (see John 12:4), chastised Mary for anointing Jesus with perfume, on the grounds that it was a waste of money. The chastising of Mary was driven by Judas's greed (see John 12:6), as is Judas's betrayal of Jesus. Judas makes clear his motive in betraying Jesus, because right off, he asks the chief priests: "**What are you willing to give me if I hand Him over to you?**" (vs. 15). "There is no disguise in this vile question. Judas unblushingly reveals his base motive in offering such a bargain" (Pulpit Commentary). "No small part of the sins of the world can be traced to avarice, and many, and many a time since the days of Judas, has the Lord Jesus been betrayed among His professed friends by the same base propensity" (Barnes).

The price that the chief priests were "**willing to give**" was "**thirty silver coins**". This price, ironically, was the price of a slave (see Exod. 21:32). No doubt, the chief priests chose this amount purposely, for they knew their Torah. "And it is not unlikely that this sum was fixed on by them to show their contempt of Jesus, and that they regarded Him as of little value" (Barnes).

Recall that previously, the chief priests were unwilling to arrest Jesus during the feast days, because of the crowds (see Matt. 26:5). Here, however, Judas was to provide them with an "**opportunity**" to arrest him during the feast days, but away from the crowds. Judas unknowingly cleared the way for Jesus' death to be on the Passover, so as to be our Passover, as was God's plan.

As the feast days came, there was much to do, for Jesus desired to celebrate the Passover with His disciples: "**On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?'** He replied, '**'Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, "The**

Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house."" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover" (vss. 17-19). Jesus, of course, had no residence in Jerusalem, so had to borrow a room for the Passover feast. This was not unusual, for many travelers went to Jerusalem during the Passover, all needing rooms to celebrate the Passover. Jesus sent the disciples to ask for a room from "**a certain man**", no doubt another follower of His. The "**certain man**" must have considered it a great privilege that His Master would "**celebrate the Passover with His disciples at his house.**" And this Passover, for Jesus, was greatly significant, for His "**appointed time was near.**"

"When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, He said, 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me'" (vs. 20-21). Jesus grabs the attention of the disciples for an astonishing announcement, by saying, "**I tell you the truth...**" The sad declaration was: "**One of you will betray me**" (vs. 21). "The usual subject of discourse at that ordinance, was the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (see Exod. 12:26-27), but the great Passover is now ready to be offered, and the discourse of that swallows up all talk of the other" [Henry]. "This was a most unpleasant thought to bring to a feast, yet it was most appropriate to the Passover, for God's commandment to Moses concerning the first paschal lamb was, '**with bitter herbs they shall eat it**' (Exod. 12:8)" [Spurgeon].

Jesus' statement troubled the disciples: "**They were very sad**" (vs. 22); or as the KJV translates: "**And they were exceeding sorrowful**". Part of the reason for their sorrow was a fear by each of them that he himself would betray Jesus: "**They were very sad and began to say to Him one after the other, 'Surely not I, Lord?'**" (vs. 22). It is commendable that they looked to themselves first for fault, rather than to others. "Though they were not conscious to themselves of any inclination that way (no such thought had ever entered into their mind), yet they feared the worst, and asked Him who knows us better than we know ourselves" [Henry].

"Sincerity and charity will make men search and suspect themselves rather than another, as here the Apostles say not, 'Is it Judas?', but 'Is it I?... The sincere man dares not trust the deceitfulness of his own heart, but brings it to the Searcher thereof, and relies upon His testimony" [Dickson]. "We know not how strongly we may be tempted, nor how far God may leave us to ourselves, and therefore have reason, not to be high-minded, but fear. It is observable that our Lord Jesus, just before He instituted the Lord's supper, put His disciples upon this trial and suspicion of themselves, to teach us to examine and judge ourselves, and so to eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" [Henry]. Apparently, Judas's thievery (see John 12:6) was undetected by the disciples. "Note, it is possible for a hypocrite to go through the world, not only undiscovered, but unsuspected; like bad money so ingeniously counterfeited that nobody questions it" [Henry].

Jesus had spoken a number of times about the coming events (see Matt. 17:22; 20:18; 26:2), even of being "**betrayed**", but He had never (to our knowledge) disclosed that the betrayal would come from one of the Twelve. Next, He emphasizes that the betrayal will come from someone close to Him: "**Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me'**" (vs. 23). "This language means that one of those who had eaten bread with him had violated the rights of hospitality by betraying Him... [In that culture] eating one's bread ties your hands and compels friendship" [Robertson]. "The fact of eating together made in the Easterns' view, the treachery more monstrous" [Pulpit Commentary]. "External communion with Christ in holy ordinances is a great aggravation of our falsehood to Him. It is base ingratitude to dip with Christ in the dish, and yet betray Him" [Henry].

Jesus continues: "**The Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born**" (vs. 24). Here, Jesus is saying that His death by crucifixion will come whether Judas himself betrays Him or not: "**The Son of Man will go just as it is written about**

Him." Jesus here is encouraging Judas to change his mind and heart. Jesus graciously desires Judas's repentance. Jesus even tells Judas that, whether Judas betrays Him or not, God's will shall be done: "**The Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him.**" Judas can choose not to be a part of the betrayal. Jesus warns Judas of the dire consequences of the betrayal: "**But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born**" (vs. 24). "This He said, not only to awaken the conscience of Judas, and bring him to repent, and revoke his bargain, but for warning to all others to take heed of sinning like Judas; though God can serve His own purposes by the sins of men, that does not make the sinner's condition less woe-ful" [Henry].

But Judas does not heed Christ's warning, nor accept the opportunity to repent of his actions. Instead, he adds hypocrisy to his list of failings: "**Then Judas, the one who would betray Him, said 'Surely not I, Rabbi?'**" (vs. 25). "Judas appears to have been the last of the twelve to ask the question, '**Is it I?**' Those who are the last to suspect themselves are usually those who ought to be the first to exercise self-suspicion" [Spurgeon]. Note that, significantly, Judas did not call Jesus "**Lord**", as the others did, but "**Rabbi**" (or "Teacher"). Jesus was no longer Judas's Lord.

Judas must have been quite surprised when Jesus answered: "**Yes, it is you**" (vs. 25). The Lord sees; He knows our hearts, and future plans. He always gives us opportunity to change our sinful plans, and encourages us to walk in His way. And when we do stumble, He freely offers forgiveness for our sins, made possible by the gift of His death, the sacrifice of His own body in our place, for our sins against God, the Creator.

Matthew 26:26-30



The Sacrament of Holy Communion

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it all of you. ²⁸This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

³⁰When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Mt 26:26-30 NIV)

¹⁹And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

²⁰In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:19-20 NIV)

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He

comes.

²⁷So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. (1 Cor. 11:23-29 NIV)

Towards the end of their Passover supper, Jesus, as He was supping with His Apostles, instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion (known also among Christians as the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper). Though not explicitly expressed in the passage in Matthew, we know from the writings of Paul that the Sacrament of Holy Communion was intended to be observed by believers in the entire Christian Church (implied in the passage above, 1 Cor. 11:27-29).

It was appropriate that Holy Communion be instituted during the Passover supper, for in a way, Holy Communion has replaced the Passover for the people of God, as the primary, recurring religious observance that commemorates God's work on behalf of His people. "At the latter end of the Passover-supper, before the table was drawn, because, as a feast upon a sacrifice, it was to come in the room of that ordinance. Christ is to us the Passover-sacrifice by which atonement is made (see 1 Cor. 5:7); Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. This ordinance is to us the Passover-supper, by which application is made, and commemoration celebrated, of a much greater deliverance than that of Israel out of Egypt" (M. Henry). "We observe that the celebration of the first Sacramental Supper of the Lord was joined in one continued supperly action with the Sacrament of the Passover; our Lord herein declaring the old church and new to be one in Him, and the Sacraments of both, to have Himself for their signification" (D. Dickson).

As a whole, this Sacrament is not complicated, or elaborate: consume the bread and wine, in remembrance of Christ and His atoning sacrifice. As such, the Sacrament can be per-

formed by any group of Christians, virtually anywhere, and at any time. But we should not let the simplicity of the execution of the Sacrament hide the importance for us as Christians, and the solemn seriousness with which we should observe it. "We must never forget that this central ordinance of our Christian worship was instituted by our Lord Himself. It is an indication of His foresight and forbearance; for it shows first that He saw we should need to be repeatedly reminded of what He is to us, and then that He condescended to help the infirmity of our wandering natures by providing the most impressive means for continually presenting the great central facts of His work before our minds and hearts. He enlists the services of the three senses of sight, taste, and touch, to aid the sense of hearing in bringing before us the vital truths of His gospel" (Adeney, in Pulpit Commentary).

Paul, writing to the Corinthians about the Sacrament, expresses the seriousness and solemnity of it, when he tells us that harm can come to those who participate in the Sacrament without proper meditation on the central meaning of it: "**So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep**" (1 Cor. 11:28-29, italics mine). To me, this passage in Corinthians, tells us that it's crucial that those who lead people in this Sacrament, instruct them of its significance, seriousness and importance. Moreover, prospective partakers in the Sacrament should be lovingly told that they should abstain from it if they are not in the proper frame of mind to "**discern the body of Christ**" (either as non-believers, or distracted believers). The church must be careful that the Sacrament of Holy Communion not be performed in a rote manner. As Paul tells us, the

seriousness and significance of the Sacrament must always be observed.

The Sacrament, in its proper execution, reminds us to put Jesus, not complex theological issues, at the center of the Christian religion. The Sacrament depicts the importance of Jesus, not just as an abstract religious personage, but as someone whom we must allow to enter our lives. "We eat the bread and drink the wine. Christ is the Bread of life. We must personally participate in Christ, and receive Him into our lives, in order to profit by His grace" (Adeney, ibid.).

As we said, the Sacrament was instituted towards the end of the Last Supper: "**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body'**" (vs. 26). Note the sequence of the Sacrament, as instituted: Take the bread; give thanks; break the bread; take and eat, taking note of Jesus' words, "**This is My body**". We would do well to follow the Sacrament, as instituted. Each step has significance.

First, we take the bread: this is Christ, the Bread of Life. "The body of Christ is signified and represented by bread; He had said formerly (see John 6:35), I am the bread of life, upon which metaphor this sacrament is built; as the life of the body is supported by bread, which is therefore put for all bodily nourishment (see Matthew 4:4; 6:11), so the life of the soul is supported and maintained by Christ's mediation" (M. Henry).

Second, give thanks. The thanks vis-à-vis the bread is two-fold, in our case: for Christ as the Bread of Life; and for Christ's sacrifice of His body.

Third, break the bread. Breaking the bread is symbolic of the breaking of Christ's body on our behalf (while it is true that, to fulfill prophecy, no bones were broken in Jesus' body, certainly His body was broken in other ways, by the crown of thorns, the thirty-nine lashes, the crucifixion, etc.). "The breaking of the bread I consider essential to the proper performance of this solemn and significant ceremony: because this

act was designed by our Lord to shadow forth the wounding, piercing, and breaking of His body upon the cross; and, as all this was essentially necessary to the making a full atonement for the sin of the world, so it is of vast importance that this apparently little circumstance, the breaking of the bread, should be carefully attended to, that the godly communicant may have every necessary assistance to enable him to discern the Lord's body, while engaged in this most important and Divine of all God's ordinances." (A. Clarke). I dare say, in many (possibly most) cases during Protestant enactments of the Sacrament, the breaking of the bread is not performed. This should be changed, based on our Lord's institution of the Sacrament. It can easily be added to the Sacrament by giving congregants a decent-sized wafer, and instructing them to break it, before consuming it. Instruction concerning the reason they are breaking the bread, that Christ's body was broken on our behalf ("given for you", as Luke quotes in Luke 22:19), will aid in the congregants "discerning" of the body of Christ in the Sacrament.

Fourth, take and eat, with an awareness of Jesus' words: "**This is My body.**" Let us note here how shocking this statement must surely have been to the Apostles at the time. Jesus did not say: "This is a symbol of my body", or "This represents my body"; He said, "**This is My body.**" I believe the statement was worded this way to encourage us to dig deeper into its meaning. Fortunately, Jesus spoke in depth about this earlier.

Not long after Jesus miraculously fed the crowd of about five thousand (see John 6:5-13), He crossed the Sea of Galilee and was met by some Jews who were some of five thousand that He fed (see John 6:26). These Jews seemed to be sincere in their questioning (i.e., they were not Pharisees who were trying to trip Jesus up). They asked: "**What must we do to do the works God requires?**" (John 6:28). Jesus answered: "**The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent**" (John 6:29). The Jews replied by asking for a sign, similar to the sign of manna that their forefathers were given (John

6:30-31). Jesus replied that it is God who sends bread from heaven that "**gives life to the world.**" Then Jesus continued: "**I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty**" (John 6:35). Jesus contrasts the "**manna**", which was given for sustenance, with Himself, as "**the bread of life**". To consume this "**bread of life**", is to "**come to Him**", and "**believe in Him**". To do so is to *never* be hungry (that is, spiritually hungry), and *never* be thirsty (that is, spiritually thirsty). To eat the "**bread of life**" (by coming to Him, and believing in Him), is to have complete spiritual fulfillment, forever.

Jesus elaborates: "**I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world**" (John 6:48-51). So then, for the Sacrament, when Jesus says: "**Take and eat; this is My body**", we are to eat of the bread as an outward sign that we have "**come to Him**", and that we "**believe in Him**." This is, as Paul says, to "**discern the body of Christ.**" It is the full understanding of the sacrifice that Jesus made by giving His broken body for us, and faith that by consuming Jesus as the bread of life, we will "**never go hungry**", and "**never be thirsty**".

Matthew leaves out of his narrative two important clauses that Luke supplies in his: "**This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me**" (Luke 22:19). The phrase "**do this in remembrance of Me**" is important because it provides the reason the members of the church carry out the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The other clause, "**given for you**", underscores that Jesus knew ahead of time that very soon He would be sacrificing Himself for us. "Thus the Lord, before He actually suffered, offered Himself as a victim vol-

untarily undergoing death, and showed it forth by the broken bread and the poured wine" (Pulpit Commentary). "Which is **'given for you'**: [Matthew and Mark] leave out this clause, which, however, is far from being superfluous; for the reason why the flesh of Christ becomes bread to us is, that by it, salvation was once procured for us... So then, in order that we may feed aright on the flesh of Christ, we must contemplate the sacrifice of it, because it was necessary that it should have been once given for our salvation, that it might every day be given to us" (J. Calvin). "After, '**this is my body**', [Luke] adds, '**which is given for you**'; ...the sense of which is: 'As God has in His bountiful providence given you bread for the sustenance of your lives, so in His infinite grace He has given you My body to save your souls unto life eternal. But as this bread must be broken and masticated, in order to its becoming proper nourishment, so My body must be broken, i.e. crucified, for you, before it can be the bread of life to your souls. As, therefore, your life depends on the bread which God's bounty has provided for your bodies, so your eternal life depends on the sacrifice of My body on the cross for your souls'" (A. Clarke).

