THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Matthew is a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is a Jewish document aimed at Jewish readers. The book talks about a Jewish Messiah.

AUTHOR

The author of this book was beyond a doubt Matthew, an apostle of our Lord, whose name it bears, Matthew 9:9-13 / Matthew 10:3. Matthew, the apostle and the son of Alphaeus, was formerly known as Levi, Mark 2:14. The name Matthew means 'gift of God'. He was a tax collector in Capernaum before being called by Jesus to follow Jesus, Matthew 9:9 / Luke 5:27-28 / Acts 1:13.
Matthew wrote about Jesus and not about himself, and nowhere in the Gospels do we find a word spoken by him. The last mention of him is in Acts 1:13, and the time and manner of his death are unknown.

DATE

As to the time of its composition, there is little in the Gospel itself to indicate. It was evidently written before the destruction of Jerusalem, Matthew 24:1-35, and sometime after the events, it records. The probability is that it was written between the years A.D. 60 and 65.

THE BOOK

Some suggest that the four faces mentioned in Ezekiel 1:10 and Revelation 4:7 represent Jesus in the four Gospels.
Matthew represents the face of the lion, which implies Jesus' kingship. Jesus is from the line of Judah.
Mark represents the face of the ox, which implies the servant, service. The serving Jesus.
Luke represents the face of the man, which implies humanity. Jesus is the Son of Man.
John represents the face of the eagle, which symbolises Jesus' deity. Jesus is the Son of God.

Matthew was written for Jews, and he uses the words 'as it is written' throughout his Gospel. Note the genealogy goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, Matthew 1:1-17. His point is to remind the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah in fulfilment of the Jewish Law.
Mark is writing to the Romans, and he simply talks about what Jesus is doing and how busy He is, which is exactly what the Romans were doing, building roads, etc., they were busy people.

Luke was written for the Greeks, and he uses the term 'Son of Man' throughout his Gospel. Notice his genealogy goes back to Adam; his point is that Jesus is for the whole world, Luke 3:23-38.
John is writing to those in Asia, and he uses the term 'Son of God' throughout his Gospel. His point is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ through signs, eight miracles and eight 'I AM' statements.

The Old Testament is a book of promise, and in Matthew's Gospel, the term 'fulfilled' is used fifteen times. Matthew uses one-hundred and twenty-nine quotes and allusions to the Old Testament. The Gospel of Matthew is known as the

Gospel of the King. It records twenty miracles performed by Jesus, six major lessons and 60% of the teachings of Jesus.

THE BOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR PARTS

1. Containing the genealogy, the birth, and the infancy of Jesus. Matthew 1:1-2:23.
2. The discourses and actions of John the Baptist preparatory to Christ's public ministry. Matthew 3:1-4:11.
3. The discourses and actions of Christ in Galilee. Matthew 4:12-20:16.
4. The sufferings, death and resurrection of our Lord. Matthew 20:17-28.

OUTLINE

The Revelation of the King. Matthew 1-10
Rebellion against the King. Matthew 11-13
Retirement of the King. Matthew 14-20
Rejection of the King. Matthew 21-27
The resurrection of the King. Matthew 28

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. Thus, there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.' Matthew 1:1-17

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

The reason Matthew starts his account this way is due to the fact that his Jewish readers would place a great deal of emphasis on the genealogy.

Matthew 1:1-17 is parallel with Luke 3:23-38
Matthew 1:3-6 is parallel with Ruth 4:18-22
Matthew 1:7-11 is parallel with 1 Chronicles 3:10-17

Both Matthew and Luke record the genealogy of Jesus, Luke 3:23-38. However, Matthew gives the account of the ancestry of Joseph, the legal and earthly parent of Jesus. Luke records the ancestry of Jesus through the genealogy of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Matthew divides his account of the genealogy of Jesus into three sections.

1. Abraham to David. Matthew 1:1-6
2. Solomon to the Babylonian captivity. Matthew 1:7-11
3. The Babylonian captivity to Jesus. Matthew 1:12-16

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'In his genealogy, Matthew shows us the royalty of Kingship gained the tragedy of freedom lost. The glory of freedom restored.'

The names written here show that Jesus is part of history; they also illustrate God's wonderful grace, hence the mention of women such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba.

Matthew shows from the genealogy that the barriers have been broken down between the Jew and Gentile, between male and female and between saint and sinner.

Matthew begins by telling us that 'this is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah,' Matthew 1:1 / 1 Chronicles 1 / 1 Chronicles 2:1-15 / 1 Chronicles 3:1-19 / Ruth 4:18-22. In other words, this gives us the details of the ancestry of Jesus.

The name Jesus is a form of the name 'Joshua', which means God is our helper, deliverer or saviour. It was a very common name in Jewish circles, and in New Testament times it meant 'Jehovah is salvation'.

The Hebrew word, 'Messiah', is the Greek word Christ, which means 'anointed'. In other words, Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah who fulfilled all Old Testament prophecies, Luke 24:44.

The term 'son of' refers to a distant relative, and so, when one is the 'son of' another, ancestors in the lineage can be left out by the chronicler. Cainan is placed between Shelah and Arphaxad in Luke 3:36, but he is left out of the genealogy of Genesis 11.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jesus was the literal son of David through Mary, a descendant of Nathan, one of David's sons, as in Luke's genealogy. Jesus was the legal son and heir of David through King Solomon, as in Matthew's genealogy. He was also the antitypical son of David in that many parallels exist between the life of our Lord and that of King David. Both were born in Bethlehem. David's struggle with Goliath answers to Christ's struggle with Satan. In both cases, it was the enemy's own weapon that was used to destroy him, Hebrews 2:14. Both David and Christ were sent by their father with a message to the brethren. Both were rejected. David was, in a sense, a mediator between the lines of Israel and the Philistines. Christ is the one Mediator between God and man, 1 Timothy 2:5. Matthew considered it of great importance to identify Jesus Christ as the Son of David, a popular designation for the Messiah, and he does so in the very first verse of his gospel.'

Jesus was the 'son of Abraham', Matthew 1:2, in more ways than one.

1. He was the 'seed' of promise, Galatians 3:15-16.
2. He was the legal son and heir through Isaac, son of the free woman, as distinguished from Ishmael, son of the slave woman, Galatians 4:22-31.

3. He was literally descended from Abraham through Mary and her ancestors.

4. He was the antitype of Isaac. As in the case of David, there are also sharp contrasts between the life of Abraham and that of Christ.

Abraham gave up his wife to Abimelech in order to procure his own safety, or so he thought, but Jesus gave Himself up to die for His bride, the church, Genesis 20:2 / Ephesians 5:25.
Gill, in his commentary, says the following.

'Abraham begat Ishmael before Isaac, and others after him, but they are not mentioned because the Messiah was not to spring from any of them, but from Isaac, of whom it is said, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called', Genesis 21:12 and who, as he was a progenitor, so an eminent type of Christ, being Abraham's only beloved son and particularly in the binding, sacrifice and deliverance of him.'
Gill continues in his commentary, says the following.

'The genealogy of Christ proceeds from Isaac, in the line of Jacob, Matthew 1:2. Isaac begat Esau, as well as Jacob, and they two were twins, but one was loved, and the other hated, therefore no mention is made of Esau. He had no concern in the Messiah, nor was he to spring from him, but from Jacob, or Israel, by whose name he is sometimes called, Isaiah 49:3.
Gill continues in his commentary, says the following.

'The lineage of Christ is carried on from Jacob in the line of Judah, Matthew 1:3. The reason of which is, because it was particularly prophesied that the Messiah, Shiloh, the prince and chief ruler, should be of him, Genesis 49:10 / 1 Chronicles 5:2.'
Gill continues in his commentary, says the following.

'And it is evident beyond all contradiction, that our Lord sprung from his tribe, Hebrews 7:14. The reason why the brethren of Judah, who were eleven in number, are mentioned, when the brethren of Isaac and Jacob are not, is because though the Messiah did not spring from them, yet the promise of him was made to the twelve tribes, who all expected him, and to whom he was sent, and came. These made but one body of men, and therefore, though the Messiah came from the tribe of Judah, yet he is said to be of them all, Romans 9:4.'
Tamar, Matthew 1:3, is remembered for having been twice the daughter-in-law of Judah and later, by means of deception, his wife also, Genesis 38:12-26. Ram Matthew 1:3-4 is the same as 'Arni', as Luke records, Luke 3:33. Rahab, Matthew 1:5, was the Gentile woman who helped the Israelite spies out of the window in Jericho and later became a Jewish proselyte, Joshua 2 / Joshua 6:22-23 / James 2:8-11 / Hebrews 11:31. Ruth, Matthew 1:5, was also a Gentile woman who became a Jewish proselyte, Ruth 4.
Notice that Matthew records, 'David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,' Matthew 1:6. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and ordered the murder of her husband Uriah, it would be an event the Jews would want to forget, 2 Samuel 11.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'It is a marvel, in the providence of God, that this guilty and unfortunate wife of Uriah the Hittite should have found a place in the Lord's ancestry; however, her first child was not permitted to live. David's sin with her constitutes one of the saddest events in the Old Testament. Like the two women in Matthew 1:5, she was presumably a Gentile.'
Although Matthew records the names of Joram and Uzziah, Matthew 1:8-9, he omits the kings Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah, 2 Kings 8:24 / 1 Chronicles 3:11 / 2 Chronicles 22:1 / 2 Chronicles 22:11 / 2 Chronicles 24:27, between Joram and Uzziah.

The reason for this omission is probably because he wants to keep the continuity of the 'fourteen generations', Matthew 1:17. Ezra also omits six names from his genealogy, Ezra 7:1-2 / 1 Chronicles 6:6-11. Jeconiah, Matthew 1:11, was a king of Judah, who is also called Coniah, Jeremiah 22:24 / Jeremiah 22:28, and Jehoiachin, Matthew 1:11-12 / 2 Kings 24 / 1 Chronicles 3.

After this king not one of his seeds were to reign legally as a God-anointed king on the literal throne of David in Jerusalem in Palestine as king of Israel, Matthew 1:11-15 / Jeremiah 22:30 / Jeremiah 36:30. Jeconiah was carried into Babylonian captivity in 597 B.C.

The Jews remained in captivity for seventy years and returned to their homeland in three stages. The first group returned in 536 B.C., led by Sheshbazzar, Ezra 1-6; the second group returned in 457 B.C., led by Ezra, Ezra 7-10, and finally, the third group returned in 444 B.C., led by Nehemiah, Nehemiah 1:1-13.

It's interesting to note that Matthew attributes the birth of Jesus to Mary and not Joseph, Matthew 1:16. This is because Joseph had nothing to do with the conception of Jesus because He was born of the Spirit, Matthew 1:18 / Matthew 1:23.

The reason for using the 'fourteen generations', Matthew 1:17, and the omitting of some names, appears to be so that they could easily be memorised by the people, Ezra 7:1-2 / 1 Chronicles 6:6-11.

JOSEPH ACCEPTS JESUS AS HIS SON

'This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.' Matthew 1:18

This verse makes it clear that the birth of Jesus was different from that of any other Jewish boy, Matthew 1:18. Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'Is he not rightly called Wonderful? Infinite and an infant! Eternal, yet born of a woman! Almighty, and yet hanging on a woman's breast! Supporting the universe, yet needing to be carried on a mother's arm! King of Angels, and yet the reputed son of Joseph! Heir of all things, and yet the carpenter's despised son! Wonderful art thou, O Jesus! And that shall be thy name forever?'

There were three steps in a Jewish marriage.

1. Engagement.

2. Betrothal.

This is the ratification of engagement. It could be broken, but once entered, it was binding. It lasted one year, and during that time the couple were known as husband and wife, Matthew 1:19.

Although they did not have the rights of husband and wife, it could not be terminated in any other way but divorce. Unfaithfulness resulted in death, Deuteronomy 22:13-21.

3. Marriage proper.

Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, and in Jewish culture, this was a civil agreement that was just as binding as marriage itself, Deuteronomy 20:7 / Deuteronomy 22:23-24. Before Mary and Joseph had any sexual relations, she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

At the time Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit, she had never had sexual intercourse; she was a virgin. This was nothing less than a miracle, John 1:1 / John 1:14 / Luke 1:31-35. Mary and Joseph would go on to have children of their own after the birth of Christ, but in a natural way, Matthew 13:55 / Mark 6:3.