As we take the bread, which is Christ's body, and eat of it, "**in remembrance**" of that moment in time at the Last Supper, there is a sense that we become one with Christ at the time of the institution of the Sacrament, at the Last Supper itself: Christ's body, in our body, at the Last Supper. Then just as Christ goes on soon-after from the Last Supper to His death, it follows then that, in a sense, we are crucified with Christ, just as Paul says: "**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me**" (Galatians 2:20). Paul also tells us elsewhere: "**For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin**" (Romans 6:6). We would do well to ponder our crucifixion with Christ, as we observe the Sacrament.

Matthew's account continues, the institution of the Sacrament continues: "**Then He took a cup, and when He had**

given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (vss. 27-28). In one sense, addition of the wine to the Sacrament makes it complete, harking back to the passage in John's Gospel, when Jesus said: "**Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty**" (John 6:35). "To assure us of full satisfaction and complete furniture for eternal life, Christ our Lord has not only taken bread in the Sacrament, but also has instituted a cup; that is, both food and drink, for certifying us, that we shall have complete nourishment in Him" (D. Dickson). "As it was the design of Christ to keep our faith wholly fixed on Himself, that we may not seek anything apart from Him, He employed two symbols to show that our life is shut up in Him. This body needs to be nourished and supported by meat and drink. Christ, in order to show that He alone is able to discharge perfectly all that is necessary for salvation, says that He supplies the place of meat and drink" (J. Calvin).

But there is more to the wine than its mere sustenance. As the bread points to Jesus' sacrifice, so does the wine: "**This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins**" (vs. 28). Note the verb tense that is used: "...**which is poured out...**"; Jesus does not say "...**will be poured out...**" This expresses that, as we carry out the Sacrament, we should have an awareness that Jesus' blood *is* poured out, as if it is occurring in the present. Such an awareness strikes home the fact that Jesus' sacrifice applies directly to each of us, for each of our sins. If, as we partake, we can say, "This *is* Jesus' blood. It *should be* my blood which is poured out," then we are truly "**discerning**" Christ's sacrifice for us, which is one of the purposes of the Sacrament.

Jesus tells us: "**This is My blood of the covenant**" (vs. 28). Jesus' words directly hearken back to the words of Moses, when the first covenant (or pact) was established between God and His people: "**Moses then took the blood,**" (that is, the

blood of the sacrificed animals), “sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘*This is the blood of the covenant* that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Ex. 24:8). By directly referencing the passage in Exodus, Jesus was establishing a new covenant, in which His sacrifice, the pouring out of His blood, takes the place of the atoning sacrifices of the original covenant. “When Jesus spoke of His blood as blood ‘**of the covenant**’, He was surely claiming that, at the cost of His death, He was about to inaugurate the new covenant of which the prophet [Jeremiah] had spoken (see Jer. 31:31). This was a big claim. Jesus was saying that His death would be central to the relationship between God and the people of God. It would be the means of cleansing from past sins and consecrating to a new life of service to God. It would be the establishment of the covenant that was based not on people’s keeping it (see Ex. 24:3,7), but on God’s forgiveness (see Jer. 31:34)” (L. Morris).

Though just hinted at here, the writer of the book of Hebrews explicitly teaches us that Jesus’ sacrifice, indeed, establishes a New Covenant, which replaces the Old Covenant of atonement via the sacrifices of goats and bulls. Moreover, the New Covenant is more perfect than the Old one, because it is the perfect fulfillment to which the sacrifices in the Old Covenant were prophetically pointing. The writer of Hebrews teaches: “**The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.** Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me; with burnt offerings and sin

offerings You were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about Me in the scroll—I have come to do Your will, My God.’” First He said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings You did not desire, nor were You pleased with them—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then He said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ *He sets aside the first to establish the second.*” (Hebrews 10:1-9, italics mine). “There was a two-fold manner of making a Covenant of Grace between God and the Church, in her head Christ; one called, ‘An Old Covenant’, before He came, of typical promises, painful and chargeable rites, and harder conditions to the external beholder; another Covenant after His incarnation, called ‘A New Covenant’ of better promises, and more [clearly understood], because now the dimness of the shadow is removed, the yoke of the ceremonies is broken, and the substance of the covenant is more clearly seen... He made His [Covenant] after His incarnation in plain and clear terms, after which He fulfilled the types of His death, and actually laid down His life for His redeemed people” (D. Dickson).

To conclude, Jesus added: “**I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom**” (vs. 29). This again is evidence that Jesus knew that His death was imminent. Jesus says this so as to “put upon His disciples the impression of His death shortly to follow, and so both engraff the doctrine of the Sacrament more deeply in them, and prepare them the better for His death” (D. Dickson). Though the reference to His soon death is solemn, there is the good news that Jesus would be with them to “**drink it new**”. This statement was to be multiply fulfilled. First, after the resurrection, in the infancy of the kingdom of God, Jesus was with the Apostles multiple times (see Luke 29:30; Luke 29:43; John 21:12; Acts 1:4; Acts 10:41). The ultimate fulfillment, though, is when all believers commune with Jesus at the great marriage supper of the Lamb, prophesied in the book of Revelation:

"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 19:6-9).

Matthew adds: "**When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives**" (vs. 30). It was traditional for participants, at various times during the Passover supper, to sing and/or chant Psalm 113 through Psalm 118, which are psalms of praise and thanksgiving to God for His marvelous works in the lives of His people. That the Apostles and our Lord still did so, even on this solemn occasion, is an example for us. "How sad hours soever the Lord send to us, it is our part always to sing His praises" (D. Dickson). "[To sing God's praises is never] unseasonable, no, not even in times of sorrow and suffering. The disciples were in sorrow, and Christ was entering upon His sufferings, and yet they could sing a hymn together. Our spiritual joy should not be interrupted by outward afflictions" (M. Henry). Moreover, "was it not truly brave of our dear Lord to sing under such circumstances? He was going forth to His last dread conflict, to Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha; yet He went with a song on his lips" (C. H. Spurgeon). May we always praise the Lord, no matter the circumstance.



Matthew 26:31-46

Preparation for Jesus' Arrest

³¹Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

"I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

³²"But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

³³Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."

³⁴"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

³⁵But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

During the evening and night of the Last Supper, Jesus was to spend His time in prayer at Gethsemane, to prepare for the suffering He was about to endure. Before that, Jesus wanted to apprise the disciples of the trials they would face, presumably so that they also would spend the time in prayer: "**Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered"'**" (vs. 31). "The intimacy of the Last Supper is shortly to be replaced by disloyalty and cowardice" [Carson, 540].

On this occasion, Jesus is very specific about the time of the suffering; it is "**this very night.**" "He has during more than six months repeatedly foretold that He should be put to death in Jerusalem and rise again (see 16:21; 17:22ff; 20:18ff).

At the close of His public teaching, He declared that He should at the Passover be delivered up and crucified (see 26:2). Now He is perfectly definite as to the time” [Broadus, 533].

Jesus’ charge is serious; they would “**fall away**”. The Greek words here used suggest a forsaking of Christ, possibly even an apostasy or renunciation of one’s belief. And this “**falling away**” was not to be an isolated stumbling, they would “**all**”, to a man, fall away.

Jesus was certain this would occur. There is no wiggle-room in His words: “**This very night you will...**” In fact, the isolation and forsaking of the Messiah during His sufferings was predicted in the Old Testament. Jesus cites one of the prophetic statements: “**I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered**” (vs. 31, taken from Zech. 13:7). Isaiah (in the amazing prophetic chapter Isaiah 53) also alludes to Jesus’ isolation during His suffering, telling us none of His followers would defend Him: “**By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested?**” (Isaiah 53:8). And what if the disciples, rather than “**scattering**”, stood with Jesus and “**protested**” His innocence, His sinlessness. What if Peter had got up, and preached to the mob about the significance of the suffering and death of Jesus, as it was happening? Would not this have served to open their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit of God, as they watched Jesus die for them? What if the disciples had prophesied aloud the resurrection of Christ to the throngs that had gathered, before it occurred? Would not many of the throng have been inclined to worship Jesus as their Savior after His resurrection, having been told beforehand of the significance of His death, and the surety of His resurrection? Yet instead, they denied Him, disowned Him, and “**fell away**”.

By citing the prophecy of the “**striking**” and the “**scattering**”, Jesus is letting the disciples know that the horrible things that were about to occur, were to be all part of God’s plan, foreknown to Jesus Himself. “What the Lord knew by immediate prevision, He nevertheless connects with a pro-

phetic word: partly for the sake of the disciples, partly on account of His relation to the law; and further to prove that the course of His suffering was not contrary to Old Testament predictions, but that the carnal notions of the Jews as to a Messiah exempt from suffering were in direct contradiction to the Old Testament” [Lange, 478]. “In laying out in advance much of the tragedy of the coming hours, [this passage] shows that Jesus is not a blind victim of fate but a voluntary sacrifice; and simultaneously He is preparing His disciples for their dark night of doubt” [Carson, 540]. “His agonizing trials came not on Him by surprise or accident; all was foreknown and fore-arranged. The very prospect of all our life trials would crush us long before they came; but Christ had that sublime magnanimity that enabled Him to look at them in all their enormity in the distance, approach them without a faltering step, enter them with a spirit of unconquerable loyalty to Heaven, and pass through them with the moral energy of a God” [Thomas, 500].

To console them, Jesus lets the disciples know that all will end well: “**But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee**” (vs. 32). Despite the predicted “**falling away**”, Jesus, in His grace and forgiveness, says that He will meet them after His death and resurrection. “Both His knowledge and His purpose stretched beyond His death; that He should rise, knew that He should meet them after His resurrection. He speaks of all with most unquestioned certainty” [Thomas, 501]. This prophecy was directly fulfilled when Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission in Galilee (see Matt. 28:16ff).

The exactitude, and imminence of their Lord’s prediction of their “**falling away**” should have put the disciples on guard, and should have incited the disciples to prayer and deep reflection. Instead, they rejected that what Jesus prophesied would occur. Peter spoke up: “**Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will**” (vs. 33). “Since he did not know [or fully understand] what he would be called upon to go through, it was a thoughtless and foolish boast, but it reflects the deep-seated loyalty in the heart of this disciple and his de-

termination at the time he spoke to be faithful, whatever the circumstances” [Morris, 665]. But Jesus had said “all”, and He meant “all”, even Peter. Peter’s reply to Jesus was quite presumptuous, given that Peter earlier professed Jesus to be **“Messiah. The Son of the living God”** (Matt. 16:16). The words, “No, Lord” should never be spoken together. Peter would learn that Jesus knew his heart better than he himself did.

Jesus contradicts Peter’s prideful (almost boasting) statement, **“Even if all fall away...”**, by informing Peter that indeed he would fall away in a more shameful way than the other disciples: **“Truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times”** (vs. 34). Peter would sink far lower than he thought capable of himself. “In the best of men there may sleep certain elements of depravity, which, if roused by powerful temptation, would prompt them to actions, the very thought of which a few minutes before would make them shudder” [Thomas, 501].

This is a specific prediction, not a vague forecast. It was to happen **“This very night, before the rooster crows”**. The specificity should have given Peter pause, and caused him to stop and reflect. Instead, Peter doubles down: **“But Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”** (vs. 35). To Peter’s credit, I believe that he was ready to actually die with Christ. Peter demonstrates this by drawing his sword, and even beginning to fight with it when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus (see John 18:10). Peter imagined possibly dying for Christ, in a blaze of glory, in a brave fight against the soldiers. Peter did not, however, imagine the way it would actually turn out: Jesus rebuking him for drawing his sword; Jesus voluntarily going to His death. Peter, I am sure, was caught off-guard by this, and the unexpectedness of Jesus’ voluntary surrender, led to (I believe) his denials and his disowning of His Lord. Sometimes, yea even most times, I dare say, God does not work things as we planned them. We need to be prepared to stand firm with our Lord when this happens.

We tend to fault Peter specifically, because of his outspoken vehemence, but he was not alone in faultily professing future bravery: **“And all the other disciples said the same”** (vs. 35). All of the disciples said that they would stand by Jesus, and all, to a man, fell away. Jesus faced His suffering entirely alone. And sadly, Jesus also faced the preparation for His suffering, in prayer, all alone, as we see in the next section.

Prayer at Gethsemane

³⁶Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

⁴⁰Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. ⁴¹“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴²He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

⁴³When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

After the Last Supper concluded, Jesus and His disciples headed to the Mount of Olives (see vs. 30). Specifically, they went to Gethsemane: **“Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray’”** (vs. 36). Acting as a type of Jesus, King David also went to pray on the Mount of Olives, when one of his most trusted friends, Ahithopel, betrayed him (see II Sam. 15:30-31; Ps. 41:9).

Jesus, as we see in this passage, went to the Mount of Olives, specifically the Garden of Gethsemane, to pray concerning the coming hours of suffering. In my opinion, and the opinion of many others, this is one of the most significant passages in the Bible. We learn much from it: we learn about the humanity of Christ, about the depth of prayer needed to face serious trials, about surrendering to God’s will, about being watchful in times of trouble. There is also much that we do not fully understand about what happened in Gethsemane: what was the source and manifestation of Jesus’ distress? At what point did Christ’s physical and spiritual suffering for our sins begin; was it here at Gethsemane? What was the nature of the need that Jesus had for companionship as He faced what was coming? What was the nature of the struggle between the two persons of the Holy Trinity? Despite the mysteries, we are blessed and enriched to have this passage in the Bible. It provides much food for meditation, and deep thought. “It is a passage which undoubtedly contains deep and mysterious things. We ought to read it with reverence and wonder, for there is much in it which we cannot fully comprehend” [Ryle, 361]. “Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord’s life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language. May the Holy Spirit graciously reveal to us all that be can be permitted to see of the King beneath the olive-trees in the garden of Gethsemane!” [Spurgeon, 461].

The eleven disciples at the Last Supper all went with Jesus to Gethsemane. Jesus separated Himself with the three closest disciples (Peter, John and James): **“He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled”** (vs. 37). Implied here is that Jesus had a need and desire to be with His closest human companions during His time of trouble. He pours His soul out to them: **“Then He said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me’”** (vs. 38). In this, Jesus displays traits of humanity. “Urged by the social instincts of His [adopted] nature, Jesus sought the presence and sympathy of His friends in the dark hour of sorrow.... This is natural, this is right. Man is made to help man, is bound to help man. God frequently helps man through man” [Thomas, 503]. It is significant that the three disciples who saw Jesus in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matt. 17:1-9), should be called to support Jesus in His time of suffering.