‘Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’ Matthew 1:19-20

Joseph, her husband to be, but at this moment not legally married to Mary, was a man who was faithful to the law, and when he found out Mary was pregnant, instead of embarrassing her, Matthew 1:19 / Deuteronomy 22:23-24, had in mind to ‘divorce’ her quietly. We must note that the word used for divorce here is the Greek word ‘apoluo’, which means to ‘send away’, Matthew 5:31-32.
The point I’m making is that Mary and Joseph were engaged, not actually married, at this point. In the Jewish culture, they were as good as married, but still not legally married. He had in mind to ‘send Mary away’, Matthew 1:19, not divorce her because he isn’t actually married to her as yet.
He is a noble character who desired to shield Mary and under those circumstances, he needs to be commended for wanting to do so in the way he wants to do it, Proverbs 11:13.
When Joseph was considering sending Mary away, an angel appeared to him, Matthew 1:20, this was possibly Gabriel, Genesis 16:7-9 / Isaiah 63:9 / Daniel 8:16 / Daniel 9:21 / Luke 1:19 / Luke 1:26.
When the angel appeared in his dream, Joseph was obviously afraid and so the angel wanted to calm Joseph’s anxiety, Matthew 1:20. And so, he assured Joseph that God was at work in the conception, Mary wasn’t involved in an adulterous affair, Matthew 1:20. Joseph should now proceed to take Mary as his wife, that is, legally get married to her.

‘She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). Matthew 1:21-23

Something to keep in mind is that most people don’t name their children until they know what sex the child is. They didn’t have six-week scans, etc., back then, like we do today to find out the sex of a baby before it’s born. Both Mary and Joseph are told not only what sex the child will be but what to name Him, Matthew 1:21 / Luke 1:30-33.
The child inside of Mary was a boy, and His name was to be Jesus, Matthew 1:21 / Matthew 1:1 / Luke 1:31 / Luke 2:21, which means ‘the Lord is salvation’. Jesus wasn’t an unusual name among the Jews; in fact, it was quite common.
But what was unusual was this Jesus’s mission, even before He was born. Most parents have dreams and aspirations for their children; they want them to grow up to do great things. And Mary and Joseph are no exception; however, at this point in time, they have no idea just how great this child was going to become.

Because even before Jesus was born, we are told as to why He was coming into the world. Not for secular reasons, not for political reasons, but for redemptive reasons, He came to save the world from its sins, Matthew 1:21.
Why did God plan for Jesus to be born like this? Why couldn’t He just shout from the clouds how He wanted people to be saved from their sins? God made the salvation of the world personal, John 3:16; there had to be a sacrifice for sin, 1 John 4:10.
Jesus came with the purpose of dying in our place because it was the only way that we can be saved from our sins and receive forgiveness for our sins, Luke 2:11 / Luke 19:10 / John 1:29 / Acts 4:12 / Acts 5:31 / Acts 13:23.
The prophet in question is the prophet Isaiah, Matthew 1:22 / Isaiah 7:14-15. The Son of God was to be born of a virgin, Matthew 1:23, and so He would be the fulfilment of the prophecy we looked at earlier in Genesis 3:15. The reason God came to earth in the form of Jesus is that God wanted to live with us; that’s what Immanuel means, ‘God with us’, Matthew 1:23.

It doesn't mean God WAS with us or God WILL BE with us, it means God IS WITH us, or to use it as Isaiah meant it to be used, God in the flesh. This beautiful prophecy not only reveals the virgin birth but also sets forth the dual nature of Christ. His name means God with us, but His diet is that of a man, 'curds and honey', Isaiah 7:14-15.

'When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.' Matthew 1:24-25

I'm sure the local gossips would have been talking about them both and telling everyone this baby boy looks nothing like his father, Joseph. And I'm sure there would have been neighbours who, by doing their calculations, worked out how many months pregnant Mary was and the date Mary and Joseph got married. There were no DNA tests back then, but that result would have been interesting.

But Joseph, like Mary, demonstrated great faith in doing everything God asked them to do, Matthew 1:24 / Luke 1:38. The Catholic Church believe that Mary was a virgin all her life and all her children were miraculously conceived.
But notice that Joseph had no sexual relations until AFTER Jesus was born, Matthew 1:25, that word 'until' implies that he did afterwards. And we know he did afterwards because Matthew 13:55-56 / Mark 6:3 gives us the names of four of Jesus' brothers and even mentions His sisters.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

'After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Matthew 2:1-2

The chronological order before the Magi visit Jesus is as follows. An angel told Mary while she was in Nazareth that she would give birth to a child who would save His people, Luke 1:26-28.
Jesus was born, wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger, Luke 2:6-7. We know that the angels appeared to the shepherds while they were in the field tending their sheep, Luke 2:8-20.

THE MAGI VISIT THE MESSIAH

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Matthew 2:1 / Judges 17:9 / Judges 19:1 / 1 Samuel 17:12 / Micah 5:2. The name Bethlehem means 'place of bread', which is significant since Jesus later would declare that 'I am the bread of life', John 6:35.
Bethlehem was around five miles south of Jerusalem. David, the king of Israel, was born in Bethlehem, and so, this city was referred to as 'the city of David', 1 Samuel 16:1 / 1 Samuel 16:19.

At the time of the decree of Augustus Caesar, Joseph and Mary were living in Nazareth, Luke 1:26-27 / Luke 2:1-5. And so, they made the long journey to Bethlehem of Judea, not Bethlehem in Zebulun, Joshua 19:15, in obedience to the law of Augustus.

There are a lot of theories concerning the date of Jesus' birth, and it's here in Matthew where we find the closest reference we can actually find. Matthew says that Jesus was born 'during the time of King Herod', Matthew 2:1. Herod the Great was the son of Antipater, an Idumean and descendant of Esau. He was proud, cruel, bloodthirsty and unmerciful as a ruler of the Jews, Acts 12:1-3. Herod the Great, as he was called, cruelly reigned from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. according to our calendar today.

And so this establishes the date of the birth of Jesus about two years earlier than 4 B.C., for Herod had sent out a decree before his death to kill all children under two years of age, Matthew 2:16. But knowing the exact date of Jesus' birth isn't important; what is important is that He was born.

These magi, Matthew 2:1, were possibly Gentile astronomers from Arabia, Persia, Parthia, or even India. And unlike most of the nativity plays we see today, where they always have three wise men, we actually don't know how many there were. I guess most people presume three because there were three gifts, Matthew 2:11, but we simply don't know.

Some translations use the words 'wise men' which is the Greek word for 'magi', Matthew 2:1. We can imagine the truly wise of all ages are indeed those who bow down and worship the Lord Jesus Christ, Matthew 2:11.

But the fact that these wise men came from a great distance to see Jesus indicates that they had possibly received a revelation of some kind concerning the birth of Jesus.

Now, isn't it interesting that the Old Testament opens with a question when God is seeking man, He asks in Genesis 3:9, 'Adam, where are you?' The New Testament opens with a question when man is seeking God, and man asks, 'Where is the one?' Where is which one? The magi say, 'the one born to be king of the Jews,' Matthew 2:2.

The Jews hoped that the Messiah would come into the world. It was believed by many that the Messiah would supposedly reign as king on earth and restore the nation of Israel to its former glory.

But as the Jews were soon going to discover, not this King, His reign and rule and His kingdom were going to be spiritual, not physical, John 3:3-7/ John 18:36 / Colossians 1:13-14.

And so the magi say, 'we saw his star', Matthew 2:2. This star the magi saw was not a natural phenomenon; this star was a miraculous signal sent by God to the Magi to alert them of the birth of the Messiah for whom they hoped. And there is a possibility that this was a fulfilment of prophecy, but we can't be certain, Numbers 24:17. We don't have to be dogmatic about what this star was or what it looked like, but we mustn't lose sight of who this star is hovering over, Jesus, the King of the Jews.

> 'When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." Matthew 2:3-8

On hearing the news of the birth of the Messiah, not only was Herod disturbed, but so was all of Jerusalem, Matthew 2:3.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'Herod's trouble was jealousy and rage, a rage that would finally vent itself in the slaughter of the innocents. Well, also, might the city of Jerusalem have been troubled with such a man upon the throne.'

It's very obvious that Herod didn't want a rival king in his kingdom, and so his pride and arrogance moved him to scheme against any possible contender for the crown.

Herod may have been ignorant of the prophecy of Micah 5:1-2, which spoke of Bethlehem as the place of the birth of the Messiah. But he went ahead and called a meeting with the chief priests and the teachers of the law, Matthew 2:4.
The chief priests were the principal leaders of the Jewish religious system who were in charge of the temple, 1 Chronicles 24:6 / 2 Chronicles 34:13 / Malachi 2:7.
The teachers of the law were the educated men of the Jewish law and it was their responsibility to preserve and interpret the Old Testament law for the people, Ezra 7:6 / Matthew 23:34 / Luke 10:25 / Acts 5:34.
Herod has probably heard over and over again talk about a coming Messiah, and so he wanted to know where this Messiah was to be born, Matthew 2:4 / Jeremiah 23:5 / Jeremiah 30:9 / Zechariah 9:9 / Matthew 27:11 / John 1:49 / John 18:37 / Luke 19:38 / Luke 23:38.
The chief priests and teachers of the law more or less say to Herod, 'O King, we don't really know anything about it, but there is, it so happens, a verse in one of the prophecies that speaks of the birth of the Messiah, and that says it is to take place in Bethlehem,' Matthew 2:5-6.
Herod appears to be interested in going to worship Jesus and tells the magi to go to Bethlehem and report back to him, Matthew 2:7-8. But as we know, it was not Herod's plan to worship, but to destroy the newly born child whom he saw as a possible competitor for his throne. He knew the birthplace, he thought he knew the child's age, and he only needed to find out the exact location of the Christ in order to kill him, Matthew 2:16.

> 'After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.' Matthew 2:9-10

It's obvious here that the star in question was miraculous in nature because it appears again, Matthew 2:9. And it appears here for the second time to make it possible for the Magi to find the baby without drawing attention to the birthplace by making inquiries.
And notice this time, the star came and stopped over the place where Jesus was, Matthew 2:9. And what was the outcome of them seeing the star again and it stopping? It was pure joy; there is always joy when we come to meet Jesus, Matthew 2:10.

> 'On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.' Matthew 2:11-12

By the time the magi had arrived, Jesus had been moved from a manger, Luke 2:6-7, into a house, Matthew 2:11. We don't know how old Jesus would be at this point in time, but He would only be a few weeks old at the most.
Notice 'they bowed down and worshipped him,' Matthew 2:11; they didn't bow down and worship Mary or Joseph, but Jesus. Jesus is always the main focus of our worship, and it's to Him that every knee in heaven and earth and every demon in hell will have to bow down to one day, Romans 14:11 / Philippians 2:10.
It was a custom of the Orient to bring gifts to a newborn, and such gifts were commonly given to those who were considered noble. Some commentators believe that the three gifts symbolised the three works of Jesus, that is, His kingship, His divinity, and His sufferings.

GOLD

The gift of gold, Matthew 2:11, would certainly provide money for the flight to Egypt, which is going to happen soon. The buildings and treasures of kings and pharaohs from the ancient past have left reminders that gold was the prize of rulers and kings.
Men such as King Solomon and King Nebuchadnezzar treasured gold. We know that while gold can be a gift for anyone, gold was a gift, especially for kings, Isaiah 60:6.

FRANKINCENSE

Frankincense, Matthew 2:11, was an incense that was made from the sap of a tree that grew both in Arabia and India. Frankincense was once greatly valued throughout the Middle East, from Rome to India.
It was very expensive and a gift with a wonderful fragrance; it was used for a variety of purposes, such as incense, medical treatment, and perfume. It was used in worship, and so frankincense speaks of the worship of God, Exodus 30:34-36 / Leviticus 2:1 / Numbers 16:1-50.

MYRRH

The myrrh, Matthew 2:11, was also a perfume that was made from the sap of a tree, and although it was less expensive than frankincense, it was still highly valued.
Myrrh was used for a variety of purposes, such as perfume, Esther 2:12, an anaesthetic, and burial embalming, and it was used as an ingredient in anointing oil, Exodus 30:23, and to deodorise clothes. We also know that John 19:39 records that myrrh was used in Jesus' burial. In the New Testament, myrrh is primarily associated with death.
We cannot come to worship Jesus without giving. Those who worship Christ give, and those who don't or won't give do not worship either. In other words, true worship simply can't exist if there is no sacrifice, Romans 12:1-2.
In everything surrounding the birth of Jesus, God was directing the movements of the Magi in order that they not be discovered by Herod. God warned them in a dream, Matthew 2:12, and they listened, which means the wise men refused to cooperate with Herod, and that was punishable by death.
Dreams were often a vehicle of revelation among the Hebrews, and they were considered inferior to visions but often played a vital role in protecting the chosen people, Genesis 37/ Genesis 41 / Daniel 7 / Matthew 27:19. Interpretation of dreams always belonged to God alone, Genesis 40:8 / Genesis 41:16 / Daniel 1:17.
But as we know God doesn't operate through dreams and visions today. God used to speak through the prophets, He used to speak through visions and dreams, but now He speaks through Jesus, Hebrews 1:1-2.
Notice that the magi returned by another route, Matthew 2:12, which is what God offers all to come to Him in worship. The new and better route is that route through Jesus, a route where sinners don't have to live in sin anymore without any hope for eternal life in heaven, Matthew 7:13 / John 14:6 / Hebrews 10:19-25.

THE ESCAPE TO EGYPT

'When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he

got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." Matthew 2:13-15

As Egypt wasn't under the jurisdiction of Herod, an angel, possibly Gabriel again, tells Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt because Herod was planning to kill Jesus, Matthew 2:13.
This was a journey of around forty miles. And so, Mary and Joseph were told to stay in Egypt until Herod had died, Matthew 2:14. This would be on April 1st, 4 B.C.
Just as God called his 'son' Israel out of Egypt when they were released from slavery, Exodus 4:22-23 / Numbers 24:7-8 / Numbers 24:17, so now God calls His Son Jesus out of Egypt, Matthew 2:15, as Hosea had prophesied, Hosea 11:1.

'When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." Matthew 2:16-18

After realising that the magi had tricked him, Herod became furious and then proceeded to order that all babies two years of age and under were to be killed in Bethlehem and the vicinity, Matthew 2:16.
This tells us that Jesus was born at least within the two-year period before Herod's death on April 1st, 4 B.C. Pharaoh ordered the murder of all male Israelite babies when the Israelites were becoming too numerous in Egypt, Exodus 1:15-22.
Macrobius, who was a fourth-century historian, referred to the slaughter of those children and affirmed that Herod's own son was among the slain, hence a proverb that arose, 'It is better to be Herod's hog than his son.'

Clarke, in his commentary, concerning this saying, says the following.

'The point of this saying consists in this, that Herod, professing Judaism, his religion forbade his killing swine, or having any thing to do with their flesh; therefore his hog would have been safe, where his son lost his life.'

Jeremiah's prophecy Matthew 2:17-18, was of the Israelites who were carried away to the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah 31:15. The second fulfilment of the prophecy is here realised in the death of the babies of Bethlehem, Matthew 2:16. Rachel was the mother of Benjamin, Matthew 2:18, and she was the wife of Jacob whose tomb was in Ramah near Bethlehem, Genesis 35:16-19.

THE RETURN TO NAZARETH

'After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.' Matthew 2:19-23

After Herod's death, an angel of the Lord appeared again in a dream to Joseph and tells him to take Mary and Jesus to the land of Israel, Matthew 2:19-20 / Matthew 1:24 / Luke 2:39. It was now safe to return because those who were trying to take Jesus' life were now dead, Matthew 2:20.
When Herod died, Augustus Caesar of Rome divided his kingdom among Herod's three sons, Philip, Herod Antipas and Archelaus. Philip and Antipas received Galilee and Perea, and Archelaus received Judea, Idumea and Samaria.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'This Archelaus was as cruel as his father Herod the Great, but without any of his greatness. "A man of kindred nature, suspicious, truculent (Josephus, Antiquities, 17,11,2), to be feared and avoided by such as had cause to fear his father.'

Poole, in his commentary, says the following.

'His brother Herod Antipas is reported of a much milder disposition, and more inactive temper. So Joseph, not without the direction of God, goeth into his own province, which was Galilee.'

Understandably, Joseph was frightened to go to Judea because Archelaus Matthew 2:22, had a reputation for being ruthless; hence, why Rome itself got rid of him in A.D. 6. He is warned in a dream once again and goes to the district of Galilee and lives in Nazareth, Matthew 2:23.
There was nothing special about Nazareth, and at this time it was known as a place of contempt, John 1:46 / John 7:52. It was the place where Joseph was raised, John 1:45-46, and some suggest that Mary was raised there too, Luke 1:26-27. We do know that Jesus was raised as a child there and grew in wisdom and stature, Luke 2:40 / Luke 2:52.
To be a Nazirite meant that a person would commit themselves to a special vow of consecration, Numbers 6:1-21. However, no recorded prophet mentions that Jesus would be called a Nazarite, but this is mentioned to tell us of Jesus' humble beginnings, Isaiah 11:1 / Isaiah 53:1-4.
The town of Nazareth was named after the Nazarites, and so, because Jesus lived there, He was called a 'Nazarene', Matthew 2:23 / Mark 1:24 / Acts 22:8 / Acts 24:5.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

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

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

The events written here are some twenty-nine years after what is recorded in the first two chapters of Matthew, Mark 1:1-8 / Luke 3:1-18. John the Baptist, Matthew 3:1, was Jesus' cousin, the son of the priest, Zacharias and his mother was Elizabeth, 1 Chronicles 24:10 / Mark 1:2-8 / Luke 1:5.
Zacharias and Elizabeth were both very old, and Elizabeth was unable to conceive, Luke 1:7. John's birth was nothing less than miraculous. He preached in the wilderness of Judea, Judges 1:16 / Joshua 15:61 / Luke 1:80 / Luke 3:2.
Referring to the coming of the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah had also said, 'The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His Temple', Isaiah 40:3. And look who it is who's coming, is to be announced! Four hundred years had passed since Malachi made that prediction, Malachi 3:1.

Four hundred years during which the Jews had been waiting for and looking for the coming of the Messiah. But there had been four hundred years of silence. It was even longer because it was seven hundred years since Isaiah had spoken about the coming of 'The Messenger', Isaiah 40:3, but the time had now come.
John is preaching the kingdom of God, Matthew 3:1-2. What does that mean? By the way, unless you look closely at Malachi's prophecy, you will miss something which is most important, Malachi 3:1.
The prophecy speaks of someone called 'my messenger', that is, God's Messenger. It also speaks of 'the messenger of the covenant', Malachi 3:1. That's two people. One is the messenger who prepares the way, that is, John.
In Matthew 11:14, Jesus tells us that 'HE (John) is Elijah who was to come!' The other is the messenger for whom the way is prepared, the bearer of the New Covenant? It is Jesus.
Matthew sums up the mission of John in one word: the word 'repent', Matthew 3:2 / Luke 3:3 / Luke 13:3 / Acts 3:19 / 2 Corinthians 7:10. John has a message concerning the kingdom of God, Matthew 3:2 / Isaiah 2:2-3 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14 / Matthew 11:11 / Matthew 19:23.
John came to 'prepare', Matthew 3:3, a people, but not for the purpose that the people imagined! He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, which says, 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him,' Matthew 3:3 / Isaiah 40:3.
For centuries, they had prayed for His coming; they believed that when the Messiah came, he would drive out the unclean Gentile Romans who were walking the holy streets of Jerusalem.

They believed that the Messiah would establish a kingdom that would bring back the glorious days of Solomon. The result was that when Jesus came, they failed to recognise Him and they rejected Him, John 10:22-42.
I know this shocks us, but perhaps we should not be too shocked because after all, John himself did not recognise Jesus at first! Only at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, did John realise who it was whom he had baptised! Matthew 3:13-17 / Luke 3:21-22.
And even then, when he was in prison, he expresses a troublesome doubt when he sends two messengers to Jesus with a question, 'Are you truly the one who was to come, or should we look for someone else?' Luke 7:20.

'John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.' Matthew 3:4-6

John's clothing and the food he ate, Matthew 3:4 / Leviticus 11:22, demonstrated humility, self-sacrifice and self-denial, 2 Kings 1:8 / Matthew 3:4 / Matthew 17:9-13.
People would come from all around to hear him preach, and after being convicted of their sinfulness, they would confess their sins and be baptised in the Jordan River, Matthew 3:5-6 / John 3:23.
John's baptism, though it required repentance, Acts 19:4, looked forward to the coming of the One for whom John was a forerunner, that is, Jesus. Jesus had not yet died when John baptised people, and so, John's baptism of preparation was looking forward to Jesus' death, Matthew 3:3 / John 19:30.
This shows that John's baptism cannot be the baptism which Jesus commanded people to receive under the Gospel, Mark 16:15-16 / Matthew 28:18-20.

'But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."' Matthew 3:7-12

We should understand that Matthew's record is a very abbreviated account of John's ongoing ministry. Vast multitudes were pursuing John as he preached in 'the wilderness of Judea,' Matthew 3:1 / Matthew 3:5.
Some in the crowd were sincere; they confessed their sins and were immersed by John in the Jordan, Matthew 3:6.
Others, quite obviously, were caught up in the emotionalism of the occasion.
Among these were Sadducees, Matthew 3:7, those who didn't believe in angels or the resurrection of the dead, Matthew 22:23-34 / Acts 4:1-2 / Acts 23:6-8. The Pharisees, Matthew 3:7, were those who were obsessed with traditions, Matthew 15:1-9 / Matthew 23 / Mark 7:1-9 / Mark 8:11-15 / Luke 11:52 / Luke 18:9-15.
John characterised these Jews as 'a brood of vipers,' who would be advised to 'flee from the wrath that is to come', Matthew 3:7. This possibly has a more immediate reference to the destruction of Jerusalem.
They didn't produce any fruit worthy of repentance, Matthew 3:8 / Acts 26:20 / Luke 17:4, and because they claimed that Abraham was their father, they thought this gave them special privileges, as God's children, Matthew 3:9 / Genesis 12:1-3 / John 8:33 / John 8:39.
They didn't understand that a real Jew, a son of Abraham was by faith, not genealogies, Matthew 8:11-12 / John 8:31-41 / Romans 2:28-29 / Romans 8:28-29 / Romans 4:1-5 / Romans 9:6-11 / Galatians 3:26-29.
The reference to 'even now the axe lies at the root of the trees,' Matthew 3:10, may possibly be speaking about the final day of human reckoning, Matthew 3:12. Notice that 'every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire,' Matthew 3:10.
The promise, 'he shall baptise you in the Holy Spirit and fire,' Matthew 3:11, has reference to the apostles. The Saviour's testimony in Acts 1 establishes this, 'For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit,' Acts 1:5.
It can hardly be denied that there is a connection between Acts 1:5, and Matthew 3:11. The promise was fulfilled on Pentecost when the apostles received an 'overwhelming' measure of the Spirit's power, Acts 2:1-4.
But what is the significance of the 'fire' in John's statement? Matthew 3:11. The immediate context would suggest that it is an allusion to the final fate of the wicked.
At the conclusion of Matthew 3:12, John continues, concerning Jesus, and says, 'His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'
Why should the 'fire' of Matthew 3:11 be viewed as something different from that referenced in Matthew 3:10 and Matthew 3:12, without some sort of compelling justification?
John's message focused on two themes that will help us get ready to receive Christ.

1. He preached about repentance.

To repent means to decide to change, to reconsider, Luke 3:3 / Luke 13:3 / Acts 3:19 / 2 Corinthians 7:10. John was telling his hearers that they had to reverse their life's direction to get ready for Christ. Those who are unwilling to change cannot come to Him.
2. John declared the greatness of Jesus.