In Gethsemane, Jesus **“began to be sorrowful and troubled”** and told His close disciples that His **“soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”** What was the source and cause of this deep and overwhelming sorrow? Was it just the anticipation of the excruciating physical pain that He was to suffer? I think it was more than that, though that was certainly part of it (in His incarnation as a human, Jesus was to suffer great physical pain). Jesus was not only to face great physical pain, but He was also to bear the spiritual burden of every sin ever committed and ever to be committed by those he was dying for. Jesus was facing the death due to all sinners, even those who had committed the most heinous of sins. We cannot imagine the burden that Jesus was beginning to bear—in conscience, in physical pain and anguish, in being literally God-forsaken—that such a death brings, especially to one who is Himself sinless. The number and heinousness of all sins is unimaginable, and this guilt and shame was all put on Jesus in the hours of His sufferings. This, I believe, was why His **“soul**

is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” “Thousands have endured the most agonizing sufferings of body, and died without a groan, and so, no doubt, might our Lord. But the real weight that bowed down the heart of Jesus, was the weight of the sin of the world, which seems to have now pressed down upon Him with peculiar force” [Ryle, 361-362]. “Jesus went to His death knowing that it was His Father’s will that He face death completely alone ([hence the cry, ‘**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**’ in Matt. 27:46]) as the sacrificial, wrath-averting Passover Lamb. As His death was unique, so also His anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship” [Carson, 543].

Notice the wording here: Jesus “**began to be sorrowful and troubled**” (vs. 37). Could it be that it was here, at Gethsemane, that Jesus was beginning to bear the burden of our sins, that the “**overwhelming sorrow**” was the sorrow of a conscience bearing sin?

Properly, and as we should, Jesus goes to pray when His “**soul is overwhelmed**”: “**Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.’**” Jesus’ bodily attitude during His praying reflected the extent to which His soul was overwhelmed: “...**He fell with His face to the ground, and prayed.**”

Interestingly, Jesus had foreknowledge that He was to bear our sins and to die for us very soon; He expressed as much not long beforehand, when He told the disciples that “**this very night**” they would fall away, and that “**after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.**” (vss. 31-32). Yet, Jesus prayed anyway that the “**cup**” be taken from Him. At times we pray, even though we know God’s desired outcome. This is okay. Prayer is at times a struggle to get our own spirits in line with God’s will: A wrestling with God, as Jacob did.

That Jesus prayed this prayer, that the “**cup**” be taken away, teaches us that Jesus could have walked away from dying for us, and God could have, if He desired, stopped the whole thing to

save His Son. This should emphasize to us what a great gift to us the death and resurrection of Jesus was. As we should already know, Jesus’ sacrifice was a great and magnificent gift to us, the greatest and most magnificent gift ever given from anyone being to another. It is the crowning proof that God loves us, as we have been told by John: “**For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life**” (John 3:16). Paul echoes this: “**He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things**” (Rom. 8:32).

The words “...if it is possible...” in Jesus’ prayer are significant. Jesus did not mean “**if it is possible**” in the sense of questioning the possibility that God had the power to cause Jesus to escape the crucifixion. Certainly, God the Father, and Jesus Himself, had the physical power to escape any Roman guard or prison. The words “...if it is possible...” were spoken within the implied context that both God the Father, and Jesus, wanted to save mankind; they were agreed in the desire, based on their love for us, to free us from the punishment we deserve for our sins. Jesus in His anguish, in those hours at Gethsemane, was asking, essentially, for another mechanism that the redemption and salvation of mankind could be achieved. And so, in the end, what we learn from the fact that Jesus did go on to sacrifice Himself for us, is that this was the only way to effect our salvation.

Jesus’ use of the “**cup**” enlightens us a bit on what exactly the cause of Jesus’ anguish was. The word “**cup**” was used multiple times to denote a portion of God’s wrath (see Isa. 51:17; Ezek. 23:33; Ps. 11:6, in the KJV). So, Jesus, in His time of anguish, did not want to face the wrath of God, which was falling on Him because He was bearing our sins. As stated earlier in this article, I don’t think that any of us humans can know or imagine what the bearing of all the sins of mankind feels like—the extent of the physical, spiritual, and soulful pain

of the entire “**cup**” of God’s wrath is unimaginable to us. We should not be surprised that Jesus asked for another way for the goal, common to the Father and Jesus, of human redemption and salvation to be achieved.

Note also that the use of the word “**cup**” points back to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. As we take the “**cup**” to remember the pouring out of Jesus’ blood for us during Communion, we should also remember His anguish in Gethsemane, and the choice that Jesus made to go ahead and bear the full “**cup**” of God’s wrath on Golgotha.

The end of Jesus’ prayer to the Father in Gethsemane was, as the end to all of ours anytime and anywhere should be: “**Yet not as I will, but as You will**” (vs. 39). “This was the vital part of His petition, its true essence; for much as His human nature shrank from the ‘**cup**’, still more did He shrink from any thought of acting contrary to His Father’s will” [Spurgeon, 463]. There’s so much to learn from Jesus’ prayers at Gethsemane, not least of which is that our prayers should be earnest, but in the end submissive to God’s will.

“Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Couldn’t you men keep watch with Me for one hour?’ He asked Peter” (vs. 40). Jesus had been praying about an “**hour**” at that point. It was no doubt an intense, lengthy prayer, the gist of which we have been given in vs. 39.

To me, one of the most heartbreaking moments in the Bible is when Jesus returns from this intense prayer, and finds Peter, John, and James “**sleeping**”. Our Lord desired their support and companionship during His time of overwhelming anguish, and they were “**sleeping**”. “It is one of the saddest things in the Gospel accounts that in this critical time, when Jesus was so disturbed in the face of the ordeal that confronted Him, and when He had appealed to the three who were closest to Him on earth to watch with Him, they were so far from understanding the situation that they went to sleep” [Morris, 669].

Jesus directly addresses Peter, when He asks about the three of them sleeping. Rightly so. It was Peter who led the disciples

in the protestation about them falling away (see vs. 33, 35). “They had professed their loyalty and their readiness even to die for Jesus. But when the first test came, they were tired and lacked the strength *to watch* with Jesus even for *one hour*” [Morris, 569].

Jesus advises: “**Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**” (vs. 42). Given Jesus’ previous warnings about the disciples falling away—that very night, even—they should have been on guard, and spiritually prepared. “Watching and praying were enjoined for a special purpose: ‘**that ye enter not into temptation**’. He knew what sore temptations were about to assail them, so he would have them doubly armed by—‘**watching unto prayer**’” [Spurgeon, 478]. “*Watch*—Act the sentinel, look about you, observe the perils that threaten and the foes that surround; and *Pray*—look above you, ever realize your dependence upon God for guidance, protection, and support” [Thomas, 504]. “Watchfulness sees temptation coming; prayer gives strength to withstand it” [Pulpit Comm., 527]. The failure of Peter, John, and James to “**watch and pray**” quite probably directly led to their falling away, and even disowning Jesus, after His arrest.

Jesus poetically summarizes the struggle that Peter, John, and James were having: “**The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**” (vs. 41). “The apostles had shown a certain readiness of spirit when they offered to die with Christ; but the flesh, the material and lower nature, represses the higher impulse, checks the will, and prevents it from carrying out that which it is prompted to perform” [Pulpit Comm., 527]. Indeed, we all encounter this struggle between the willing spirit and the weak flesh. It is a universal Christian condition. “Spiritual eagerness is often accompanied by carnal weakness—a danger amply experienced by successive generations of Christians” [Carson, 544]. The Apostle Paul speaks of this battle in Romans 7, especially in this passage: “**I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...**

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing... So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (Rom. 7:15, 17-19, 21).

There is some sympathy implied in the statement by Jesus to the disciples about the willing spirit and the weak flesh, for Jesus Himself was at that time in the midst of a flesh vs. spirit battle. “Christ Himself is included in this declaration, with the difference that He gave as high and pre-eminent an example of its truth, as the disciples afforded a low and ignoble one: He, in the willingness of the spirit, yielding Himself to the Father’s will to suffer and die, but weighed down by the weakness of the flesh; they, having professed, and really having, a willing spirit to suffer with Him, but, even in the one hour’s watching, overcome by the burden of drowsiness” [Schaff, in Lange, 480]. Jesus overcame His spirit vs. flesh battle by His deep, fervent, and lengthy prayer, with **“Yet not as I will, but as the Father wills”** as the foundation and emphasis.

Jesus went away again, prayed the same prayer, returned and found the three sleeping. This time, He did not wake them, resembling how the pull of the Holy Spirit on us lessens as we ourselves fall away. And then again, a third time, Jesus prayed the same prayer: the three prayer sessions paralleling the three temptations in the desert (see Matt. 4), as well as the three denials of Christ by Peter.

After the third time praying, Jesus roused the disciples, in preparation for His arrest, saying: **“Rise! Let us go!”** (vs. 46). The result of Jesus’ prayer was that He willingly, without hesitation, went to His death. “After His prayer, all the terrific excitement seemed to pass away; the inner storm subsided, the clouds broke, and the sun shone; a halcyon calmness came over Him, and His soul rose to an energy equal to His fate. He rose

from His devotions with a new power, went to His drowsy disciples, and said, **‘Rise, let us be going,’** and began His way, with a firm and majestic step, to the cross” [Thomas, 504].

Matthew 26:47-68



Jesus' Arrest

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

⁵⁰Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend."

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁵²"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

⁵⁵In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Jesus had just come back to the Apostles from praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He roused Peter, John, and James from their sleep, saying: **"Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my**

betrayer!" (vss. 45-46). So Jesus, it appears, was praying right up until the time of His arrest, which occurs in this section: **"While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people"** (vs. 47). At first glance, it would seem that **"a large crowd armed with swords and clubs"** to arrest a man of peace is a bit of overkill. Yet, on the other hand, no matter how large the crowd, it would not be enough to arrest Jesus, with His almighty power, if He did not voluntary choose to be arrested.

The **"large crowd"** most likely consisted of some Roman soldiers (the ones with **"swords"**, for they were authorized to carry **"swords"**), members of the temple police (security for the Sanhedrin), as well as members of the Sanhedrin (the temple ruling council, consisting of chief priests and elders of the Jerusalem temple) [Illus. Bible Backgrounds]. As such, they did have human authority to arrest Jesus.

"Judas" also was among them, leading the arresting crowd to Jesus. Matthew points out that Judas was **"one of the Twelve"**, emphasizing Judas's treachery, in that Judas was a trusted follower of Jesus. "The sad fall of Judas should be a warning to everyone not to indulge a vain reliance in the mere external fellowship of Christ" [Lisco, in Lange, 489].

"Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest Him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him" (vss. 48-49). The crowd was there to arrest specifically Jesus, and no one else, so Judas **"arranged a signal"** with them so that they would know who to arrest, given it was night time in a dark garden. By choosing to betray Jesus with a kiss, Judas has forever tainted the pure and beautiful act of the kiss of friendship and made it a symbol of hypocritical betrayal. "All the better instincts of human nature revolt at the treacherous disciple's kiss" [Broadus, 540]. "Ah, lewd losel! Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? Givest thou thy Lord such rank poison in such a golden cup? Consignest thou thy

treachery with so sweet a symbol of peace and love?" [Trapp, v. V, 272]. "What foul hypocrisy here! Kissing in order to kill! Saluting in order to slay?" [Thomas, 506].

Judas saluted Jesus with "**Greetings, Rabbi!**" (translated "Hail, Master" in the KJV), and then "**kissed him**". The Greek word for "**kissed**" used here is "to kiss fervently," indicating that "the act of the traitor was almost certainly more demonstrative than the simple kiss of salutation" (Vine's). It's not entirely clear why Judas kissed in that manner. It's as if Judas was purposely emphasizing his own hypocrisy, by calling Jesus Master, and then kissing Him fervently. His act was a subtle mocking of Jesus, thus Judas himself begins the mocking and mistreatment that Jesus will undergo in the day to come. Sadly, the spirit of Judas continues, and will always be present. "There are many that betray Christ with a kiss, and *Hail Master*; who, under pretense of doing Him honor, betray and undermine the interest of His kingdom" [Henry, 230].

"Jesus replied, 'Do what you came for, friend.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him" (vs. 50). By calling him "**friend**", Jesus emphasizes Judas's hypocrisy, while also providing us an example of peaceful, non-resistance, and love for one's enemies. "He calls him '**friend**'. If he had called him villain and traitor, Raca, and fool, and child of the devil, He would not have miscalled him; but He teaches us under the greatest provocation to forbear bitterness and evil speaking, and to shew all meekness" [Henry, v. IV, 230]. "In this address to Judas there is no indication of anger or excitement of any kind, but a mere dignified recognition. There is a majesty of calmness about it which must have gone to the heart of the betrayer" [Thomas, 508]. "Christ [calls] the traitor [**'friend'**], as might make him compare his pretense of friendship to his Master, with his intention of bringing soldiers on Him... To compare our profession with our practices, and our pretenses with our intentions, is a means to give us a right sight of ourselves" [Dickson, 318].

"With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest,

"cutting off his ear" (vs. 51). It was Peter who drew the sword (see John 18:10). He was backing up his "**I will die with you**" statement, back when Jesus told the disciples that they would "**all fall away**" (see Matt. 26:31-35). On an impulse, in the heat of battle, Peter was brave, and indeed would have died with Christ, in the heat of a battle with the mob who came to arrest Jesus. But such a battle was not sanctioned by the will of God. Peter needed the bravery at that time to live for Christ in the near future, as he was to help found the Christian Church and spread the gospel of Christ to the world. Peter would eventually die for Christ, but not then, and not there. "Peter had talked much, and more what he would do for his Master, he would lay down his life for Him, yea, that he would; and now he would be as good as his word, and venture his life to rescue his Master; and thus far was commendable, that he had a great zeal for Christ, and His honor and safety; but it was not according to knowledge, or guided by discretion" [Henry, v. IV, 231]. "[Peter] is magnificent and pathetic-magnificent because he rushes in to defend Jesus with characteristic courage and impetuosity, pathetic because his courage evaporates when Jesus undoes Peter's damage, forbids violence, and faces the Passion without resisting" [Carson].

Jesus Himself, the arrestee, diffused the situation, and returned peace to it: "**'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword'**" (vs. 52). Jesus de-escalated the situation. This, and His healing of the man who was injured (see Luke 22:51), most likely saved Peter from being arrested, or worse, at that time. "A wonderful work of God it was surely, that hereupon [Peter] was not hewn in an hundred pieces by the barbarous soldiers" [Trapp, 265]. "Peter had really forfeited his life to the sword; but the Lord rectified his wounded position by the correcting word which He spoke, by the miraculous healing of the ear, and by the voluntary surrender of Himself to the authorities" [Lange, 486].