He said Jesus was so great that he himself was 'not even worthy to stoop down and untie His shoes', Mark 1:1-8.
This was an amazing declaration because one does not have to have much worth to untie somebody's shoes.
In fact, in John's day, untying shoes was considered to be a slave's lowest duty. John wasn't worthy to be Jesus' humblest slave! So, for us to be ready to receive Jesus, we must repent, change our lives, and recognise His awesome greatness.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

'Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' Matthew 3:13-17

The Lord's baptism was an important event in His life. We need to understand that it wasn't something that He accepted casually. On the contrary, it was an act about which He had clearly given deep thought. How do we know this?

We know this because He made a special journey in order to be baptised. The Lord travelled 'from Galilee to Jordan', Matthew 3:13, to John, for a specific purpose, namely, 'to be baptised by him', Matthew 3:13.
This means that His baptism was an event which He obviously regarded as of deep significance. Indeed, it isn't too much to say that His baptism was only equalled in its importance by His later Transfiguration.

Matthew reveals that when Jesus took Peter, James and John 'apart' to the high mountain, this, too, was a deliberate and purposeful act. He had chosen these three apostles to become the witnesses of a very special event, as He was 'transfigured before them', Matthew 17:2.
They were meant to hear the Voice which said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him' and as we know, this was the Voice which, at His baptism, had said, 'this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' Matthew 13:17 / Matthew 17:5 / John 12:28-30.
The timing of the Lord's baptism was deliberate. Luke tells us that it was after 'all the people' had been baptised that Jesus came to John to be baptised, Luke 3:21. John had come as the 'forerunner' of the Messiah, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, Malachi 3:1.
His task was 'to make ready a people prepared for the Lord', Matthew 3:3, and the baptism of Jesus marked the culmination of John's own ministry, and he was able to say, 'this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, and I must decrease,' John 3:30.
It was a special message to John the baptiser, but in a lesser sense, the baptism of Jesus also carried a more personal significance for John the Baptiser because it was the manner in which the identity of the Messiah was revealed to him, John 1:33.
Jesus wasn't a stranger to John; he already knew Jesus as a relative because of the relationship that existed between their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, Luke 1:36 / Luke 1:39-45, and he was aware of the sinless character of Jesus. How otherwise, when Jesus asked to be baptised by John, could John try to deter him and say, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?' Matthew 3:14. This surely indicates prior acquaintance.
My own view is that the statement from John wasn't so much a question but more of an exclamation of surprise, of amazement! The one whom he knew to be so holy should request to be baptised by him. But although John knew Jesus, he didn't know Him as the Messiah, until the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism, Luke 3:22 / John 1:32-34.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

1. The dove was a 'clean' creature under the ceremonial laws of the Jews.

2. It was used in their religious sacrifices, two, in fact, being offered upon the presentation of our Lord in the temple, Luke 2:24.
3. It is a monogamous creature! Stayed with the same partner all its life.

4. It is a symbol of peace.

5. It is a marvel of gentleness, love, and affection.

6. It is a messenger; the homing pigeon is a dove.

7. The dove has no gall, suggesting that there is no bitterness in the service of God.

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTISED?

To answer the question as to why Jesus was baptised, we first need to ask, what is meant by 'to fulfil all righteousness'? Matthew 3:15. Although He lived as a Jew, faithful to the Mosaic law and all its requirements, Jesus wasn't baptised 'to fulfil the Law' because baptism wasn't commanded by the Law of Moses.
When John issued the call to his fellow Jews to 'repent and be baptised,' Matthew 3:2 / Mark 1:4, this message was unique in Jewish history. It was this new message that brought about the confrontation between Jesus and the chief priests and elders, Matthew 21:24-27.
This passage tells us that Jesus challenged the religious leaders to say where John's baptism originated. Was it from heaven, or from men? But, of course, had there been a prior provision in the Law of Moses for such a baptism as John's, the discussion would not even have taken place. It was this very uniqueness of John's baptism that was the cause of the debate.

The Jewish religious leaders didn't accept John's baptism because it wasn't a requirement imposed by the Mosaic Law, and, therefore, they refused to submit to it. They were probably intolerant of those who were influenced by John and regarded them as ignorant and foolish.

As for it being 'from God', the religious leaders couldn't accept the baptism commanded by John as a new revelation from God, because it hadn't come through themselves. After all, they were the authorities who determined what was permissible in Judaism! They were the arbiters of true and false revelations!

And again, these priests, scribes and Pharisees would have argued that they, as 'children of Abraham' and members of a nation that was in a covenant relationship with God, didn't need baptism, Matthew 3:7-9.
They believed in the ritual washing of both their persons and their possessions, as Mark explains, Mark 7:3-4. They saw baptism as a rite intended only for non-Jews who wished to become proselytes of their religion.
The strict rule was that any male Gentile who wished to embrace the Jewish faith must undergo first circumcision, then be baptised and then offer a sacrifice, whilst the law for a female declared that she must first be baptised and then offer a sacrifice.

This is because the act of baptism was regarded as the means of cleansing from the old, 'heathen' life and its sins, and the beginning of a new life in the Jewish faith. The converts were then said to be received, 'under the wings of the Divine Presence', the expression that was used to describe proselytism.

These rules meant that no devout Jew would have considered himself a subject for repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, Luke 3:1-6. For this reason, John's message fell on the ears of the people as both utterly new and startling.
In the light of the discussion between Jesus and the Jews on the subject of John's baptism, we have to say that 'to fulfil all righteousness', Matthew 3:15, means 'to do everything commanded by God', because the Lord made it clear that John's baptism was commanded by God, John 1:29-34.

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTISED?

This is an interesting question because many people have come up with all kinds of theories and explanations over the years to try to explain why Jesus was baptised.

JESUS WAS BAPTISED TO PLEASE HIS MOTHER!

Jesus wasn't baptised to please his mother. There is an ancient document known as 'the Gospel of the Nazarene', sometimes called 'The Gospel of the Hebrews', but never regarded by the early Christians as divinely inspired.

This document claims that Mary and His brothers said to Jesus, 'Behold, John the Baptist baptises to the remission of sins. Let us go and be baptised by him. Jesus replied, 'How have I sinned that I should go and be baptised by him? Perchance this very thing that I have said is ignorance.'

The story continues to claim that Jesus was compelled, unwillingly, by Mary to go to John to be baptised. Is it any wonder that the early Christians rejected a document which heard such unlikely tales?

JESUS WASN'T BAPTISED FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS"

Jesus wasn't baptised for the forgiveness of sins, 2 Corinthians 5:21. Unlike the multitudes who flocked to John from all quarters, confessing their sins, Jesus had no sins to confess, Hebrews 4:15 / 1 Peter 2:22.

THE REASON FOR HIS BAPTISM

Jesus was baptised not only 'to fulfil all righteousness', Matthew 3:15, but also to mark the commencement of his own ministry. As the ministry of John ended, the ministry of Jesus began.
After recording the descent of the Spirit and the message of the heavenly voice, Matthew 3:16-17. Luke 3:23 reveals that after His baptism, at about thirty years of age, Jesus commenced His own public ministry.
As a boy in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus had revealed that He was aware of having a mission to fulfil, Luke 2:46-48, and for many years, He waited for the moment to arrive when His work should commence.
The 'forerunner' had come as promised by the Scriptures, Malachi 3:1 / Matthew 11:10, with a message which had disturbed, convicted and prepared the people for the coming of the longed-for Messiah. They were ready, and Jesus knew that His time had arrived.
When He asked John to baptise Him, John had protested, but Jesus had insisted, 'let it be so now', Matthew 3:14-15. The 'now' is emphatic and it means 'at this time'.
Therefore, the baptism of Jesus was both an act of identification with the repentant people whom He had come to save and an act of commitment to the task the Father had laid on Him, John 1:11-12.

Just as Christ received the Holy Spirit to mark the beginning of His ministry, as Christians, we, too, at our baptism, receive the Holy Spirit to mark the beginning of our ministry for Him, Acts 2:38 / Matthew 28:19-20.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

'Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.' Matthew 4:1

JESUS IS TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS

Jesus had just been baptised by John and the 'Spirit of God descending upon Him', Matthew 3:16, and so now, after receiving the Spirit, Jesus is preparing to go about His mission.
This is the way it should be for all Christians. When they receive God's Spirit at baptism, Acts 2:38, they must be willing to get on with the mission of God in sharing the Gospel with others, Matthew 28:19-20.
It's interesting that when God is preparing people to begin a mission, those people usually end up in the wilderness, we see this with Moses, Exodus 3:1, John the baptiser, Mark 1:4, Paul, Galatians 1:17, and here we find Jesus being led into the wilderness, Matthew 4:1.
When most people think of the word 'wilderness' they often think of a barren place where nothing grows, however, the word 'wilderness' often means a place where wild beasts live.

When we read that the 'Spirit led Jesus', Matthew 4:1, we're not to understand this to mean that the Spirit was going to tempt Him, because we know that God doesn't tempt anyone, James 1:13. This simply means that the Holy Spirit led Him to the place where He was going to be tempted.
In Luke's account, he tells us that Jesus was 'full of the Spirit', Luke 4:1, which is a reference to receiving the Spirit at His baptism by John, Matthew 3:16. This also tells us that when He received the Spirit, He was fully equipped to do the work God had prepared for Him to do, Philippians 2:6-8.
The reason for Jesus being led into the wilderness was to be tempted by the devil, Matthew 4:1. Remember, the devil was thrown out of heaven because he wanted to be God, Isaiah 14:12-17 / Revelation 12:7-9.
He is the Christian's enemy, Matthew 13:28 / 2 Timothy 2:26, but his power is limited, 1 Corinthians 10:13. He is the accuser and deceiver of all men, Matthew 13:19 / Luke 22:31 / Ephesians 6:11 / 1 Thessalonians 2:18 / 1 Peter 5:8-9 / Revelation 20:7-10.

'After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.' Matthew 4:2

Jesus is one of only three people in the Scriptures who are recorded to have fasted for forty days and forty nights, Matthew 4:2, the others being Moses, Exodus 34:28 and Elijah, 1 Kings 19:8.
It's not surprising that Jesus was hungry after eating or drinking nothing for forty days and nights, and it's not surprising that Satan would come to Him now when He's at His most vulnerable.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION

'The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Matthew 4:3

The devil is well aware that Jesus is hungry and needs to eat, and so he's about to tempt Jesus in the same way he tempted Eve in the garden, Genesis 3:1-7. He's now going to offer Jesus the lust of the eyes and flesh, and the pride of life, 1 John 2:16.
Notice that the tempter uses the word, 'if', Matthew 4:3. The devil knew who Jesus was, He is the Messiah, and so, he uses the word 'if' to try and place doubt in Jesus' mind as to who He was.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The tempter appeared in this passage as the Lord's antagonist in three different guises, giving rise to the impression that Satan too has a triune nature. Three names characterise Satan in the book of Revelation. He is called the devil, the beast, and the false prophet, Revelation 20:10. He appears in three guises, as a serpent, Revelation 20:2, as a lion, 1 Peter 5:8, and as an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14. This same triple pattern is seen in the temptation of Adam and Eve, through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life, 1 John 2:16. It is noteworthy that the temptation of Christ followed this same three-phase pattern.'
Because the tempter knew that Jesus was hungry, he asked Jesus to turn some stones into bread so that he could have food to eat, Matthew 4:3. The temptation here was for Jesus to perform a miracle so that Jesus could meet one of man's most basic needs, which is hunger.
The tempter wanted Jesus to perform a miracle for Jesus' own personal gain, which would mean Jesus wouldn't be relying on God to meet that basic need, Matthew 6:11 / Matthew 6:25-34, but to become self-reliant.

JESUS' RESPONSE

'Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' Matthew 4:4

Notice how Jesus responds to the tempter, He says 'it is written', Matthew 4:4, which is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, when Israel was reminded not to forget God and what He did for them in bringing them out of Egypt.
This is the way all Christians should respond when they find themselves being tempted: we should respond with the Word of God, Acts 20:32 / 1 Thessalonians 2:13 / 2 Peter 1:3.
Jesus came to give us not only life but life to the full, John 10:10, and whilst we understand that physical life is important, our spiritual life is far more important.
We know we have to eat physical food to help us grow and become healthy people, but we also must feed our souls with God's Word in order for us to grow into healthy Christians, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 / Hebrews 5:11-12 / 2 Peter 3:18.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION

'Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' Matthew 4:5-6

The place where the devil took Jesus next was the holy city of Jerusalem, Matthew 4:5 / Luke 4:9 / Nehemiah 11:1 / Nehemiah 1:18 / Matthew 27:53. Jesus stood on the highest point of the temple, although no one knows exactly where this is located in the temple; we do know that he was facing the Kidron Valley.
The point here is that this place was high enough for someone to jump off to their certain death unless a miracle prevented them from dying. In order to prove that Jesus was God's Son, the devil asks Jesus to throw Himself down, Matthew 4:6.
Notice the word again 'if', and then the devil asks Jesus to perform another miracle to prove who He was. In other words, in this temptation, he's telling Jesus that He could save himself a whole load of time and energy in trying to convince people that He is the Messiah.

If He jumps from this high point and lives, and everyone sees Him, this act within itself will convince everyone that He really is the Messiah. Notice that the devil also quotes Scripture to Jesus to encourage Jesus to jump, Matthew 4:6; his quote is taken from Psalm 91:11-12.

JESUS' RESPONSE

'Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Matthew 4:7

Jesus once again responds to the temptation by saying, 'it is also written', Matthew 4:7. Notice in response to the devil's misquotation or misapplication of the Scripture. Jesus didn't rebuke him for doing so. The reason for this is that the words quoted from Psalm 91:11-12 actually do apply to the Christ.
Jesus didn't reject the temptation to jump from the temple because the devil misquoted the Scriptures; Jesus rejected the temptation because it would have created an unnecessary presumption and would have been testing God, hence why Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16.
If we learn anything from Jesus' response, it is simply this: we must always understand any text in its context before applying it to anything else. If we look at the next two verses, Psalm 91:13-14, they tell us that God would in His work in the life of Jesus, destroy the works of Satan, Luke 10:19 / Romans 16:20 / 1 John 3:8.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION

'Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Matthew 4:8-9

Notice the three places these temptations took place: first, there was the wilderness, Matthew 4:1; then there was the temple, Matthew 4:5; and now we have a very high mountain, Matthew 4:8. It appears that the devil tried to tempt Jesus in three different places and in three different ways.
You will also notice that the devil took Jesus up on a very high mountain, and he took Jesus up to the holy city. This tells us that Jesus purposely permitted the devil to take Him to these places to be tempted because Jesus knew this was the will of God, Luke 22:39-46. How the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour is unknown, Matthew 4:8.
McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

'Christ, in some way unknown to us, was transported through Satanic power to a great eminence where the devil made all the kingdoms of the world to pass in review, as it were, before the mind of Jesus. If they were presented

only to his mental vision, it might have been accomplished by a vivid description, such as Satan is capable of, aided by the excited imagination of Jesus as he looked abroad from the top of the exceeding high mountain.'

The devil tells Jesus that he will give Him all these kingdoms if he bows down and worships him, Matthew 4:9. The temptation here is that Jesus can rule the world with the devil.
However, Jesus knows that the Father had already given all things into His hands, John 13:3 / John 17:2 / Matthew 28:18, and Jesus knew that He was to be King of kings and Lord of lords, 1 Timothy 6:15. When Christ returns, He will then hand over His present kingdom reign to the Father, 1 Corinthians 15:26-28.
It's important to note that the devil is the father of lies, John 8:44, and here, he clearly lies to Jesus because the devil has no control over the kingdoms of the world, although he may use deception to try and rule over them, Luke 4:6.
We know if Jesus had given in to this temptation then Jesus wouldn't have won the kingdoms of the world, but the devil would have won them and God's plan to save the world would have failed just as quickly as it had begun.

JESUS' RESPONSE

'Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'
Matthew 4:10

It was after the devil's third temptation that Jesus commanded him to get away and notice that Jesus calls him Satan, Matthew 4:10. The reason why Jesus calls him Satan is seen in His response, where He quotes Deuteronomy 6:13. Jesus takes that passage of Scripture and includes the worship of Satan.
In other words, Jesus was telling him that it's not only sinful to worship men or women, Matthew 2:11 / Acts 10:26, but it's also sinful to worship Satan and his angels, Revelation 19:10; only God is worthy of our worship, Revelation 4:8-9.

'Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.' Matthew 4:11

Jesus commands the devil to go away, and he obeys, Matthew 4:11, but this wasn't to be for long, he would come at Jesus again very soon, Luke 4:13 / John 14:30. As the devil leaves, angels come to attend to Jesus, Matthew 4:11, they came to attend to His physical needs after fasting for forty days and nights.
The devil's proposal to change stones into bread was as unnecessary as it was sinful. Jesus, who is introduced to us in the very first verse of the New Testament, is introduced as 'the son of Abraham,' Matthew 1:1.
Abraham, if you remember, on Mount Moriah, when he was going to sacrifice his son Isaac, said, 'The Lord will provide!' Genesis 22:14, and the Lord certainly provided for Christ by sending His angels to Jesus to provide for His physical needs. The father was always with His Son, always there to help Him in His hour of need, Matthew 26:53 / Luke 22:43.
As Christians, we all often face temptations, which come at us from all directions and in different forms. The devil loves to dangle in front of us things he knows will be seriously attractive to us. Even though he knows some things won't tempt me, he knows exactly what will tempt me.

In the temptation of Christ, we see the devil tempting Christ in various ways, with various things, but the good news is Christ resisted all those temptations, Hebrews 4:15. We must remember that this event wasn't the only time Christ was tempted, Luke 4:13 / Luke 22:42 / Matthew 26:39 / Hebrews 2:18.

TEMPTATION

The English dictionary defines the word temptation as ‘the desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise.’ Easton’s Bible Dictionary defines the word temptation as ‘solicitation to that which is evil’. What the English dictionary calls something ‘wrong’ or ‘unwise’, the Bible calls ‘evil’. Let’s be clear here: temptation is powerful enough to lead us into sin.

TEMPTATION AND TEST

We should note there is a difference between the word ‘temptation’ and the word ‘test’. Satan is the tempter, not God, Genesis 3:1-6 / Matthew 4:1-11 / James 1:13.
He tempts us to sin and lures us away from God and to bring out the worst in us, but testing is done by God to draw us closer to Him and to bring out the best in us, Genesis 21:1 / Genesis 22:16-18 / James 1:2-4.
The Greek word for tempt, ‘peirazo’ is the same Greek word for test, but we can understand the difference when we look at the context and what the motivation is. Satan ‘tempted’ Jesus in order to draw Him away from the Father, but God allowed Jesus to be ‘tested’ in order to allow Jesus to exercise His free will. His choice was to follow His Father’s will or follow Satan’s will.

We should be encouraged in knowing that Jesus experienced temptation as we all do, and so He is more than capable of empathising with us when we face our temptations, Hebrews 4:15.
We should also be encouraged in knowing that He overcame those temptations, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and we too can overcome our temptations, 1 Corinthians 10:13.
We must remember that it’s not sinful to be tempted; it’s sinful when we yield to those temptations. Doing what pleases God, as Jesus did when He was baptised, doesn’t exempt anyone from temptation, but Satan often intensifies his efforts when a person begins to serve God.

Knowing the Scriptures is really important for the Christian because we hear all kinds of texts being taken out of context to promote some kind of theory or belief.

We must be aware of what the Scriptures actually say when someone comes along and tries to teach us something ‘new,’ 2 Timothy 4:3-4 / Romans 16:17-18 / Revelation 22:18-19.

JESUS BEGINS TO PREACH

‘When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. From that time on, Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Matthew 4:12-17

Most commentators suggest that a year has passed since Matthew 4:11, hence why Matthew doesn’t record the events of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, John 1:43 / John 2:3 / John 4:1-43.

When Jesus heard about John's imprisonment, Matthew 4:12 / Matthew 14:1-13 / Mark 1:14 / Luke 3:20, He left Galilee, Matthew 4:12 / Mark 1:14-15 / Luke 4:14-15. He now goes to live in Capernaum, Matthew 4:13 / Matthew 9:1-9 / Matthew 11:23 / Matthew 17:24 / Mark 1:21 / Mark 7:1-2 / John 6:59, to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah, Matthew 4:14 / Isaiah 8:22 / Isaiah 9:1-2.

Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew all lived in Capernaum, and it would be Capernaum who would reject Christ and be denounced by him, Matthew 11:23.

It be would here that the people who lived in darkness would see a great light, Matthew 4:15-16 / Isaiah 9:1-2, that is, Jesus and the good news He brings, John 1:4-9.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning 'the shadow of death'.

'In the shadow of death is an expression that occurs several times in the Old Testament: Job 10:21 / Psalms 23:4 / Jeremiah 2:6. In this place, it is only a further reference to the moral and spiritual condition of the people of Galilee.'

Jesus' message was simple, 'repent', Matthew 3:2 / Luke 13:3, 'for the kingdom of heaven has come near'. Jesus is speaking of the spiritual kingdom of God, Matthew 4:17 / Isaiah 2:2-3 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14 / Matthew 11:11 / Matthew 19:23, which is about to come, Matthew 4:17 / Mark 9:1. He wants the people to start living out God's will in their lives, Matthew 6:9-10 / Luke 17:20-21.

JESUS CALLS HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

'As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once, they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.' Matthew 4:18-22

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, it was here He called His first disciples, Matthew 4:18 / Mark 1:16-20 / Luke 5:1-11.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE CALLING

The apostle John records who the first five people were called to follow Jesus. John and Andrew were the initial two people called to be disciples by Christ, John 1:35-39.

Then came Peter, also called Simon or Simon Peter, John 1:40-42, followed by Philip, John 1:43-44, and then Nathanael, Bartholomew, John 1:45. The book of Matthew then records that James, a son of Zebedee and brother of John, was called, Matthew 4:21-22, followed by Matthew's own calling, Matthew 9:9.

THE RABBI DISCIPLE SYSTEM

Every young Jewish boy grew up wanting to be a rabbi, and every young Jewish boy and girl would at least go to an elementary school called Bet Sefer, that is, 'House of the Book'.

Their job was to memorise the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, what we would call the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

And the best of the best would be able to graduate and go on to the next school of learning, a type of secondary school called Bet Talmud, or 'House of Learning', and their job was to memorise the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

From there, the best of the best of that group would be allowed to apply to Bet Midrash, or 'House of Seeking', which was a type of school for would-be rabbis. A student would find a rabbi that he respected, someone that he wanted to be like, and he would say to that rabbi, 'Rabbi, I want to follow you.'

Now the rabbi's job was to question the would-be disciple to seek to determine, not whether or not he knew the Scriptures, but whether or not he could imitate his teachings, become like him, and pass on his way of life.

And if the student could answer the rabbi's questions to his liking, then he would say to his student, 'Come follow me.' And these are the words that every student longed to hear. And he would leave behind his family, his job, his vocation, and he would go and become a disciple of that rabbi.

Now, if the student didn't quite make the cut, the rabbi would say, 'Ah, my son, you know the Torah, you know the teaching well, but I'm afraid that you cannot be my disciple, go home, make babies, and pray that they become rabbis.'

The very fact that these men were fishermen shows that they were not the best of the best, and they did not make the cut. So, when Jesus, a respected teacher of the law, a teacher of God's Word, comes along and says, 'Come follow me', they could hardly believe it, and so they leave everything behind. Jesus was inviting them to become like Him.

SIMON PETER

Peter was a Galilean fisherman who lived on the shores of the Sea of Galilee with his wife, his brother Andrew and his mother-in-law. People at the time worked as a family unit, so the men and women of Peter's family worked together to catch and preserve dry fish for export to the surrounding towns.