Jesus' command to Peter, "**'Put your sword back in its place'**", is also Jesus' marching orders for all Christians. It was

Peter's impulsive idea to begin the Kingdom as a conquering warrior, but this was not the way Christ wanted to advance His kingdom. Violence in defense of Jesus, or the Christian religion, is not in keeping with the teachings of humility and peace of Jesus, and contrary to faith that Jesus has the power to subdue anyone, if He chooses. Later, when the Apostles were freed from jail, it was not through an armed resistance of other Apostles, but through the power of God. To draw a sword is never a *modus operandi* for the advancement of the Christian Church. Crusades to force people into the Christian religion are never sanctioned by God. Yes, we can defend ourselves from attackers, as part of our human defense mechanism. But we are never to go on the offensive in a physical battle, in the name of Christ. Instead, we are to “**overcome evil with good**” (Rom. 12:21). The Crusades were not sanctioned by God as a way to advance the Christian religion, nor was the Inquisition, and certainly not the Holocaust. All these were contrary to the precepts of Christ, and they all did nothing but harm the Christian religion.

“Christ’s errand into the world was to make peace. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual; and Christ’s ministers, though they are His soldiers, yet do not war after the flesh, (see 2 Cor. 10:3-4). Not that the law of Christ overthrows either the law of nature, or the laws of nations, as far as those warrant subjects to stand up in defense of their civil rights and liberties, and their religion, when it is incorporated with them; but it provides for the preservation of public peace and order, by forbidding private persons to resist the powers that be; nay, we have a general precept, that we resist not evil (see Matt. 5:39); nor will Christ have His ministers propagate His religion by force and arms. ‘*Religio cogi non potest & defendenda non occidendo sed moriendo*’ (‘Religion cannot be secured and defended by killing, but by dying’ – Lactantius). As Christ forbade His disciples the sword of justice (Matt. 20:25-26), so here the sword of war” [Henry, v. IV, 231].

“Christians [must] not use the sword for the defense or for the propagation of the gospel. Sometimes mistaken zeal,

sometimes more unholy motives, have led to persecutions and to so-called religious wars. The Lord distinctly condemns the use of force; He Himself refrained from the exercise of His power, He was King of kings and Lord of lords; He could have subjugated all the kingdoms of the world at once, by one act of omnipotence; He might have had around Him now, not eleven disciples, but more than twelve legions of angels. But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled? The salvation of man was to be brought about, not by force, not by a display of power, but by holy teaching, by holy example, by suffering, by self-sacrifice, by the cross. The forces to be employed were not physical, but moral and spiritual. Christ would not terrify men into obedience. What He seeks is not the forced service of slaves, but the willing obedience of love. And love cannot be forced; it can be gained only by love. It is the love of Christ manifested in His incarnation, in His holy life, in His precious death, which constrains His faithful followers to live no longer unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again” [Pulpit Comm., 546].

“Old Testament martyrdom had in it some affinity with the self-sacrifice of a hero in battle: they hoped for the speedy triumph of the theocracy. The New Testament martyr must, in the patience of the saints (Rev. 13:10; 14:12), tarry for the manifestation of victory until the last day. For this the disciples were not ripe: they had not the joyful testimony of victory within their own spirits. This New Testament martyrdom could flourish only after the blood of Christ was shed” [Lange, 488].

Jesus speaks of His control of the situation: “**Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?**” (vss. 53-54). If Jesus had called for the legions of angels, one for each of the Apostles and one for Himself, they would have come. Jesus was not being forced into sacrificing Himself. He, in His great love, chose to be. At any point, He could have aborted His mission, but thank God

He didn't. Jesus ever continued to do the will of the Father, thus "the Scriptures [were] fulfilled."

"In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled" (vss. 55-56). "The implication is that there is no need to arrest Him secretly and violently, except for reasons in their own minds that reveal more about them than about Him" [Carson]. By arresting Jesus in secret, rather than when He was teaching in the temple courts, the Sanhedrin was purposely avoiding the defense of Jesus by a sympathetic crowd. They acted furtively at night, so they could try Jesus furtively, without the sympathetic hearers of Jesus' teachings there to witness the trial. The goal of the Sanhedrin was to arrest Jesus in such a way that He would be alone, and they achieved this. Realizing that Jesus would be led away, the courage of the Apostles flagged, and they fled, as prophesied by both Zechariah hundreds of years before (see Zech. 13:7), and Jesus earlier in the evening (see Matt. 26:31). Jesus was to suffer alone.

"It would have been to the eternal honor of any one of the disciples to have kept close to Christ right up to the last; but neither the loving John nor the boastful Peter stood the test of that solemn time" [Spurgeon, 469]. "This was their sin; and it was a great sin for them who had left all to follow Him, now to leave Him for they know not what. There was unkindness in it, considering the relation they stand in to Him, the favors they had received from Him, and the melancholy circumstances He was now in. There was unfaithfulness in it, for they had solemnly promised to stick to Him, and never to forsake Him... What folly was this, for fear of death, to flee from Him, whom they themselves knew, and had acknowledged, to be the fountain of life? (see John 6:67-68)" [Henry, v. IV, 232].

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ⁵⁸But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

⁵⁹The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward ⁶¹and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

⁶²Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶³But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

⁶⁴"You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him ⁶⁸and said, "Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"

There were three different jurisdictions under which Jesus' case fell: the Sanhedrin's (the governing body for the Jews,

consisting of the chief priests and other Jewish leaders), Pilate's (representing the Roman government), and King Herod's (the Jewish leader over Galilee, Jesus' home town, who was sanctioned by Rome to lead that district). Jesus faced hearings and trials before all of these. The hearing before Herod is not recounted in the book of Matthew (it is recounted in Luke 23:6-12). The result of that hearing was just that Jesus was returned to Pilate (see Luke 23:11).

The first hearing was before Annas, a well-respected, former high priest. This also is not recounted in the book of Matthew, but can be found in John 18:12-24. Matthew's accounts of Jesus' hearings and trials begins with the hearing before Caiaphas, and other members of the Sanhedrin, the night Jesus was arrested: **"Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled"** (vs. 57). Though it was late in the evening, they **"had assembled"**, waiting for Jesus to be brought before them. This is how anxious they were to see Jesus die.

Though all the Apostles initially fled during the arrest of Jesus, Peter stayed close enough to witness the event of that night: **"But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome"** (vs. 58). "Peter followed Jesus 'at a distance,' midway between courage (v. 51) and cowardice (v. 70)" [Bengel, in Carson]. "He followed Him, but it was afar off: Some sparks of love and concern for his Master there were in his breast, and therefore he followed Him; but fear and concern for his own safety prevailed, and therefore he followed afar off. Note, it looks ill, and bodes worse, when those that are willing to be Christ's disciples, yet are not willing to be known to be so. Here began Peter's denying Him; for to follow Him afar off is by little and little to go back from Him... He should have gone up to the court, and attended on his Master, and appeared for Him; but he went in where there was a good fire, and sat with the servants, not to silence their reproaches, but to screen himself" [Henry, v. IV, 233].

The hearing before the Sanhedrin was not an honest, unbiased search for true justice; rather, it was a mock-trial where the desired outcome (death for Jesus) was predetermined: **"The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death"** (vs. 59). This mock-trial violated the spirit and the letter of the law of God, as laid out in the Holy Scriptures that the Sanhedrin claimed to venerate (see Ex. 23:7; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:18-20; et. al.).

As stated, the desired result was **"to put [Jesus] to death"**. However, the Sanhedrin did not have the governmental authority to put people to death for capital crimes. Only the Roman court could do that (see John 18:31). But the Romans would not put Jesus to death for blasphemy under the Jewish religion. That was not a crime against Rome. They would put Jesus to death if sedition against Rome was involved (such as Jesus trying to set Himself up as King), but Jesus never did that. So, this was the **"false evidence"** that the Sanhedrin was looking for: false evidence that Jesus was trying to undermine the Roman authority. Note that earlier, the Pharisees tried to get Jesus to say incriminating things against the Roman authority in the famous **"render unto Caesar"** passage (see Matt. 22:15-22).

In getting such **"false evidence"**, the Sanhedrin was not very successful: **"But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"** Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, **'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remained silent'** (vss. 60-63). From witnesses, a threat to **"destroy the temple of God"** was the best the Sanhedrin could come up with.

Jesus did say something like this. After Jesus cleared the temple courts of marketeers and money changers (John 2:14), some Jews responded to this by asking Jesus: **"What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this"** (John

2:18). Jesus answered: “**Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days**” (John 2:19). Jesus was speaking metaphorically, and with deep theological teaching. John tells us that Jesus was speaking of the “**temple**” of His own body—the ultimate meeting place between God and man. And so, raising the “**temple**” in three days refers to Jesus’ resurrection. But the Sanhedrin understood none of this, and tried to use these words against Jesus, saying they were a blasphemous threat to the Jewish religion. “In Christ, His greatest enemies could find no fault, but were forced to make that a fault which was none, to wit, His foretelling of His own death and resurrection, which was the matter of His glory and our comfort” [Dickson, 321].

Jesus Himself did not dignify them with an answer; He “**remained silent.**” What can one say to a kangaroo court, determined to find guilt where there was none? Then also, Jesus “**remained silent**” because He was bearing the guilt of our sins. He allowed the mock-trial to continue, because He was on trial for our sins, and determined to pay the price for all the sins of mankind. “Our Lord could have answered for Himself, but because He stood in our [stead], He answered nothing, and was content to be condemned for our faults, though He was free of all sin in Himself” [Dickson, 321].

“**The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God’**” (vs. 63). Since most of the Jews at that time equated the Messiah with a militant, political leader, who would overthrow the secular government rulers, the high priest’s question was designed to elicit a response from Jesus that would be treasonous to the Romans.

Jesus responds this time, being charged “**under oath**” to respond: “**You have said so,’ Jesus replied, ‘But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven’**” (vs. 64). Jesus’ response, I think, is subtly non-offensive to the Romans, yet at the same time, offensive to the Sanhedrin. Jesus speaks of Himself as a leader in the

Heavenly Kingdom, and makes no direct threat against any earthly kingdom. Jesus speaks of Himself being “**at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven**”. These words, for the non-believing Sanhedrin, are blasphemous. They respond: “**Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’ ‘He is worthy of death,’ they answered**” (vss. 65-66). They do not consider, for even one moment, that Jesus might, indeed, be the Christ, the Son of God. They do not think back to the signs and wonders He performed, to the inspired heavenly teaching that He gave, to the marvelous good works He performed for the sick, down-trodden and lame. Instead, with blood-lust, they “**tore their clothes**”, and pronounced Jesus “**worthy of death.**”

Moreover, after their condemnation of Jesus to death, the spirit of the Evil One inhabits them completely, leading them to perform heinous acts of malevolence and wickedness: “**Then they spit in His face and struck Him with their fists. Others slapped Him and said, ‘Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?’**” (vs. 67). They accuse Jesus of blasphemy, yet here, they perform hideous acts of blasphemy against the true Son of God. But let us all remember, as we read of Christ’s suffering, the part we played in it: it is for our sins that Jesus here is being buffeted, spat upon and mocked. “Christ was content to be spit upon, to cleanse our faces from the filth of sin, to be buffeted with fists, and beaten with staves, to free us from that mighty hand of God” [Trapp, 267].

Matt. 26:69-27:10



Peter's Denial

⁶⁹Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said.

⁷⁰But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

⁷¹Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth."

⁷²He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

⁷³After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away."

⁷⁴Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!"

Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

The previous section concluded with the beginning of Jesus' physical suffering, as He was buffeted and mocked by the Sanhedrin (see vs. 67-68). Now in this section, Jesus is denied three times by His most faithful disciple. Appropriately, Matthew juxtaposes the two episodes, for Peter's denial of Christ is part of Jesus' sufferings.

All four of the Gospel writers in the Bible recount this episode. Matthew chooses to relate all three of Peter's denials together in his Gospel, though they took place at different

times during the evening (see John 18:16ff; Luke 22:58). There are other differences in the accounts Peter's denials in the Gospels, mainly as to who the speakers were. These differences can be explained by the fact that there were a number of people in the area where Peter was, and it is probable that multiple people spoke up, inquiring if Peter knew Jesus. Remember that Peter was pretty much Jesus' right-hand man, nearly always with Him as He ministered. Those who saw Jesus, probably saw Peter with Him.

Peter's sin of denying Christ did not occur spontaneously, out of the blue. As we look back at Matthew's account of the events of the evening of Jesus', and even earlier events, we can see things that Peter did and said that led up to his denials of Christ. For instance, when Jesus first laid out to the disciples God's plan of Jesus' suffering, dying, and being raised to life, Peter responded by "**rebuking**" his Lord, saying, "**Never, Lord!... This shall never happen to you!**" (Matt. 16:22). Peter clearly did not fully accept God's plan that Christ would suffer and die for mankind. This is also reflected by Peter pulling his sword in an attempt to prevent the arrest of Jesus.

Another indication in Peter's behavior that lead up to his denying Christ was his over-confidence concerning his loyalty to Jesus. Earlier in the evening, when Jesus predicted that all of the disciples would "**fall away**", Peter, rather than carefully considering what Jesus was saying, impulsively answered: "**Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will**" (Matt. 26:33). "Peter, the bold, venturesome, straightforward disciple, fell by cowardice and lying; as Moses the meek by anger, and Solomon the wise by folly. Often our most flagrant transgressions arise from parts of our character we have not inspected" [Pulpit Comm., 559].

Yet another indication in Peter's behavior that lead up to his denying Christ was his spiritual negligence in the Garden of Gethsemane. Rather than being in watchful prayer, and deep spiritual meditation in preparation for the momentous events that Jesus said would occur that very evening, Peter slept. This

spiritual negligence left Peter spiritually unprepared for the challenges he would face that evening.

We can all, of course, learn from the path that Peter took which led to his great sin. We must seek to understand, and buy into God's will. We must seek to understand our own weaknesses. We must fervently seek God in prayer for guidance and strength, especially when momentous events are about to occur, or important decisions need to be made.

It is significant that all four Gospels relate the episode where one of the Christian religion's heroes experiences a major fall into sin. This is not the first time in the Bible where the weaknesses, and even major sins of its heroes, are related to us. We are told of David's descent into adultery, and even murder (as he tried to cover his sin of adultery). We are told of Solomon's descent into idolatry, and lascivious living. The relating of these episodes speaks to the truth of the Bible. The Biblical writers speak truth, even when the truth tars and mars its heroes. "[Peter's denial of Christ] is one of those events, which indirectly prove the truth of the Bible. If the Gospel had been a mere invention of man, we should never have been told that one of its principal preachers was once so weak and erring, as to deny his Master" [Ryle, 374-375]. "It is remarkable and significant that the story of the denials should have been recorded at all. When the Gospels were written, Peter was regarded as the leading apostle, the chief man in the church. It would have been very natural to pass over in silence this man's fall from grace. But all four of our Gospels recount it. They do not do this by way of demoting Peter, for in due course he repented, was reinstated, and continued in a position of leadership. But the church knew that its leader was a fallible sinner like all others and that he had had a dreadful fall. The church knew, too, that he had repented and by the grace of God had gone on to greater and better things" [Morris, 687-688].