This particular family was probably in partnership with Zebedee and his sons, James and John, Matthew 4:21. Like his father and brother Andrew, Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade, working on the Lake of Galilee. His family seems to have been caught up in the revival movement led by John the Baptist.
Peter met Jesus at Bethany through his brother Andrew and was immediately impressed. Jesus called him 'Peter', the rock, an odd choice of name since Peter seems to have been passionate and impulsive rather than rock-like. Jesus actually called Peter 'Cephas', which is the Aramaic equivalent of 'Petros', a rock, John 1:40-42.

ANDREW

The name Andrew is a Greek name which means 'manly' or 'of valour.' Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter and the son of Jonah. He was born in Bethsaida in the province of Galilee and was a fisherman like his brother Peter.

Before he met Jesus, Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. However, when John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, he realised that Jesus was greater and immediately left John, found his brother Peter and became a disciple of Jesus, John 1:25-42.

After this, Andrew and Peter continued to be fishermen and lived at home until being called permanently by Jesus to be 'fishers of men,' Mark 1:16-20 / Luke 5:2-11 / John 1:40-42.
Later, when Jesus is teaching the multitudes on the mountainside, he asks Philip where they could find food to feed the crowd, and Philip says, 'eight months' wages could not buy enough bread' to feed them.

It was Andrew who brought the boy with five barley loaves and two fish to Jesus, who miraculously multiplied them into enough food to feed everyone. John 6:8-9.
And it was Andrew who, during the Passover Feast, brought a group of Greek Gentiles to meet Jesus, which prompts Jesus to remark, 'when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to myself,' John 12:20-32. Andrew knew that Jesus came not only to save Israel but also everyone on the earth.
The last time Andrew is mentioned in the Bible is in Acts 1, where he is listed as one of the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and His ascension into Heaven, Acts 1:13.
Because they were fishermen, who were used to fishing for fish, Jesus tells them He will make them fishers of men, Matthew 4:18-19 / Mark 1:16-20 / Luke 5:2-11 / John 1:40-42. They will preach the Good News and share it with others, in order that those they teach will become followers of Christ, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16.

JAMES, SON OF ZEBEDEE

The apostle James was honoured with a favoured position by Jesus Christ, as one of three men in his inner circle. The others were James' brother John and Simon Peter, Matthew 4:18-19.
When Jesus called the brothers, James and John, they were fishermen with their father Zebedee on the Sea of Galilee. They immediately left their father and their business to follow the young rabbi. James was probably the older of the two brothers because he was always mentioned first.

Three times, James, John, and Peter were invited by Jesus to witness events no one else saw: the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead, Mark 5:37-47, the transfiguration, Matthew 17:1-3, and Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:36-37.
But James wasn't above making mistakes. When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, he and John wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the place. This earned them the nickname 'Boanerges,' or 'sons of thunder.' Mark 3:17. The mother of James and John also overstepped her bounds by asking Jesus to grant her sons special positions in his kingdom. Matthew 20:20.
James' zeal for Jesus resulted in his being the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred. He was killed with the sword on the order of King Herod Agrippa I of Judea, about 44 A.D., in the general persecution of the early church. Acts 12:1-2.

JOHN, SON OF ZEBEDEE

John was the brother of the apostle James, and he was also the son of Zebedee, a fisherman of Galilee. His mother's name was Salome, who is believed to be the sister of Jesus' mother, Mary.

John, his brother James and the apostles Peter and Andrew were all partners in a fishing business prior to their calls by Jesus to follow Him; Zebedee was also a partner.

It is said that John owned a home in Jerusalem and that it's possible that the interview Nicodemus had with Jesus was held there. John, with his brother James, wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the place; this earned them the nickname 'Boanerges,' or 'sons of thunder,' Mark 3:17.
The apostle John rose to a position of influence within worldwide Christianity, and shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., he moved to Ephesus.

He became the elder of the church in Ephesus and had a special relationship with other churches in the area, as we know from the letters to the seven churches in Asia, in the Book of Revelation, Revelation 2-3.
John's brother, James, was the first of the apostles to die; on the other hand, John was the last. All of the apostles met a violent death; however, John died peacefully in Ephesus, at an advanced age around the year 100 AD. There is a church tradition which says that while John was living in Ephesus, he had with him Mary, the mother of Jesus, for a few years.

While in Ephesus, by order of the Roman emperor Domitian, John was exiled to an island called Patmos, Revelation 1:9, in what is known as the cave of the Apocalypse, located on this island, the sacred text of the book of Revelation was given to the apostle John by Jesus. It's here that John recorded what is written in the New Testament Book of Revelation, Revelation 1:9.
Other New Testament books accredited to John are the Gospel of John, along with 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. When he was released from exile, he returned to Ephesus and lived till the time of the Roman emperor Trajan.

It's said that John, who founded and built churches throughout all of Asia and was worn out by old age, died at the age of sixty-eight years after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city, Ephesus.

THEY LEFT EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW JESUS

Peter and Andrew dropped their nets and followed Jesus, Matthew 4:20. James and John left their nets and their father and followed Jesus, too, Matthew 4:21-22. Think about this, they left their jobs, their family and their comforts immediately to follow Jesus, Matthew 10:37-39 / Mark 10:28 / Luke 9:23.
What does Jesus' choosing of Peter, Andrew, James and John tell us about the character of a person who can take Jesus to the world? They all had their strengths and weaknesses; they were ordinary people who weren't highly educated.

JESUS HEALS THE SICK

'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them.' Matthew 4:23-24

As Jesus went through Galilee, he was teaching in their synagogues, Matthew 4:23 / Ezra 8:1, and preaching the good news about the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 4:23 / Matthew 9:23 / Matthew 13:54 / Matthew 26:55 / Mark 1:21 / Mark 6:2 / Luke 22:53 / John 6:59 / John 18:20.
He healed many people with all kinds of ailments, Matthew 4:23 / Matthew 8:16 / Matthew 9:35 / Matthew 14:14 / Mark 1:34 / Mark 3:10. He did this to prove He was indeed the Son of God, John 3:2 / John 20:30-31.

It's not surprising that Jesus was becoming popular among the people, Mark 1:28, so popular in fact, that many other people came with all kinds of problems to be healed, Matthew 4:24. Since Jesus created mankind, Colossians 1:16, it's not surprising that He could heal mankind of their fleshly ailments.
Since Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, Hebrews 2:14 / Ephesians 4:8, it's not surprising He healed those who were demon-possessed, Matthew 8:16 / Matthew 8:28 / Matthew 8:33 / Matthew 9:32 / Matthew 12:22 / Matthew 15:22 / Mark 1:32 / Mark 5:15 / John 20:21.

DEMON POSSESSION

The topic of 'demon possession' is an interesting subject, to say the least, and I know most people have their own thoughts and ideas about it. Some believe it still happens today, and others say there's no way it can happen today, and still others are not sure.

I remember many years ago, a friend of mine witnessed someone who was a member of a certain 'church' being literally beaten up by the 'pastor', as he says, this was the only way to drive out this 'evil spirit' from the young boy. Anyone who knows anything about the Scriptures will know that 'beating' people up to drive out some 'demon' is nowhere found in the Bible.

There was a documentary on TV a few years ago where certain 'churches' were being investigated for this very subject. Their pastors were claiming that some members were 'possessed' because they stole something from a shop.

Some were claiming that members were 'witches' because, since the time those individuals joined the 'church', nothing but 'bad luck' has happened to other members.

Our television is filled with programmes which speak about demon possession. Films have been made about demon possession, someone heard about someone else in the middle of some far-off country, in the middle of some village, of someone who possessed.

You can go on YouTube and see a video of people who are supposedly possessed, and you can see videos of people having those demons driven out. I mean, it's everywhere, and people's minds are slowly being filled with all kinds of wonderful ideas about the subject.

However, whether we like it or not, these practices are still rampant within some religious circles today. Possibly because of ignorance, possibly because some so-called 'pastors' have a desire for power and financial gain.

The whole purpose of talking about this is to try to compare what people believe is demon possession today with the Scriptures. Then you can make your own mind up about the subject at hand. We can either believe 'people's testimonies' or the Word of God.

I'm not disputing what people are claiming they have seen and witnessed, but I am disputing whether what they saw and witnessed was genuine. Some people claim that they have been possessed by a demon, or they at least claim they know someone who has been possessed.

DO DEMONS EXIST?

We can't deny that demons or 'evil spirits' exist because the Bible tells us so, James 2:19. We know that demons were under the power of Satan, who is the commander of all evil spirits. This is what the Jewish leaders were accusing Jesus of in Matthew 12:24.

HOW DID DEMONS OPERATE?

We know from the Scriptures that these demons entered into people's bodies and controlled their lives, Matthew 8:28-34. They often caused sickness in the people they entered, such as not being able to speak or see, Matthew 12:22.
They caused people to become insane and mad, Luke 8:26-36, and they often caused people to inflict personal injuries on themselves, Mark 9:14-27. They often caused other kinds of bodily infirmities, Luke 13:10-17.

WHAT DO DEMONS KNOW?

Unlike most of the people in Jesus' day, they certainly knew who Jesus was, and they understood why He came into the world in the first place, Luke 4:41. There are no doubts that they actually believe in God too, James 2:19. They are well aware of the coming Judgement and they fear the Judgment and their eternal punishment, Matthew 8:28-29. All of the above text shows us that demons are not some kind of disease as some people have claimed, but these demons or evil spirits are just that, they are spirit beings who think, speak and act.

WHO WAS CAPABLE OF CASTING OUT DEMONS?

This is an important question which we'll get back to later in this part of our study. For now, we see clearly in Scripture that Jesus often cast demons out of people, Matthew 8:16.
Jesus also gave the ability to cast out demons to His early disciples, Luke 10:17, and Jesus also gave the ability to cast out demons to His apostles, Mark 16:17-18 / Acts 5:16 / Acts 8:7 / Acts 16:16-18 / Acts 19:11-12.
The apostles were able to give miraculous gifts to others by laying their hands on them, Acts 6:6-8 / Acts 8:14-21 / Acts 19:1-6. Please remember that these miraculous powers would have included the power to cast out demons, Acts 8:5-8.

DO DEMONS STILL POSSESS PEOPLE EVEN TODAY?

1. There is no indication that demon possession occurred before the ministry of Jesus and His apostles.

We have no references to it in the Old Testament; Saul was not demon-possessed, 1 Samuel 18:10. The first time we hear of this is in the Gospels during the ministry of Jesus. The last we hear of it is during the ministry of the apostles.

This suggests that demon possession was something God allowed for a short time in order to demonstrate the power and authority of the Lord Jesus and His apostles.

2. There is no instruction in the epistles on how to cast out demons.

If demon possession is a problem for the church today, then surely believers need to be able to cast out demons and to do so, we must know how. Because there is no such instruction, it suggests this isn't a problem now.

If demon possession continued today, Satan would have more power than God, for he could send his demons into people, but God's people couldn't cast them out.

3. What is sometimes called demon possession today doesn't match up with the accounts we find in Scripture.

We don't find people, for example, who break the strongest of chains, as the possessed man of Gadara did, Mark 5:3-4 / Luke 8:29.

4. Most alleged demon 'exorcisms' today are secluded, back-room affairs that are only later publicised.

Yet when Jesus expelled evil spirits, His miracles were publicly viewed by astonishing multitudes, Luke 4:36.

WHEN DID DEMON POSSESSION END?

Zechariah, an Old Testament prophet, spoke of the time when Christ would come, Zechariah 13:1. This fountain was opened when Jesus shed His blood on the cross for the sins of the world.

Following the time when the Lord would die for our sins, prophets, men who spoke by the Holy Spirit, and unclean spirits, demons, would no longer be in the land, earth, Zechariah 13:2.

So, I guess the question is, when did this happen? As we saw earlier, only the early disciples, just before Jesus ascended back to the Father, only the apostles could drive out demons. Later, it was only those whom the apostles laid their hands on who had the ability to drive out demons and perform other miracles.

In other words, since no early disciples are still alive today, since no apostles are still alive today and since no Christians of whom the apostle's laid their hands on to bestow upon the gift of casting out demons are still alive today, we can safely say that demon possession can't exist today because no one has the power to drive them out today. We understand that the purpose of these miracles was to confirm or prove that what they were saying was God's Word, Mark 16:20 / Hebrews 2:2-4.

One of the nine spiritual miraculous gifts in the first century, according to 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, was 'the discerning of Spirits'. We must remember to try to understand these gifts in the context of the historical period during which they were exercised.

1 Corinthians 12:10, which seems so strange to us, would be perfectly understood by the people alive at the time of the writing of Paul's letter. For example, his readers would understand when he writes in 1 Corinthians 14:37, about those whom he describes as 'spiritual'.

Paul was referring to those who were believed to be possessed by a spirit because this was the name by which such people were known. Also, Christians weren't the only ones who believed in 'spirit-possession', i.e. individuals who were regarded as being under the influence of spirits which used them as their 'instruments'.

Both Jewish and Pagan religions also had their prophets, whom they believed were under spirit control. Paul hints at this in 1 Corinthians 12:1-2, but, because men recognised the existence of both good and evil spirits, it was essential to determine by which spirit a person was being 'possessed' and 'controlled'.

We know that during the ministry of the Lord Himself, there were times when He encountered and dealt with people who were possessed by evil spirits. The man at Gadara, and the spirit-controlled son of the man who came to Jesus because he said, the disciples couldn't cure the lad, Matthew 17:14-20.
Luke records the experience of Paul at Philippi, in dealing with a spirit-possessed girl, Acts 16:16-19. With this in mind, Paul lays down two criteria that must be used in making this judgment.
1. 'Sanity'.

For centuries, about 500 B.C. in fact, the Greeks had flocked to temples where priests or priestesses were believed to contact and be controlled by the gods, for whom they acted as 'mouthpieces', as the gods spoke through them to deliver messages.

Whether it was real or fake, when these people were under the control of their gods, they foamed at the mouth, their hair streaming out, and their limbs wildly flailing, as in an epileptic fit, all of which was taken to prove that they were being 'moved' by the spirit of the god whom they served.

Not so the prophets of the church, they did not scream or foam at the mouth, or roll on the ground! The Holy Spirit enlightened their minds and sharpened their vision. They didn't claim that they were the mouthpiece of God, but the messengers of God.

2. The credit of honour to Christ.

The well-used Christian confession of faith in New Testament times was 'Jesus is Lord', and as Paul reveals in 1 Corinthians 12:3, this was the formula by which the prophets were to be judged either true or false.
Bear in mind that, beginning with Caesar Augustus, Roman Emperors had begun to regard themselves as 'gods', and everyone in the Empire was required to recognise and acknowledge this! Citizens had to declare their loyalty to Caesar as a god by saying the words, 'Caesarea Kyrios', 'Caesar is Lord'.

In fact, at the entrance to every Roman camp, there was an altar onto which the soldiers were expected to throw a pinch of incense in the worship of the Emperor, whilst saying those words, 'Caesar is Lord', and, woe betide any man who failed to do so!

But when the favour with which Rome had originally looked on Christians turned into persecution, this affirmation of loyalty to Caesar was something that the Christians also were required to make, and failure to make it usually meant death.

At the same time, there was a quite different affirmation that was being freely made by both Jewish and Pagan enemies of the church. They were saying, as Paul records in 1 Corinthians 12:3, 'Jesus is accursed', and obviously, only the enemies of Christ would utter those words!
Furthermore, when a Christian refused to speak those words which were taken as an acknowledgement of Caesar's deity, their refusal was taken as a denial of his deity, and that was treason, which brought the death sentence.

Thus, the distinction between the prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit and the false prophet was, in this way, easily made. The one was happy to say, 'Jesus is Lord', whilst the other, because he was under the influence of an evil spirit, said, 'Jesus is accursed'.

John also writes about the importance of making this distinction in 1 John 4:1-3. One needs little imagination to understand that in a pagan world, many pretended to be possessed and controlled by the gods so that they might claim to be speaking in their names.
The significant contrast between these frenzied fakers and the calmness of the Spirit-led Christian prophets is, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33. Notice 'The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets'.

In other words, there was no wild abandonment in the manner in which they delivered their message. Everything was done in an orderly manner, because 'God is not the author of confusion, but of peace', 1 Corinthians 14:33.

A FINAL OBSERVATION

The exercise of the 'gift of discerning of spirits' was to be used when several prophets spoke in the service, 1 Corinthians 14:29. Paul said these spiritual miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit would fail, cease, and vanish away. These miraculous gifts would cease when that which is perfect comes, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. The perfect refers to the complete New Testament, which is called the perfect law of liberty, James 1:25.
As we noted, one of these miraculous gifts was the power to cast out demons. Therefore, evil spirits possessing men, along with the power to cast them out, ceased when the New Testament was completed and confirmed.

Some people often go to Matthew 7:21-23 to prove that others were able to prophecy and drive out demons, but notice that Jesus didn't say they did prophecy or drive out demons in His name; He was simply saying what they would claim. And the very fact that He says, He didn't know them and called them evildoers, suggests that what they were doing was fake, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

WHY DEMON POSSESSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The New Testament clearly indicates that demons were under the control of divine authority. Jesus, for example, could command them to leave a person, Matthew 8:16, or even keep quiet, Mark 1:34.
The demons that tormented the man in the country of the Gerasenes couldn't enter the nearby swine herd except by the Lord's concession, Mark 5:13-14. Since it's the case that demons could do nothing except by divine permission, the intriguing question is, why did God allow these spirits to enter people?
The truth of the matter is, the Bible doesn't give a specific answer to this question. I personally believe that God permitted demons to possess certain people in the time of Christ and the apostles so that His power could be seen.

Not only did Christ have power over nature, disease, and death, but He also had power over the spirit world. The devil and his demons were proved to be powerless before the Son of God, Colossians 2:15 / 1 John 3:8.
And we know that the ability to cast out demons in the first century was given in order to confirm the truth of the Gospel message, Mark 16:17-20 / Acts 14:3 / Hebrews 2:3-4.
Demons still exist, but they don't possess people today. Today, we need to be concerned about Satan, the devil, who tempts us to sin. We know that the devil is still working today, but he doesn't have the power he once had, and so he can only work through lying and deceit.

LYING AND DECEIT

Note the following passages which speak about how the devil operates today: John 8:44 / 2 Corinthians 11:3 / 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 / Ephesians 6:11 / 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 / Revelation 12:9 / Revelation 13:12-14 / Revelation 19:20.

The purpose of the church, especially the duties of elders, preachers, and teachers, is to teach people so that they are not as vulnerable to such deceit, Ephesians 4:12-14.

The whole purpose of spending so much time on this subject is to try to compare what people claim is demon possession today with the Scriptures, in order for you to make up your own mind about the subject at hand.

Remember, I'm not disputing what people are claiming they have seen and witnessed, but I am disputing whether what they saw and witnessed was genuine.

'Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.' Matthew 4:25

As a result of Jesus' teaching and miracles, great crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him, Matthew 4:25 / Mark 3:7-8 / Luke 6:17.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

'The facts of this section, Matthew 4:12-25, furnish another argument in favour of the claims of Jesus, as the Messiah.'

1. They show that his dwelling place was where the prophet Isaiah had predicted the appearance of a great light.

2. That Christ was such a light.

3. That he was so great a light that some people left all things to follow him.

4. That multitudes came from all surrounding regions to receive his blessing and enjoy his instruction. No clearer proof could be given that he was the Great Light whose rising had been predicted by the prophet.

CHAPTER 5

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was delivered near the beginning of His ministry, and it is the longest of Jesus' sermons recorded in the New Testament. It begins with a section commonly referred to as the Beatitudes, meaning 'perfect joy.'

Most of the beatitudes are irrational and contrary to the world's view. The word 'blessed' is used throughout this passage, and it can be accurately replaced with the word 'joyful.' Another synonym that could be utilised is the word 'happy,' as long as we understand this bliss is not due to good luck or chance.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

'Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.' Matthew 5:1-2

Jesus was travelling near the Sea of Galilee and decided to speak to His disciples about what it means to follow Him. He went up on a mountainside and gathered His disciples around Him, Matthew 5:1-2.
The rest of the crowd appears to have found places along the side of the hill and at the level place near the bottom in order to hear what Jesus taught His closest followers. It was very common practice for teachers to sit down to teach, Luke 4:20 / Matthew 13:2 / Matthew 23:2 / Matthew 24:3.
Please note this is not the same event we have recorded in Luke, on that occasion, Jesus spoke on 'a level place', Luke 6:17. The exact location where Jesus preached this sermon is unknown, although tradition names the location as a large hill known as Karn Hattin, located near Capernaum along the Sea of Galilee. There is a church nearby called the church of the Beatitudes to this day.

THE BEATITUDES

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 5:3

The word 'blessed', Matthew 5:3, simply means happy, 1 Timothy 1:11.
Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'The blessing is in every case in the present tense, a happiness to be now enjoyed and delighted in. It is not 'Blessed shall be,' but 'Blessed are.'

To be 'poor in spirit' is to feel a deep sense of spiritual poverty. It is to empty ourselves and understand our insignificance in comparison to our Almighty God, Philippians 2:3-4. To be 'poor in spirit' is to have a state of mind that is lowly and reverent before Him. It is to be full of humility, not pride, Luke 18:9-14.
It is impossible to be 'poor in spirit' until we realise our spiritual needs. As long as a person delights in sin, they won't be 'poor in spirit,' and they won't seek the Saviour since they don't feel a necessity for Him, Matthew 9:12.
To be 'poor in spirit' is a joyful condition because when we become aware of our sinfulness and hopelessness without God, we will seek the 'kingdom of heaven' and find hope therein.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.' Matthew 5:4

In the Greek language, the strongest word for 'mourn' is used here, Matthew 5:4. This term indicates a type of mourning that cannot be hidden. The mourning can be physical mourning over a loss, Genesis 37:34.
However, the main thrust here is that of spiritual mourning. The blessing here is not upon all who mourn; those with worldly sorrow would be excluded, 2 Corinthians 7:10.
Those who mourn because of sin and consequently repent are the ones who will be blessed, James 4:8-10. Such a person mourns over sin from a tender conscience and broken heart, realising that it's their own sin which separates them from God spiritually, Isaiah 59:1-2.
After we realise our sinfulness, we can be 'comforted' by the discovery and acceptance of God's pardon, made possible by obedience to the saving Gospel, Romans 1:16 / Romans 6:17.

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

Those listening to Jesus speak were full of the hope that He, as the Messiah, would lead them to conquest in a physical kingdom that would dominate by force, Proverbs 16:32. However, Jesus taught true joy is found in meekness, Matthew 5:5.
The primary meaning of this word is 'mild' or 'gentle.' Meekness is not another word for weakness, as some mistakenly believe, for genuine meekness is strength under control.

The word ‘meek’ has its origin in the taming or domestication of animals. A wild animal is strong but destructive and of little value when out of control. However, when a horse, for example, is tamed, it loses none of its power, but its strength is brought under the control of its trainer. It is now a useful animal and can be employed for much good.

The same is true of man. A person who is strong, physically or spiritually, is of little use to the Lord until they submit to Him and allow their strength to be controlled by God’s desires.

A meek person is totally given to the divine will. Such a person does get angry when circumstances warrant it, but they do so in a controlled manner, i.e., without sinning, Ephesians 4:26.
Moses is a good example of meekness, Numbers 12:3 / Exodus 32:19-35, and Jesus Himself is also a good example of meekness, so is Jesus. Matthew 11:28-30 / John 2:14-22.
The Christian Courier Website notes the following concerning inheriting the earth, Matthew 5:5.
1. God is the owner of this earth, Psalm 24:1.
2. Those who obey Christ become children of God, Galatians 3:27 / Hebrews 5:9, and ‘joint-heirs’ with the Lord, Romans 8:17.
3. The Father supplies all our needs, Philippians 4:19. We therefore enjoy this earth and its blessings more than all others.
4. Mainly, however, our inheritance is spiritual, Acts 20:32; we are heirs in the kingdom of Christ, Ephesians 5:5, and citizenship in that kingdom is available now on this earth, John 3:3-5 / Colossians 1:13.
Finally, we also look for an inheritance that is reserved for us in heaven, 1 Peter 1:4, because we are aware that the earth will be destroyed when Christ returns, 2 Peter 3:10.
Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It looks as if they would be pushed out of the world, but they shall not be, ‘for they shall inherit the earth.’ The wolves devour the sheep, yet there are more sheep in the world than there are wolves, and the sheep continue to multiply, and to feed in green pastures.’