Yes, Peter, by the grace of God, went on to greater and better things. We must all remember, and learn from this: those godly men and women who stumble into sin, can and will

be forgiven by God. They must also be forgiven by men, and be allowed by man (as they are allowed by God) to greatly serve God, even after serious sin. "Let us mark this history, and store it up in our minds. It teaches us plainly that the best of saints are only men, and men encompassed with many infirmities. A man may be converted to God, have faith, and hope, and love towards Christ, and yet be overtaken in a fault, and have awful falls. It shews us the necessity of humility. So long as we are in the body we are in danger. The flesh is weak, and the devil is active. We must never think, "I cannot fall." It points out to us the duty of charity towards erring saints. We must not set down men as graceless reprobates, because they occasionally stumble and err. We must remember Peter, and '**restore them in the spirit of meekness'** (Gal. 6:1)" [Ryle, 375-376]. Sadly, these days, though the religion we profess is based on forgiveness, we are very slow to forgive men of God for significant sins. Those who have sinned, even significantly, can be restored by God's forgiveness, and can be still mightily used for His purposes. We must remember this, and not be an obstacle to the work that God wants to do in the life of a sinner.

Now to the text: "**Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said. But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said**" (vss. 69-71). It's difficult to imagine a more innocuous statement, from a less threatening individual, than the one from the "**servant girl**". "Notice that this challenge was as gentle as could be imagined. It was not a man but a woman, not a mature woman but a girl, not a free woman but a slave... She made no accusation of rebellion, blasphemy, or the like; she simply said that he was with Jesus" [Morris, 588]. "A silly wench daunteth and dispiriteth this stout champion... What poor things the best of us are, when left a little to ourselves, when our faith is in the wane" [Trapp, 267]. Peter, the *rock*, less a rock than a reed, blown over by a servant girl's breath [Burkitt, in Lange, 500].

Her statement is taken a bit out of context by Matthew here. She says, “**You also...**” This suggests that she was referring to someone else who was a follower of Jesus—and she was. This is clear from the recounting of this episode in John’s Gospel: “**Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in. ‘You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?’ she asked Peter**” (John 18:15-17). Many think that this “**other disciple**” was John himself (John seems to refer to himself as “**the other disciple**”, or “**the disciple whom Jesus loved**”, in other places in his Gospel; see John 13:23, John 19:26; John 20:2; John 21:7; John 21:20), but it may have been someone like Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, who were known to be disciples of Jesus (though not of the Twelve Apostles), and were also known to have access to the Sanhedrin hearings. So, here in Matthew, when the servant girl says, “**You also were with Jesus of Galilee**”, she is effectively saying, “You, just like this ‘**other disciple**’” (who seemed to have been previously known to her) “were a disciple of Jesus.”

In light of this, it is even more surprising that Peter denied knowing Christ, for “**the other disciple**” showed himself to the same servant girl, and the same gathering of people who were near Peter, and yet (presumably) no harm came to the “**other disciple**”, despite his known connection with Christ. Her statement seemed to have been an innocent conversation starter, with the intention of carrying on banter in the courtyard about the events going on before the Sanhedrin. Perhaps, because of the arrest, she was curious about Jesus. It would have been timely for Peter to tell her what he knew of his Lord and Master: His love; His power; His goodness; His Deity, His coming death and resurrection.

Yet, it seems, Peter’s faith was shaken. Was Jesus, indeed, still Peter’s Master and Lord, now that Jesus was in chains? Did Peter believe the words of Jesus, spoken directly to him, just a few days previously: “**We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!**” (Matt. 20:18-19)? All was to end well. This very same evening, Jesus promised: “**But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee**” (Matt. 26:32).

Jesus had prepared Peter for this difficult trial, and yet Peter responds to the servant girl: “**I don’t know what you’re talking about.**” This is a kind-of half denial: not specifically denying Christ, but claiming ignorance. It’s more of an evasion than a denial, so (we presume) thinks Peter. This is how the path to great sin begins. “In the garden St. Peter was brave as a lion, slashing at the high priest’s servant with his sword. In the palace court-yard he cowers before a waiting-maid’s joke” [Pulpit Comm., 555].

Why did Peter deny knowing Jesus? I think more than just fear is involved, especially in light of the fact that the “**other disciple**” was known, and nearby, and experienced no harm. I think Peter, part of him at least, had lost his faith. Seeing Jesus arrested and tortured, and then seeing Jesus not even really answer the charges that the Sanhedrin brought, caused Peter to consider washing his hands of Jesus, in effect. He would pretend he never even knew Jesus. This agrees with what Jesus said when predicting Peter’s denial: “**Truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times**” (Matt. 26:34). The word here translated “**disown**” is a strong word, meaning, “to deny utterly, to abjure, to affirm that one has no connection with” [Strong’s]. Earlier, before the Transfiguration, Jesus had warned His disciples that He would “**suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers**

of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Matt. 16:21-22). Peter flatly rejected that things would unfold in this manner: **“Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’”** (Matt. 16:22). So back then, Peter was not willing to follow a Master who was to suffer and die; and clearly, as we see here on the night of Jesus’ arrest, Peter was still unprepared to follow a Master who was suffering, and was to very soon die. The truth of the coming resurrection had not reached Peter’s heart, so he denied even knowing Jesus.

Peter’s denials of Christ continue: **“Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, ‘This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’”** (vss. 71-72). This servant girl does not even speak directly to Peter. And again, there is no accusation involved, merely banter around a courtyard fire. “How weak, comparatively, the temptation was; it was not the judge, or any of the officers of the court, that charged him with being a disciple of Jesus, but a silly maid or two, that probably designed him no hurt, nor would have done him any, if he had owned it” [Henry, 235]. “One temptation, unresisted, seldom fails to bring on another and a third” [Quesnel, in Lange, 500]. “Embarked on this course of denial he is led further into evil; the first denial involved a lie, the second time Peter perjured himself. The first was no more than a declaration that he did not know what the girl was talking about; the second was a clear repudiation of Jesus” [Morris, 689].

Peter moved beyond his previous plea of ignorance, and emphatically denied he knew Jesus, even with an oath. He was determined to deny any knowledge of Jesus. Peter’s direct denial of Christ put his own eternal security in jeopardy. Jesus stated: **“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven”** (Matt. 10:32-33). This was stated by Jesus

in the context that there will be bodily danger in this world, for (in the Gospel of Matthew) Jesus followed this statement with: **“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword”** (Matt. 10:34). Jesus also made the statement in the context of promising that God will take care of His people, and not let anything happen to them that is outside His will, for immediately preceding this statement, Jesus said: **“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows”** (Matt. 10:28-32). So, these statements of Jesus were meant to prepare Peter for the very situation he faced and, in no uncertain terms, Jesus stated that denial of Christ was a sin: **“But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.”**

And yet, even the sin of disowning Jesus, Peter’s sin, can be forgiven, for we know that Peter himself was forgiven, and went on to mightily serve Jesus, and went on even to follow Jesus in His death by being put to death for his faith and service to Christ. In the Gospel of John, after Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus asks Peter three times, **“Do you love me?”**, and Peter answers, **“You know that I love you”** (see John 21:15-17). Then Jesus predicts Peter’s death: **“Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God”** (John 21:18-19). “Peter’s example warns us to be ready for testing; but it also summons us to start afresh if we have failed, and to show mercy to those who have already stumbled but wish to return to the way of Christ” [Keener, on vs. 75].

In the third confrontation, in the Sanhedrin courtyard, the people are certain that Peter knew Jesus, offering Peter's Galilean accent as proof: "**After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.'** Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, '**I don't know the man!**'" (vss. 73-74). The old fisherman in Peter returns; he has reverted to his pre-Christ personage, cursing like a sailor. "Having lied twice Peter finds himself forced to lie again, this time with more oaths" [Carson]. "This was worst of all; for the way of sin is downhill... We have reason to suspect the truth of that which is backed with rash oaths and imprecations. None but the devil's sayings need the devil's proofs. He that will not be restrained by the third commandment from mocking his God, will not be kept by the ninth from deceiving his brother... [Peter] designed it to be an evidence for him, that he was not of Christ's disciples, for this was none of their language. Cursing and swearing is enough to prove a man no disciple of Christ, for it is the language of His enemies thus to take His name in vain" [Henry, 235].

Just as Jesus predicted, "**Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly**" (vss. 74-75). The recollection of Jesus' prediction of Peter's sin, reminded Peter how far he had fallen, and so he "**wept bitterly.**" Peter regrets "**bitterly**" his misguided denials of Christ. The recollected words of Christ bring Peter back to faith in Christ. "A serious reflection upon the words of the Lord Jesus will be a powerful inducement to repentance, and will help to break the heart for sin. Nothing grieves a penitent more, than that he has sinned against the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the tokens of his love" [Henry, 236].

The "**bitter**" tears of Peter are tears of true repentance. "In this troubled pool Peter washed himself, in this Red Sea the army of his iniquities was drowned. As once his faith was so

great that he leapt into a sea of waters to come to Christ, so now his repentance was so great, that he leapt, as it were, into a sea of tears for that he had gone from Christ" [Trapp, 268]. "Peter who wept so bitterly for denying Christ, never denied him again, but confessed him often, and openly, and in the mouth of danger" [Henry, 236].

Let us remember Peter's tears, and not take the same path that led to them. "This is written for warning to us, that we sin not after the similitude of Peter's transgression; that we never, either directly or indirectly, deny Christ (the Lord who bought us) by rejecting His offers, resisting His Spirit, dissembling our knowledge of Him, and being ashamed of Him and His words, or afraid of suffering for Him, and with His suffering people" [Henry, 235].

Judas's Death

¹Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. ²So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

³When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴"I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

⁵So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

⁶The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. ⁸That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was

fulfilled: "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel,¹⁰and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

The Sanhedrin met again early the next morning, apparently to ratify the decision made the previous evening, and to plan a strategy of how to move forward in the Roman court: **"Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor"** (vss. 1-2). "This meeting of the Sanhedrin, which Luke describes in his Gospel, was intended at the same time to meet all the forms of law, and definitely to express the grounds of the charge against Jesus. But, as we have already seen, in point of fact, it only served to cover those violations of the law into which their reckless fanaticism had hurried them. One of the main objects of the Sanhedrin now was, to present the charge in such a light as to oblige Pilate to pronounce sentence of death" [Lange, 501].

Unnecessarily, they **"bound"** Jesus. But, however they **"bound"** Him, Jesus had the power to escape the bonds, if He so desired. He endured this shame because He chose to, not because He was **"bound"** by man's measly shackles. "He was already bound with the bonds of love to man, and of His own undertaking, else He had soon broke these bonds, as Samson did his. We were fettered with the bond of iniquity, held in the cords of our sins, but God had bound the yoke of our transgressions upon the neck of the Lord Jesus, that we might be loosed by His bonds as we are healed by His stripes" [Henry, 236].

Jesus was **"handed over to Pilate the governor."** As we previously said, the Sanhedrin did not have the authority to put a man to death, and so they would seek the death penalty from the Roman-appointed **"governor".** "Pilate was in fact appointed prefect or procurator by Tiberius Caesar in A.D. 26. Prefects governed small, troubled areas; and in judicial matters they possessed powers like those of the far more powerful

proconsuls and imperial legates; in short, they held the power of life and death, apart from appeal to Caesar" [Carson]. "Pilate is characterized by the Roman writers of that time, to be a man of a rough and haughty spirit, willful and implacable, and extremely covetous and oppressive; the Jews had a great enmity to his person, and were weary of his government, and yet they made use of him as the tool of their malice against Christ" [Henry, 236].

As Judas witnessed the results of his betrayal of Christ, his conscience was tormenting him: **"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.** (vs. 3). Judas recognized the full force of what he had done. His actions would lead to Jesus' death. Judas felt the weight on his conscience of murdering a man of peace, even the Son of God.

Judas **"returned the thirty pieces of silver"**, the price of his betrayal, possibly (and absurdly) thinking that the Sanhedrin would reconsider their verdict. Judas wanted desperately to undo what he had done. Regret always and ever follows sin. Remember this before you take that first step on the path to sin. "Though before a sin be committed the bait and allurement is only seen, and the conscience blindfolded, kept captive and benumbed; yet after sin is committed it shall be wakened at last, and see the ugliness of sin discovered" [Dickson, 326].

Judas spoke to the chief priests and elders: **"I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood"** (vs. 4). Judas mistakenly goes to men, even accomplices in the same crime, for his confession of **"I have sinned"**. Far better for Judas if he had kneeled before God, even before Jesus Himself, to confess his sin. If he had, then Judas—yes, even Judas—could have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus.

Judas himself proclaims Jesus' innocence, saying, **"I have betrayed innocent blood."** This is significant. The betrayer of Christ proclaims His innocence. If Jesus was a blasphemer, and not the true Son of God, certainly Judas, a close follower of

His, would have known, and would have himself been a witness before the Sanhedrin to Jesus' crimes. But Judas knew that Jesus was innocent, innocent of everything. Jesus committed no crime. He was not a blasphemer; He was the Messiah, the true Son of God. "We see in the end of Judas a plain proof of our Lord's innocence of every charge laid against Him. If there was any living witness who could give evidence against our Lord Jesus Christ, Judas Iscariot was the man. A chosen apostle of Jesus, a constant companion in all His journeyings, a hearer of all His teaching, both in public and private,—he must have known well if our Lord had done any wrong, either in word or deed. A deserter from our Lord's company, a betrayer of Him into the hands of His enemies, it was his interest for his own character's sake, to prove Jesus guilty. It would extenuate and excuse his own conduct, if he could make out that His former master was an offender, and an impostor... Bad as [Judas] was, he knew he could prove nothing against Christ. Wicked as he was, he knew well that his Master was holy, harmless, innocent, blameless, and true" [Ryle, 379-380].

The response of the chief priests and elders to Judas's proclamation of Jesus' innocence is surprising: "**‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility’**" (vs. 4). The chief priests were sanctioned by God to judge justly, yet they did not care whether Jesus was innocent or not. They should have been as remorseful as Judas, for they had condemned "**‘innocent blood.’**" Their statement, "**‘What is that to us?’**", proves their guilt, proves that they deserve the greatest condemnation for their actions. The Sanhedrin did not ignorantly hand Jesus over to death; they were not seeking truth in their condemnation of Jesus; they purposely sought to kill their Messiah, the one sent to save them.

“So Judas threw the money into the temple and left” (vs. 5). The silver had lost its luster to Judas. The rewards of sin always look better from the outside. "When he was tempted to betray his master, the thirty pieces of silver looked very fine and glittering, like the wine when it is red, and gives its

colour in the cup. But when the thing was done, and the money paid, the silver was become dross, it bit like a serpent, and stung like an adder... Sin will soon change its taste. Though it be rolled under his tongue as a sweet morsel, in the bowels it will be turned into the gall of asps" [Henry, 237]. "Conscience reverses our estimates. These silver pieces now seemed red with blood and hot with fire" [Thomas, 519-520].

Judas's betrayal brought about his end: "**“Then he went away and hanged himself”** (vs. 5). As his conscience tormented him, Judas ran away from Christ, and to the hangman's noose. Far better if Judas had run toward Christ—if instead, Judas had knelt at the cross of Christ—which he literally could have done. In the midst of our remorse from sin, we have a choice of two directions to run: toward Jesus to seek forgiveness, or away from Jesus in defiance of the gift of forgiveness that He offers. Judas chose the latter, and "**“hanged himself.”**" "See here how Judas repented, not like Peter, who repented, believed, and was pardoned: no, he repented, despaired, and was ruined... Judas had a sight, and sense of sin, but no apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, and so he pined away in his iniquity. His sin, we may suppose, was not in its own nature unpardonable, there were some of those saved that had been Christ's betrayers and murderers; but he concluded, as Cain, that his iniquity was greater than could be forgiven, and would rather throw himself on the devil's mercy than God's" [Henry, 237-238]. Peter and Judas shared remarkable similarities, for one so revered and the other so hated: "1. They both, and they only, are called Satan, (see Matt. 16:23; John 6:70). 2. They both, and they only [of the twelve disciples], turned openly against the Master at the end. 3. They both sorrowed deeply, but in one it was remorse, in the other it was humble and loving repentance. 4. One committed suicide, the other found forgiveness and lived a long life of usefulness" [Broadus, 559].

The chief priests and elders were unmoved by Judas's remorse. They were more concerned with what to do with the

returned pieces of silver: “**The chief priests picked up the coins and said, ‘It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.’ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day**” (vss. 6-8). There is absurd irony here: The chief priests are very concerned about dealing with the legality of how to handle the returned “**blood money**”, and yet they show no concern in violating God’s rules of justice of condemning an innocent man to death. “These leaders were willing to pay out blood money for Jesus’ capture, willing to allow Judas’s suicide, but too pious to accept their own blood money into the temple treasury” [Keener, on vss. 3-8]. “It is no new thing to see Christ’s most cruel adversaries deep in hypocrisy, pretending to be feared to offend in the least things; as these men stand not to give Judas a hire to betray innocent blood, but will not meddle with the gain, when it is cast back” [Dickson, 326].

Matthew points out a prophetic allusion to the thirty pieces of silver, and their use to buy a potter’s field: “**Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me’**” (vss. 9-10). Matthew’s citation seems to be taken from the book of Zechariah, in which a passage reads (in our modern translation): “I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord” (Zech. 11:12-13). So, in the midst of a clearly Messianic passage in the book of Zechariah, we have mention of a transaction of “**thirty pieces of silver**”, which is the “**price at which they valued me**”; and then the silver is thrown “**at the house of the Lord**”, along with references to the silver ending

up being thrown “**to the potter.**” Clearly, Zechariah’s prophetic, Messianic vision has some level of fulfillment in Judas’s betrayal of Christ.

There is a minor textual difficulty here, in that Matthew cites Jeremiah instead of Zechariah. Many commentators have offered up solutions to this difficulty (for instance, the possibility that Matthew was referring to some writings of Jeremiah—such as Jer. 19:1-13—in addition to Zechariah). The solution to the difficulty may lie in something as simple as traditions at the time for citing prophets. In the New Testament, only Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel (all so-called major prophets) are mentioned by name, though there are references to the writings of other prophets. Indeed, there are some seventy-one references in the New Testament to the book of Zechariah [see Kaiser in *Mastering the Old Testament*, and Nelson in *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*; see also http://www.olivetree.org/files/sermon_attachments/zechariah_in_the_nt.pdf for a summary of NT references to Zechariah], and yet Zechariah is never mentioned by name. Given this, some have postulated that the name Jeremiah was used to refer to the writings of Jeremiah, as well as the minor prophets, because those OT books were in the same compilation.

Whatever the case may be (all suggested solutions to this difficulty are speculations), it seems that at this time, thousands of years after the gospel of Matthew was written, we do not have enough information to reconcile the inconsistency so that everyone will be intellectually satisfied. That’s okay. We need to realize that the Bible is an incredibly deep book; the minds of humans will never solve the book completely. “The words quoted are found in the prophecy of Zechariah, in Zech. 11:12. How they are here said to be spoken by Jeremiah, is a difficult question; but the credit of Christ’s doctrine does not depend upon it; for that proves itself perfectly divine, though there should appear something human, as to small circumstances in the penmen of it” [Henry, 238]. “If not quite content with any of [the commentator’s] explanations, we had better leave the

question as it stands, remembering how slight an unknown circumstance might solve it in a moment, and how many a once celebrated difficulty has been cleared up in the gradual progress of Biblical knowledge" [Broadus, 559].



Matthew 27:11-26

Jesus Before Pilate

¹¹Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied.

¹²When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. ¹³Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" ¹⁴But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

¹⁵Now it was the governor's custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ¹⁸For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

¹⁹While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

²⁰But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

²¹"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor.

"Barabbas," they answered.

²²"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked.

They all answered, "Crucify him!"

²³"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

24When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

25All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

26Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The narrative here continues from verses 1 and 2 of this chapter, which read: **“Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor”** (Matt. 27:1-3). “It was in the ‘morning’ that followed the dark night in Gethsemane, and opened the dread day of the crucifixion” [Thomas, 523]. So begins one of the few most significant days in human history.

As stated, the purpose of the chief priests in bringing Jesus to Pilate was **“to have Jesus executed.”** The chief priests, in and of themselves, did not have the right to sentence a man to death, so they sought out Pilate with the purpose of convincing him to sentence Jesus to death. Thus, the action of bringing Jesus to Pilate was essentially an act of murder, for the chief priests knew that Jesus was innocent of any crime that deserved death.

So Jesus stood before Pilate, who was the local governor, representing the Roman government which controlled Jerusalem at the time. In the book of Luke, we learn that the chief priests told Pilate: **“We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king”** (Luke 23:2). This short statement is full of misleading half-truths, and lies. Jesus did **“subvert”** the chief priests, but called them out in matters of religion, specifically in regard to their religious hypocrisy. Jesus did not **“oppose payment of taxes to Caesar”**; on the con-

trary, Jesus said: **“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”** (Matt. 22:21). Jesus did claim to be **“the Messiah”**, but not a political Messiah against the Romans. Jesus did not seek to bring political salvation from the Romans, but rather spiritual salvation from our own sins..

Following these false charges, Pilate confronted Jesus: **“Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied”** (vs. 11). “In Roman trials the magistrate normally heard the charges first, questioned the defendant and listened to his defense, sometimes permitted several such exchanges, and then retired with his advisors to decide on a verdict, which was then promptly carried out” [Carson].

Matthew abbreviates the conversation between Jesus and Pilate concerning Jesus’ kingship. In the Gospel of John, we are given more details about this exchange between Jesus and Pilate: **“Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’ ‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’ Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’ ‘What is truth?’ retorted Pilate”** (John 18:33-38). So Jesus made it clear to Pilate that He was no threat to Rome, saying, **“My kingdom is not of this world”** (John 18:36). Moreover, “clearly, one sight of Jesus was enough to tell this experienced governor that this was no terrorist, no leader of a revolt aimed at overthrowing the Romans. Pilate would also have known that Jesus had no high position, no wealth, no soldiers, a preposterous position for anyone claiming to be a king” [Morris, 699].

The chief priests then brought more specific charges against Jesus to Pilate, probably the same “false evidence” that was used in front of the Sanhedrin (see Matt. 26:59): “**When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, ‘Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?’** But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor” (vss. 12-14). Matthew does not even dignify the lies by enumerating the specific allegations of the chief priests. “The specific allegations did not matter; they were determined to have him executed, and to refute their accusations was irrelevant. If these charges were shown to be false, they would raise others. They were not concerned with justice but with an execution” [Morris, 700]. Jesus also does not dignify the false charges; instead, “**Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge.**” Peter later writes of this: “**When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly**” (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus, as He did at Gethsemane, committed Himself to His Father’s will. In His silence, Jesus fulfilled prophecy found in the book of Isaiah: “**He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth**” (Isaiah 53:7).

Pilate saw through the motives of the chief priests, and knew that Jesus was innocent of capital charges, and so, did not want to condemn Jesus. Then Pilate proposed a way to release Jesus that would, in a way, save face for the chief priests, in that it would not be a case of Roman authorities over-ruling the desires of the chief priests: “**Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, ‘Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the**

Messiah? For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him” (vss. 15-18). We learn in the Gospel of Luke that Barabbas was “**thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder**” (Luke 23:19). So Barabbas clearly deserved capital punishment. Pilate hoped the crowd would recognize this, and free Jesus.

At this point, the trial of Jesus was interrupted in an unusual way: “**While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him’**” (vs. 19). It is surprising, and sad, that the only testimony (in effect) on Jesus’ behalf during the trial was made, not by any of Jesus’ disciples, nor apostles, nor followers, but by Pilate’s wife. “When all Christ’s disciples were fled from Him, when none of His friends durst speak a word for Him, God raises up a woman, a stranger, a pagan, to give evidence of His innocence” [Burkitt, in Lange, 517]. “This was an honourable testimony to our Lord Jesus, witnessing for him that he was a just man, even then when he was persecuted as the worst of malefactors. When his friends were afraid to appear in defense of him, God made even those that were strangers and enemies to speak in his favour: when Peter denied him, Judas confessed him; when the chief priests pronounced him guilty of death, Pilate declared he found no fault with him; when the women that loved him stood afar off, Pilate’s wife that knew little of him, shewed a concern for him” [Henry, 240]. “It was necessary that by all means the righteousness of Christ should be borne witness unto, that in his condemnation, not for his own sins, but for ours, our justification from sin might shine the more clearly; therefore, among other testimonies of Christ’s innocence, Pilate’s wife, extraordinarily moved, sent [a message to Pilate]” [Dickson, 330].

Pilate, knowing that Jesus was innocence, receives further confirmation of this through his wife. This message from Pilate’s wife can be seen as a message from God, to check Pilate

from going down the path of sin and injustice, in using his power to condemn and kill Jesus. “Note, God has many ways of giving checks to sinners in their sinful pursuits, and it is a great mercy to have such checks from providence, from faithful friends, and from our own consciences, and our great duty to hearken to them” [Henry, 240].

While Pilate received and digested the message from his wife, the chief priests were busy: **“But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed”** (vs. 20). In stirring up the crowd to release Barabbas, the chief priests give proof of their utter wickedness by corrupting the crowd to join with them in their crime. “This deliberate preference of a bad man to a good one, of a justly condemned criminal to one whom even Pilate recognized as innocent, would have been enough to brand the conduct of the priests with infamy. But when to this we add that they preferred a murderer to the Lord of life, a rebel and a robber to a prophet, to their own Messiah, nay, to the incarnate Son of God himself, this perverseness seems almost incredible and altogether irreconcilable with rectitude of purpose and sincere conviction” [Alexander, in Broadus, 564].

Pilate returned to continue the proceedings: **“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. ‘Barabbas,’ they answered”** (vs. 21). “Barabbas is preferred to Jesus whenever the offer of salvation is rejected” [Scott, in Lange, 517]. “This mad choice is every day made, while men prefer the lusts of their flesh before the lives of their souls” [Trapp, 272].

Because of his release, in a situation where he fully deserved the punishment of death, Barabbas becomes symbolic of each and every one of us: Christ died in his place. “Jesus was falsely accused of sedition, and a man really guilty of sedition was released” [Broadus, 563]. “It may be that the two who were crucified with Jesus were co-rebels with Barabbas, for Matthew 27:38 calls them [a word that should be translated] ‘rebels,’ ‘guerrillas,’ or ‘insurrectionists’, and their crucifixion indicates

they were judged guilty of more than robbery. The fact that three crosses were prepared strongly suggests that Pilate had already ordered that preparations be made for the execution of the three rebels. If so, Jesus the Messiah actually took the place of the rebel Barabbas because the people preferred the political rebel and nationalist hero to the Son of God” [Carson].

At this point, it appears that Pilate, though nominally in authority, has ceded all power to the mob: **“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’”** (vs. 22). “It was absurd for them to prescribe to the judge what sentence he should pass, but their malice and rage made them forget all rules of order and decency, and turned a court of justice into a riotous, routous, and seditious assembly” [Henry, 240].

Pilate’s question, **“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”** is a question that every human being must ask himself. Shall I accept Jesus’ sacrifice, and proclaim Him Lord of my life? Or shall I mock Him, along with the raucous mob?

The raucous mob chose to **“Crucify him!”** This baffled Pilate: **“Why? What crime has he committed?”** (vs. 23). “It is much for the honour of the Lord Jesus, that though he suffered as an evil doer, yet neither his judge nor his prosecutors could find that he had done any evil. Had he done any evil against God? No, he always did those things that pleased God. Had he done any evil against the civil government? No, as he did himself, so he taught others to render to Caesar the things that were Caesar’s. Had he done any evil against the public peace? No, he did not strive or cry, nor did his kingdom come with observation. Had he done any evil to particular persons? Whose ox had he taken, or whom had he defrauded? No, so far from that, he went about doing good. This repeated assertion of his unspotted innocence, plainly intimates that he died to satisfy for the sins of others” [Henry, 240].

Despite Jesus’ utter innocence, the crowd persists: **“Crucify him!”** All reason had left the crowd. Blood-lust had

taken over and won the day. “Now was truth fallen in the street, and equity could not enter. Where one looked for judgment, behold oppression, the worst kind of oppression for righteousness; behold a cry, the worst that ever was, crucify, crucify the Lord of glory. Though they that cried thus, perhaps were not the same persons that the other day had cried ‘Hosanna’, yet see what a change was made upon the face of the populace in a little time: When he rode in triumph to Jerusalem, so general were the acclamations of praise, that one would have thought he had no enemies; but now when he was led in triumph to Pilate’s judgment-seat, so general were the outcries of enmity, that one would think he had no friends. Such revolutions are there in this changeable world, through which our way to heaven lies” [Henry, 240].

“When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’” (vs. 24). The onset of an “uproar” tipped the scales of justice, and brought the hearing to an end. “The Romans desired two things in the provinces: tribute and peace. A successful governor was one who kept everything quiet, and popular tumult was greatly disliked, as being troublesome and expensive, if not dangerous” [Broadus, 565].

So Pilate “washed his hands” of the whole thing, claiming to be “innocent of this man’s blood.” Yet then Pilate went on to hand Jesus “over to be crucified” (see vs. 26). Though Pilate blamed the crowd, he himself had the power to release Jesus. Pilate was far from innocent. “Had he steadily and resolutely adhered to the sacred laws of justice, as a judge ought to do, he had not been in any perplexity; the matter was plain, and past dispute, that a man in whom was found no fault, ought not to be crucified upon any pretence whatsoever, nor must an unjust thing be done to gratify any man, or company of men in the world” [Henry, 241].

And yet, Pilate “washed his hands”, believing that this made him “innocent”. However, the washing of hands in

impotent water accomplishes nothing as far as innocence or guilt is concerned. Only the washing “**in the blood of the Lamb**” (see Rev. 7:14) will effect the innocence and clear conscience that Pilate sought. Only clothing ourselves with Christ as we accept His sacrifice on our behalf will impart to us blamelessness in the eyes of God, and allow us to bypass the punishment we so richly deserve. “Too weak an element to wash off guilt; which is not purged but by the blood of Christ, or fire of hell” [Trapp, 272].

Nevertheless, Pilate shouted to the rioting crowd: “**‘It is your responsibility! All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’’** (vs. 25). A generation later, in 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the Jews were scattered throughout the world. During the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome, many Jews were scourged and crucified: “Titus, during the siege, A. D. 70, caused many captured fugitives, sometimes five hundred a day, to be ‘scourged and tortured in every form, and then crucified in front of the ramparts. . . . And so great was their number that there was no space for the crosses, nor were there crosses for the bodies’ (Josephus, ‘War’, 2:14:9; 5:11:1)” [Broadus, 565].

The trial thus came to an end: “**‘Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified’** (vs. 26). Matthew does not give here details about the “**flogging**”, but it was a brutal, horrid, and horrible punishment in itself. “The whip was the dreaded flagellum, made by plaiting pieces of bone or lead into leather thongs. The victim was stripped and tied to a post. Severe flogging not only reduced the flesh to bloody pulp but could open up the body until the bones were visible and the entrails exposed” [Carson]. The flogging of the Messiah was foreseen; it was referred to and hinted at by various Old Testament scriptures: “**‘Plowmen have plowed my back and made their furrows long’** (Ps. 129:3); “**‘I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spit-**

ting" (Isa. 50:6); "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). The flogging of Jesus was not incidental; it was significant, for "**by His wounds we are healed.**" "Christ was scourged when we had offended, that he might free us from the sting of conscience, and those scourges and scorpions of eternal torments; that he might make us a plaster of his own blessed blood, '**for by his stripes we are healed**', by the bloody weals made upon his back we are delivered. We hold it a thing almost beyond belief, that the applying of medicines to the sword that wounded a man shall make the wounds heal in a man. But here is a mystery that only Christian religion can tell of, and of which there never was precedent in nature, that the scourging and wounding of one man should cure another" [Trapp, 273].



Matthew 28:1-15

The Resurrection of Christ

¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of

trouble.”¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

And so now we come to the resurrection of Jesus Christ: the event that is central to the Christian religion and, without which, there would be no Christian Church nor Christian religion. As Paul teaches: “**And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain**” (I Cor. 15:14, KJV). Moreover, one could say that the Fall of man, and the Resurrection of Christ are the two most significant events in all of human history. Through the former, sin is brought into the world and man is separated from God. Through the latter, the sins of all mankind are atoned for, and the way is made open for anyone to again establish a relationship with God, being imparted with the righteousness of Christ, through faith in his finished work on the cross. “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not merely the greatest event of history, it is the hinge on which all history turns” [Pulpit Comm., 621].

The significance of the resurrection as a historical event cannot be overstated. One could possibly imagine a Christian belief system without it, a belief that Jesus did pay the price for our sins on the cross, but without the resurrection, how would we know that God accepted Christ’s sacrifice? And besides, Jesus had predicted that he would be raised from the dead, and so, without the resurrection, how could we believe anything that Jesus said? Without the resurrection, our religion would be empty, and Lord-less. As Paul tells us: “**If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied**” (I Cor. 15:19-20).

In fact, Paul teaches us the significance of the resurrection in many places. We would not be assured of our justification without it: “[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Through the resurrection, we can have a new life: “**Or don’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). Because of the resurrection, we can be assured that Jesus is interceding to the Father on our behalf: “**Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us**” (Rom. 8:33-34, ESV). Through belief in the resurrection we are saved: “**If you declare with your mouth, Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved**” (Rom. 10:9-10). Through the resurrection, we know that we too can be raised from the dead: “**But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?**” (I Cor. 15:12). The resurrection reverses the effects of the curse of man through Adam: “**For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive**” (I Cor. 15:21-22). Because of the resurrection, we are inspired to re-prioritize our life, in the service of our Lord: “**Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things**” (Col. 3:1-3). Through the resurrection, we know that we also will have life after death: “**For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him**” (I Thess. 4:14).

“It is the resurrection of Jesus that establishes a clear and close connection between this world and the unseen and spir-

itual world. If he rose from the dead, then the world into which he is gone is real, and his invitation to us to join him there is one we may confidently trust to" [Pulpit Comm.]. "The resurrection of Christ establishes the divine origin of his mission and teachings; it gives God's sanction to all his claims, and he claimed to be the Messiah, to speak by divine authority, to be one with God. Jesus had publicly periled his reputation as the Christ of God, on the occurrence of this event. When challenged to give some sign in support of his pretensions, it was to his future resurrection from the dead, and to it alone, that he appealed. Often, and that in terms incapable of misconstruction, had our Lord foretold his resurrection. It carried thus along with it a triple proof of the divinity of our Lord's mission. It was the fulfillment of a prophecy, as well as the working of a miracle; that miracle wrought, and that prophecy fulfilled, in answer to a solemn and confident appeal made beforehand by Christ to this event as the crowning testimony to his Messiah-ship" [Broadus, 589]. "The resurrection not only culminates the passion narrative but also is at the center of redemption itself. Without it one can only pity Jesus as a martyr whose lofty ideals were sadly misunderstood. With it one must stand in awe of the Messiah, the Son of the living God, who gave his life as a ransom for many and who will one day return in glory to judge humanity" [Turner, 682-683]. And so the historical fact of the resurrection is crucial to the Christian religion. Again, without it, our faith is in vain, and we are "**of all people most to be pitied.**"

Despite being told numerous times by Jesus that he would rise from the dead, the disciples of Christ apparently had no expectation of this coming true. If they did, they would have all been waiting at the tomb for this momentous event to occur. "The disciples, who promised undying loyalty, are still scattered" [Turner, 680]. Instead, just a few of Christ's followers, all women, came to the tomb on the next morning, the third day: "**After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to**

look at the tomb" (vs. 1). And knowing the faith of these women, and their true and demonstrated devotion to Christ, perhaps there was a germ of faith in their minds that Jesus would be risen from the dead, as he promised. Their primary purpose, though, in going was to anoint Jesus' body with spices (see Mark 16:1).

Their devotion did not go unrewarded. They were the first people, of all people in history, to know of the resurrection of their Lord. "**There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men**" (vss. 2-4). The timing of our Lord's resurrection, the earthquake, and the rolling away of the stone, with respect to when the women arrived at the tomb is not specified in Matthew's text. Mark, Luke and John tell us that the stone was already rolled away when the women arrived at the tomb (see Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2, and John 20:1). And being that it was "**a violent earthquake**", the women would have felt it wherever they were. Perhaps the earthquake woke up the women and caused them to decide to return to the tomb at that time. To inhabitants of the area, the earthquake would have been considered as an aftershock to the one that occurred the night before. These earthquakes were not only related geologically, but they were both tied to the death and resurrection of our Lord. "The earth shook both at Christ's passion and at his resurrection; then, to show that it could not bear his suffering; now, to show that it could not hinder his rising" [Trapp, 280].

The appearance of the angel put the guards into some sort of shocked state, a paralyzing terror. And if their mission was to guard the body of Jesus, they did fail, though not because anyone stole the body. No one, no thing, no power could prevent the raising of Christ from the dead. "The detachment of guards and the imperial seal cannot prevent the removal of

Jesus's body because it is not stolen by the disciples but raised by the Father" [Turner, 681].

The women, though afraid (see Luke 24:5), fared better than the Roman guards, and were able to receive and understand the message that the angel told them. "By the same means the Lord can terrify his adversaries, and comfort his people" [Dickson, 349]. The appearance of the angel in physical form, though a rare event with respect to human history, was not so rare with respect to the events surrounding Jesus' incarnation on earth. "The angels frequently attended our Lord Jesus: at his birth, in his temptation, in his agony, but upon the cross we find no angel attending him. When his Father forsook him, the angels withdrew from him. But now he is resuming the glory he had before the foundation of the world, and now behold the angels of God worship him" [Henry, 252].

The angel had good news to impart to the women, the first communication of the Gospel good news that Jesus rose from the dead: "**The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you'**" (vss. 5-7). Can we even begin to imagine the emotions of the women as they heard this message? They had come there with the depressing task of anointing a dead body with spices; they arrive to learn that there is no dead body: the Lord has risen. "We might have expected that the good news would be given first to Peter or John or some other member of the eleven. But God's ways are not our ways, and the message was given first to a couple of women" [Morris]. "[The men] had deserted Christ in his hour of need, had not stood by the cross, nor aided in his burial; so they were not to be honored with the vision of angels or the first sight of the risen Lord. This was reserved for the faithful

women, who thus received their mission to carry a message to the messengers—a foretaste of the ministry which they should perform in the Church of Christ" [Pulpit Comm., 641]. "The women are sent to tell it them, and so are made as it were the apostles of the apostles. This was an honor put upon them, and a recompense for their constant, affectionate adherence to him, at the cross, and in the grave, and a rebuke to the disciples who forsook him" [Henry, 253].

As stated, the angel was the first to preach the Gospel message, bringing hope and joy to the lost and sorrowful. In essence, his message is one we also could preach, and would do well to repeat anytime and anywhere we can: "**Do not be afraid... He has risen, just as he said.**" "These words were spoken with a deep meaning. They were meant to cheer the hearts of believers in every age, in the prospect of the resurrection. They were intended to remind us, that true Christians have no cause for alarm, whatever may come on the world" [Ryle, 406]. "The servants of the word should exercise the office of comforting angels, or God's messengers of consolation, unto the anguished" [Canstein, in Lange's, pg. 550].

The angel proves the resurrection of Christ by showing the women the empty tomb: "**Come and see the place where he lay**" (vs. 6). So we see here that the stone was rolled away for our benefit, so that there would be witnesses that, indeed, the body of Christ was no longer in the tomb. "The stone was rolled away from the tomb not so that Christ could emerge; he could pass through doors and walls (Luke 24:36; John 20:19) and did not need the stone removed. The stone was rolled away so that the women and others could see the tomb was empty." [Osbourne]. "The positive evidence [of the resurrection] is in the appearance of Christ to his disciples; the negative evidence is in the empty tomb. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, men could have pointed to his sealed tomb, could even have torn it open and shown the corpse within... Jesus did not only appear after his death, as ghosts are said to have appeared, startling nervous people in haunted

places. His tomb was left vacant. His body had disappeared. This is an important fact in regard to the Resurrection”” [Pulpit Comm., 654].

The women responded with excitement at the good news, setting out to do what the angel asked: “**So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples**” (vs. 8). Note, they believed the truth of the resurrection even before they saw the risen Lord, based on the testimony of the angel, and the witness of the empty tomb.

The women were not only the first to receive the news about the risen Lord, but they were also the first to see the risen Lord: “**Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him**” (vs. 9). In seeing Jesus, the women “**clasped his feet.**” “Jesus is not a spirit but has been raised bodily — but with new meaning. Before there were resuscitations, but those raised had to die again. Jesus is raised for eternity” [Osbourne].

As they clasped his feet, they “**worshiped him.**” “In thus taking hold of his feet the women symbolically recognized Jesus’ kingship; indeed, it may indicate that they had come to realize that he was more than mortal” [Morris]. “That belief in the divinity of Christ, which was partly slumbering during His state of humiliation, is awakened in all, as with one blow, through this miraculously imposing view of the risen Savior” [Lange’s, 563]. “Jesus’s initial post-resurrection appearance sets the tone for the proper worshipful response to him for the future. The women are evidently prostrated before Jesus with their faces to the ground and arms outstretched with hands grasping Jesus’s feet.” [Turner, 682].

“**Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me’**” (vs. 10). Jesus told the women to remind the disciples that he would meet them in Galilee. Jesus made this promise on the night of his arrest (see Matt. 26:32). “This promise had

been originally made in connection with Jesus’s prediction that the disciples would desert him (26:31). The power of the resurrection will transform the deserters back into disciples (28:16)” [Turner, 681].

Significantly, though now he is the risen Lord, proven worthy of our worship, Jesus calls the disciples “**brothers.**” “The ‘family’ metaphor shows much love and patience, since the disciples have just run away from home, as it were, when they deserted Jesus. But Jesus welcomes the prodigals back” [Turner, 682]. “They had shamefully deserted him in his sufferings; but, to show that he could forgive and forget, and to teach us to do so, he not only continues his purpose to meet them, but calls them *brothers*” [Henry, 254]. “[**Brothers**] is] a new designation of the disciples, which declares to them His consoling sympathy, and makes known to them that He, as the Risen One, had not been alienated from them by their flight and treachery, but that rather they are summoned by Him to become partners in His resurrection” [Lange’s, 546]. The writer of the book of Hebrews expands on Jesus’ use of the term “**brothers**” in referring to his disciples, then and now: “**In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters**” (Hebrews 2:10-11). Jesus, by living as a man, understands our struggles as fallen humans. And so, he is “**not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.**”

What the women saw as good news was not-so-good news to others: “**While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, ‘You are to say, “His disciples came during the**

night and stole him away while we were asleep.” If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble” (vss. 11-14). “When the women were going to bring that news to the disciples, which would fill their hearts with joy, the soldiers went to bring the same news to the chief priests, which would fill their faces with shame” [Henry, 254]. Rather than accepting the good news of a risen Lord, the good news that Jesus really is the Messiah sent to save them—rather than investigating this extraordinary event, and responding to the truth of the resurrection with awe, wonder and excitement—the chief priests devise an absurd, last-ditch attempt to suppress and smother the truth of the Gospel. In doing so, they are battling against the sovereign God whom they profess they serve. Moreover, the testimony to them by the soldiers that they saw an angel, and that Jesus did rise from the dead, renders the chief priests inexcusable: they cannot claim ignorance of proof that Jesus is the Messiah. “They had said, ‘**Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him**’ (Matt. 27:42); behold, he has done something still more wonderful, yet they do not believe, no, nor make further inquiry, but simply bribe the witnesses to report a stupid falsehood... The story must have excited great surprise and alarm, but it wrought no repentance” [Broadus, 588]. “Those who were guarding Jesus’s tomb now become evangelists” [Turner, 685].

“Ironically, the same guards who were to be an asset in preventing a resurrection hoax become a liability necessitating a hoax” [Turner, 685]. The hoax is not an improvised, seat-of-the-pants plan; it is devised in a meeting between the chief priests and elders. This is pre-meditated rebellion against God. “Christ’s malicious enemies are of the devil’s nature, they will never cease to oppose him, though they know him to be the Son of God” [Dickson, 352]. “No multiplication of evidence will convince those who are stubbornly resolved not to believe” [Broadus, 589].

The soldiers, who were in a bit of a sticky situation since they failed at their duty to keep Jesus’ body in the tomb, took

the bribe and went along with the deception: “**So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day**” (vs. 15). First, thirty pieces of silver are given to Judas, now “**a large sum of money**” is given to the guards: the enemies of Christ spare no expense in battling the Gospel truth. “The Jesus whom they had caused to be slain and put into the tomb was now a living reality; all their bribes and lies could do nothing to alter the facts” [Morris].

Of course, the story devised by the chief priests is absurd on many levels: If the guards were asleep, how did they know it was the disciples who took the body? And how in heaven’s name would *all* of these specially trained soldiers fall asleep at the same time? And why weren’t any of them aroused by the arduous work of rolling the stone away from the tomb’s opening? No. Certainly the truth of what happened is far more believable than this concocted story: Jesus rose from the dead, just as he said he would.

Alternate Views of the Resurrection

Because of the strong historical evidence for the truth of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, and the resistance of many to accept that Jesus did rise bodily from the dead, there have been attempts to interpret the evidence in other ways that still take the evidence into account. Grant Osbourne has summarized the main alternative views, and also why each falls short of the most straight-forward explanation of what happened: that Jesus did rise from the dead. Here is Dr. Osbourne’s summary

There are seven different theories propounded through the centuries to explain what may have happened behind the resurrection story; let us consider each one in turn.

The early Jewish apologetic against its truthfulness said the disciples stole the body and made up a story about the

resurrection (28:13); yet this is exactly what Matthew's account intends to refute.

The political theory of Hermann Samuel Reimarus in the eighteenth century stated that the disciples concocted the resurrection story to establish a movement that would bring them fame and power. However, this has never been widely accepted because of the high ethical content of the NT. The disciples could hardly be so base as to make up such a story for personal gain and then create a Christian movement based on selflessness and filled with persecution for them.

The swoon theory of Friedrich Schleiermacher and K. A. Hase asserted that Jesus fainted on the cross and revived in the tomb (also the theory in the Koran, which says Jesus later preached in India and died in Kashmir). The gospels themselves combat this theory by stressing the observers and the reality of Jesus' wounds. The Romans were expert executioners, and the team that put Christ on the cross would have done so numerous times. There is simply no way they would have mistaken someone who had fainted for a corpse.

The mythical view of David R Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann, which hypothesizes that the stories were created by the early church along the lines of Greco-Roman myth in order to explain the existential (Bultmann) impact of Jesus on the lives of the disciples (i.e., he "still lives" in their hearts). There was insufficient time for this to develop (most accept that the tradition behind 1 Cor 15:3-8 was developed within five years of Jesus' ascension). The disciples would hardly have been so radically changed by a "myth," and the vast differences between pagan myths and the subdued resurrection narratives make this theory doubtful indeed.

The subjective vision theory of Ernst Renan and Willi Marxsen, who hold that the disciples (Peter first) had dreams of Jesus and interpreted these from a first-century perspective as being sent by God. But the appearances came to some who were not psychologically prepared (e.g., James and Paul), and it is difficult to explain all the changes merely on psychological grounds. A mass hallucination to "five hundred people at once" (1 Cor 15:6) is hardly a viable alterna-

tive, as if they were stoned on sacred mushrooms or something!

The objective vision theory of Eduard Schweizer, Günter Bornkamm, and C. R. D. Moule, who maintain that God sent the disciples visions rather than physical appearances and that these were interpreted along physical lines by the Jewish followers who had no concept of differences between a physical and spiritual body/resurrected form. But this is to force a Greek view of a spiritual body on historical evidence that attests otherwise. It is hard to conceive why God would restrict himself to mere visions of the glorified Jesus. The God who could do the one could also do the other, and there is little reason along these lines to deny the validity of the biblical claims.

The corporeal view of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and most conservative critics fits the evidence as we have it and makes the best sense. Jesus was raised from the dead literally and bodily. Gnilka notes the centrality of verbs for "seeing" in this final section (28:1, 6, 7, 17, plus the six uses of "look" in the chapter) and concludes that Matthew stresses what one can see with the eyes as interpreted through the Word. Matthew clearly believes that Jesus actually appeared and was "seen" by the disciples....

When the data is examined and the question honestly asked, "What really happened?" there are significant reasons for affirming the historicity of Jesus' resurrection.

The disparate [Gospel] accounts are not really contradictory to one another, and it is indeed possible to harmonize them and show they supplement one another.

Little else can explain the incredible change of the disciples from self-centered cowards who would desert Jesus in his moment of greatest need to world-changing moral and spiritual giants.

Anyone making up the stories about the resurrection would never have women (who could not serve as witnesses in a Jewish framework) as the first official witnesses of the resurrection news.

The empty tomb is a historically verifiable fact, and in spite of Jewish claims that the disciples stole the body (Matt

28:13-15), there is no evidence they were able to produce the body of Jesus.

From the start the early church used the resurrection as a historically verifiable event (1 Cor 15:5-8; the sermons of Acts), and to them it actually happened.

Jesus did not appear just to his followers but also to unbelievers, such as his brother James (1 Cor 15:7; for him as an unbeliever see John 7:5).

In conclusion, the resurrection as a historical event makes best sense of the data [Osbourne].



Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The disciples followed Jesus' instructions, as given to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (see 28:10): **“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go”** (vs. 16). When they arrived, they did see Jesus, as he promised: **“When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted”** (vs. 17). This is one of the eleven post-resurrection appearances documented in the Bible. Here is a summary of all of the appearances: to Mary Magdalene (John 20:14-18); to the women right after the resurrection (Mark 16:5-7; Matt 28:9); to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35); to the disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23); to Thomas and the others eight days after the resurrection (John 20:26-29); seven disciples on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23); in this passage, when Jesus gives the Great Commission on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16-20); to five hundred believers (I Cor. 15:6); to James (I Cor. 15:7); to the disciples at the ascension (Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-12). So we

see, from the post-resurrection appearances that we know about, that Jesus appeared to various people, under varying circumstances. And we know that he appeared as a body, as **“flesh and bones”**, and not as a spirit or ghost (see Luke 24:39).

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus appears in Galilee. It is an appointment of sorts, set up with the women who saw Jesus directly after the resurrection. Jesus told them: **“Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me”** (28:10). And they did see Jesus: **“When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted”** (vs. 17). Significantly, **“some doubted.”** Why? It is apparent from the documented post-resurrection appearances that Jesus was not instantly recognized. For instance, the two who walked with Jesus to Emmaus did not immediately recognize that it was Jesus that they were walking with (see Luke 24:16). And then, the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee did not immediately recognize that it was Jesus suggesting that they throw their net to the other side of the boat (see John 21:5ff). I believe that the reason for the lack of instant recognition was that Jesus still bore the scars of the beatings he received before his death, and of the resurrection itself. We know from Jesus’ encounter with “doubting” Thomas that Jesus still bore the scars from the nails of the resurrection in his hands, and from the spear in his side (see John 20:27). So, I believe, his appearance was altered by the abuse of the beatings and the crucifixion (Isaiah prophesies that **“his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human”** – see Isa. 52:14), so that he was not immediately recognized in his post-resurrection body. Whatever the case, as Jesus told Thomas: **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”** (John 20:29). And unfortunately, even for the most stolid of believers, doubt visits from time to time. “Doubt is a universal experience of finite followers of Jesus. Every one of us has been a ‘doubting

Thomas’ at some time, and the tension between worship and doubt is with us as much as with the disciples... Like the disciples we are on an upward pilgrimage of faith and discipleship throughout our time on earth, and like them we can overcome failure through radical surrender in the strength the Spirit supplies” [Osbourne].

At this appointed time in Galilee, Jesus had something important to say to the disciples. He began: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”** (vs. 18). In the previous verse, the disciples **“worshiped”** the risen Jesus; here Jesus boldly proclaims that he is worthy of that worship. “It was a despised Galilean, a wandering and homeless teacher, that gave this audacious command; but it was a teacher just raised from the dead, and endowed by God with universal authority” [Broadus, 592]. “He is making clear that the limitations that applied throughout the incarnation no longer apply to him. He has supreme authority throughout the universe” [Morris].

Jesus goes on, in this stated **“authority”**, to give disciples a commission: **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”** (vss. 19-20). This is what’s called “Great Commission.” It summarizes the primary duties of Jesus’ followers on earth. “How vast is the range of thought presented or suggested by this saying of our Lord: (1) Theology, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the mediatorial authority of Christ; (2) Discipleship, and the work of discipling others; (3) The great missionary idea, all the nations; (4) The ceremonial element of Christianity; (5) Christian ethics; (6) Christ’s perpetual spiritual presence with those who serve him; (7) Christ’s final coming” [Broadus, 596].

The primary command of the Great Commission is to **“go and make disciples of all nations”**; this is done by **“baptizing them”** and **“teaching them to obey”** what

Christ has commanded. Evangelization, the mere spreading of the Good News, is not enough (though it is the first step); “**disciples**” must be made: true followers of Christ and his teachings. “The task of the church is not just to evangelize but to disciple the world for Christ... Every single person who is won to Christ must be anchored in Christ and taught how to live for Christ in day-to-day decisions. Christianity is a practical, ethical religion, and we cannot separate the secular from the sacred. Until the secular areas of our lives have been ‘**baptized**’ with holiness, we are not truly disciples of Jesus” [Osbourne].

Jesus here is establishing a religion for *all* peoples of the world, for those of “**all nations.**” The church was established and foreseen by Jesus to be a world-wide church. “Christianity is essentially a missionary religion, analogous to the great conquering nations, the Romans, English, Russians. It must spread, by a law of its nature; it must be active at the extremities, or it becomes chilled at the heart; must be enlarging its circumference, or its very center tends to be defaced” [Broadus, 593]. “We must bear in mind that the picture of Jesus as a Jewish rabbi, with a little group of disciples around him, traveling in leisurely fashion in rural Galilee contrasts sharply with the missionary-minded church that we find in the early chapters of Acts. From the beginning the church exercised a missionary function and sought to make disciples out of those who listened to its proclamation. Why this sudden and dramatic change? Surely it is the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, coupled with the charge the risen Lord gave to his followers to make disciples of all nations” [Morris]. “The first disciples, Christians, became missionaries, messengers of salvation, as soon as the Church was founded at Pentecost. Upon that first feast of Pentecost, there were three thousand Christians; at the end of the first century, five hundred thousand; under the first Christian ruler, Constantine the Great, about ten millions; in the eighth century, some thirty millions; at the era of the Reformation, nearly one hundred millions;

and now [in the late 1800s], well nigh two hundred millions” [Rieger, in *Lange’s*, 563]. And as of this writing, there are some two billion who consider themselves Christians. The Great Commission, as far as reaching the peoples of the world with the Gospel message, has largely been carried out.

At the time when Jesus gave the Great Commission, the establishment of a religion for all the peoples of the world was a radical thought. “The idea of one religion for all the world then seemed very strange. No existing religion could aim at it, since the existing religions were believed to be merely the products of national instincts and aspirations; each religion was part of the furniture of a nation, or at most of a race. Celsus, looking out on Christianity in the second century of our era, with the feelings of Gibbon or of Voltaire, said that a man must be out of his mind to think that Greeks and Barbarians, Romans and Scythians, bondmen and freemen, could ever have one religion. Nevertheless this was the purpose of our Lord” [Liddon, in Broadus, 594].

And why is Christianity the appropriate religion for people of all nations? Because it is the religion of the one true and only God. It is the way of salvation that the one true God has offered to all of mankind. The Great Commission is “that salvation by Christ, should be offered to all, and none excluded that did not by their own unbelief and impenitence exclude themselves. The salvation they were to preach, is a common salvation, whoever will, let him come and take the benefit of the act of indemnity” [Henry, 256].

In order to be true “**disciples**,” and followers of Christ, we are to be “**baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**,” just as Jesus himself was baptized. Baptism “is a sign both of entrance into Messiah’s covenant community and of pledged submission to his lordship” [Carson, 597]. Baptism is a rite that consecrates those who are baptized “into the sincere service of the sacred Trinity, and confirms them by this holy Sacrament, in the faith of the forgiveness of their sins, and in the hope of life eternal.

This is the end, use, and efficacy of baptism” [Trapp, 282]. Baptism unites us with Christ, in his death and resurrection. As Paul teaches: “**Or don’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**” (Romans 6:3-4). “Baptism is a mere ceremonial and initial act of obedience to Christ, which should be followed by a lifelong obedience to all his commandments” [Broadus, 596].

Baptism in the name of the three persons of the Trinity—“**of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**”—affirms that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in our salvation. We receive the forgiveness of the Father, through the finished work of Jesus Christ who died for our sins. We are led to this knowledge and realization through the work of the Holy Spirit.

After baptism, disciples are to be taught to “**obey everything**” Jesus has commanded of his disciples. “Following Jesus will entail understanding and obeying his teaching” [Turner, 690]. “The baptized disciples of Christ may not walk as they like, but must study to observe all that Christ has commanded” [Dickson, 356]. “What the disciples teach is not mere dogma steeped in abstract theorizing but content to be obeyed” [Carson, 599].

The original apostles gave us writings—the Gospels, detailing the life of Christ and a summary of his teachings; and the Epistles, which expand, detail and clarify the teachings of Christ, and what it means to be a Christian. These writings are the foundational teachings of what disciples of Christ are to “**obey**.” And so, carrying out the Great Commission consists primarily in teaching the Word of God, as expressed in the New Testament.

Jesus ends his Great Commission with a word of encouragement: “**And surely I am with you always, to the very**

end of the age” (vs. 20). This statement emphasizes the *personal* relationship that all followers of Christ have with him. Christianity is not a religion that consists of merely a book with rules in it; it is a religion that has promised a personal relationship with the risen Lord. As Christians, we are not left alone to figure out the complex workings of the world; rather, Jesus is “**with us always, to the very end of the age**”, and moreover, the Holy Spirit dwells in us, to help us navigate the twists and turns we encounter as we live. Significantly, Jesus did not say “I will be with you” (suggesting a future time of meeting); he said, “**I am with you**,” promising an always-current presence. “When Christ saith, ‘**I am with you**,’ you may add what you will: to protect you, to direct you, to comfort you, to carry on the work of grace in you, and in the end to crown you with immortality and glory. All this and more is included in this precious promise” [Trapp, 282]. “He emphasizes the importance of his continuing presence and concludes his Gospel with the magnificent assurance to the followers of Jesus that that presence will never be withdrawn; he will be with them always, to the end of the world and to the end of time.” [Morris]. “He is with us daily to pardon and forgive,—with us daily to sanctify and strengthen,—with us daily to defend and keep,—with us daily to lead and to guide,—with us in sorrow, and with us in joy,—with us in sickness, and with us in health,—with us in life, and with us in death,—with us in time, and with us in eternity” [Ryle, 413].

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