In other words, the meek shall inherit the earth in the sense that they shall enjoy it more fully while living upon it, Psalm 37:1 / John 10:10 / Philippians 4:10-13.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’ Matthew 5:6

Jesus declared that those who feel an intense desire for righteousness, that which is right or just, shall obtain it, Matthew 5:6 / John 4:13-14. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is an attitude, a frame of mind, which realises God’s Word, is ‘righteousness’, Psalm 119:172.
It is the spiritual food that is needed to grow stronger, Matthew 4:4 / Hebrews 5:13-14 / 1 Peter 2:2. What type of person doesn’t get hungry or thirsty physically? The person who is either sick or dead! The same is true spiritually, Psalm 143:6.
If a person doesn’t have a strong desire to grow spiritually and feed on God’s Word daily, then they are either spiritually sick or dead, 1 Corinthians 11:30. May those who desire righteousness do so like a deer pants for water, Psalm 42:1-2. If we yearn to be ‘filled’ and to find true, lasting joy, we must put the kingdom of God first and seek His righteousness, Matthew 6:33.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.’ Matthew 5:7

To be merciful is to withhold justified punishment; it is to relieve the misery of one who deserves to suffer, Matthew 5:7. The merciful show pity to others and much joy is found therein, Acts 20:35.

Humans typically have little difficulty showing mercy toward themselves but may find it challenging to be lenient toward others. However, disciples of the Lord must learn to love their neighbours as they love themselves, even when it comes to granting mercy, Matthew 22:39 / Luke 10:25-37.
If we fail to develop this attribute, God will not bestow mercy upon us, Matthew 6:14-15. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant also clearly communicates this thought, Matthew 18:21-35.
Being merciful is a natural outward expression of an inner hungering after righteousness, Matthew 7:12. And such will generally ensure that our personal quest for righteousness will not turn into self-righteousness, Luke 18:9-14.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' Matthew 5:8

The 'heart' is the centre of our thinking processes; it is the mind, Biblically speaking, Proverbs 23:7. The 'pure in heart', Matthew 5:8, are those who are free from evil desires and purposes, their thoughts and speech are pure, Matthew 12:24. This is because they meditate on those things in which there is a virtue, Philippians 4:8.
Such people experience great joy in seeing God. They will enjoy a closer relationship with God. Of course, they do not see Him physically since He is a Spirit being, John 4:24, but they do see Him through faith in Christ, John 14:8-9.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning seeing God, Matthew 5:8.
'This is true in two ways: 1. The pure in heart shall see God by faith, just as Moses endured, 'as seeing him who is invisible', Hebrews 11:27. 2. They shall see God and Christ Jesus in the eternal world, Revelation 22:4 / 1 John 3:2.'
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning seeing God.

'This is a Hebraism, which signifies, possess God, enjoy his felicity: as seeing a thing, was used among the Hebrews for possessing it, Psalms 16:10.'
It should be noted that some might appear to be pure by their actions, though their hearts are far from such, Matthew 23:25-28. Most of the Jews, having their hearts defiled with carnal hopes or self-righteous pride, Mark 7:1-23, failed to see God as He revealed Himself in the person of His Son, John 14:6-9 / Matthew 13:14-17. Not only do the 'pure in heart' see God, but they shall also see Him 'as He is' hereafter, 1 John 3:2.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' Matthew 5:9

Peace, Matthew 5:9, is generally thought of as the absence of conflict or war, but to the follower of Christ, it is much more. It includes an internal component of contentment, even amid trials, conflict, and persecution, Romans 5:1-3. This is the peace from God that surpasses human understanding, Philippians 4:7.
Christ is the Prince of Peace, Isaiah 9:6, and we are rightly considered a 'peacemaker' when we seek reconciliation and strive to live peaceably with all, both men and God, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.
Christians should always seek external peace to the best of their ability, Romans 12:18. But it shouldn't be acquired at any cost. If peace can be achieved without compromising our convictions, purity of heart, and earnest desire for righteousness, then it must be pursued.
The humble and wise 'peacemakers' will be joyful; however, the selfish and foolish 'peacemakers', who are lovers of conflict and division within the body of Christ, will be miserable.

Followers of Christ are called sons of God because they are most like God in their efforts to reconcile man unto himself. Christians are children of God through faith in Christ, Galatians 3:26-29. A true peacemaker is a person who shares the Gospel of peace with others in the hope of fostering spiritual reconciliation, Ephesians 6:15.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 5:10

To be 'persecuted for righteousness' sake', Matthew 5:10, is to suffer at the hands of others for doing right. This is much different from being punished for wrongdoing, 1 Peter 4:12-16.

It should be realised that in order to maintain peace, we must sometimes suffer persecution. If we are faithful to the Lord, we should expect persecution, 2 Timothy 3:12 / John 15:18-20.

We should react to persecution as Christ did. He didn't retaliate but denied Himself, 1 Peter 2:22-23. He didn't develop grudges but had a spirit of forgiveness. He didn't become depressed but grew stronger and closer to His Father.

Those who suffer because of their loyalty to the kingdom of heaven are blessed by being bound more closely to the kingdom for which they suffer, just as the poor in spirit, Matthew 5:3.

The joy in being persecuted is found when we realise that we are suffering for the Name of Christ, Acts 5:41 / Acts 16:22-25. All who suffer as faithful servants of the Lord should 'leap for joy', Luke 6:23.

'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.' Matthew 5:11-12

Back in Matthew 5:10, Jesus told us that people are persecuted for righteousness' sake, but here in Matthew 5:11, He tells us that people are persecuted for His sake. Jesus is telling us that He expects His followers to follow His example of righteous living regardless of the persecution we may face, 1 Peter 2:21.

Though Christians should live joyfully here on Earth, their ultimate reward will be 'in heaven', Matthew 19:29 / Matthew 25:46. Let it always be remembered that the suffering experienced here is nothing in comparison to the bliss God has in store for His faithful children, Romans 8:18.

Also, Christians should find comfort and strength in the example of the prophets and the Christ, 1 Peter 2:21-24.

Understanding that persecution for righteousness' sake is not a sign of God's disfavour, Hebrews 11:32-38.

Persecution should be embraced, not resisted, as a way to further develop our character through suffering, James 1:2-4 / Romans 5:3-5.

It is worthwhile to note that there seems to be a logical progression to the beatitudes. After we come to realise our sinfulness, we must empty ourselves of pride and self-sufficiency, i.e., become 'poor in spirit', Matthew 5:3, and we must 'mourn,' Matthew 5:4.

This will make it easier for us to submit to God completely and be strong under His control, i.e., 'meek', Matthew 5:5. Such a person will naturally 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' for they realise without God and His spiritual nourishment, they are destitute, Matthew 5:6.

To strongly desire to do what is right should lead us to be 'merciful' as God was to us, Matthew 5:7, and it will also help in the effort to be 'pure in heart', Matthew 5:8. Anyone who is full of mercy and devoted to purity is highly qualified to be a 'peacemaker', Matthew 5:9.

However, a person who possesses these attributes of true joy will be hated by the world and will suffer as one 'persecuted for righteousness' sake', Matthew 5:10-12.

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.' Matthew 5:13

Jesus says salt is good and metaphorically refers to His followers as 'the salt of the earth' in Matthew 5:13. What exactly does this mean? To fully comprehend the Messiah's statement, we must be aware of some qualities that salt possesses.

1. Salt is a flavouring agent.

This is perhaps the most commonly recognised use of salt. Who hasn't used salt to improve the taste of food that is otherwise bland?

2. Salt is a preserving agent.

Salt that is added to fresh meat will act as a preservative; it will help delay the decay process. The practice of salting meat has been used for years.

3. Salt increases thirst.

Many people like Chinese food; however, after consuming a lot of Chinese food, our bodies will crave fluids for the rest of the evening! The salt contained in Chinese food cheese noticeably increases our thirst.

4. Salt melts ice.

During the winter months, many people use various mixtures of salt to melt ice on roads, driveways, and sidewalks.

5. Salt irritates.

Have you ever been working outside under the hot sun and had sweat running into your eyes? It stings, doesn't it? The salt contained in sweat is an irritant.

6. Salt has destructive power.

We know that certain portions of our roads, due to concrete damage, have been severely damaged by heavy salting over many winters. Salt is certainly powerful stuff. Using a little bit, it will melt the ice, but using a lot can ruin an entire road! Too much salt will also harm or kill living things, such as grass, slugs, etc.

Admittedly, although we understand these attributes and usages of salt today, it is likely that the major thrust of Jesus' point pertained to salt as a flavouring agent, note His use of the word 'seasoned' in the verse.

Notice that Jesus asks, How can you make it salty again? Matthew 5:13 / Luke 14:34 / Mark 9:50. He gives us the answer by telling us to be salt among ourselves, and be at peace with each other, Mark 9:50.
Anyone who is striving to follow Jesus will make the world a better place in much the same way that salt helps certain foods taste better. For instance, in Acts 2:47, the disciples were described as 'praising God and having favour with all the people.' Without a doubt, they added something good to society.
It is possible for salt to lose its flavour. Normally, this should not happen, but it will if the salt becomes contaminated with impurities, e.g., dirt. Jesus is issuing a warning here.

A disciple can lose the qualities that make them valuable before God as 'salt' if they aren't careful to remain separate from harmful impurities like sin, Matthew 5:13 / Luke 14:35 / 2 Corinthians 6:17.
If a Christian becomes contaminated with impurity, then they are 'good for nothing', Matthew 5:13, in service to the Lord, at least not until they come back to Him and seek forgiveness on God's terms.
Luke says it is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out, Luke 14:35. A Christian ought to be pure and kind in thoughts, deeds, and speech, Colossians 4:6.
Such a person will have a preserving effect on righteousness and godliness, as salt preserves food and helps prevent spoiling. They will endeavour, like salt, to remove or melt any hindrances that could cause others who are searching for Christ to stumble.

However, in the process, they, like salt, may irritate some people. Though this isn't their purpose, when we live for God and stand up for His cause, some will undoubtedly be rubbed up the wrong way.

It is also true that followers of the Lord, like salt, have the potential to cause destruction if they come in contact with the wrong things, namely, sin. Christians should endeavour to destroy sin from their lives.

They should be a force against evil. Finally, a faithful disciple should also cause others to thirst for righteousness, Matthew 5:6, as salt itself causes physical thirst. Jesus asks those who have ears to hear, let them hear, Luke 14:35.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' Matthew 5:14-16

In addition to being 'salt,' Jesus' disciples are also 'light', namely, 'the light of the world,' Matthew 5:14. The purpose of light is to enable people to see. Light provides 1. illumination, 2. guidance, and 3. warning.
Physical lights shine to dispel darkness and, in so doing, serve as guides and warnings, e.g., headlights and lighthouses. Spiritual lights should function in the same manner, Psalm 119:105 / Proverbs 4:18-19.
God wants the world to see the truth, and our lights, our lives, should reveal His truth, John 8:12 / John 9:5 / Philippians 2:15. His truth should be clearly seen in our lives, just as a city set on a hill is seen from all directions.
Think of the foolishness of lighting a lamp and then hiding its light, Matthew 5:15 / Luke 11:33. The purpose of lighting a lamp is to provide light for people to see. A major purpose in following Christ is to provide spiritual light for others to see.
We mustn't hide under a 'basket' or 'bowl' for any reason, Matthew 5:15 / Luke 11:33, whether it is fear, indifference, love of the world, misplaced priorities, etc. Truly, we cannot be secret disciples of Christ; either the secrecy will destroy the disciple or the disciple will destroy the secrecy.
If we light a lamp and put it under a bowl, either the bowl will smother the flame and the light will go out, Matthew 13:22, or the lamp will ignite the basket, burning it away for the light to be seen by all, Jeremiah 20:9. We must let our lights shine, Matthew 5:16 / Luke 11:33.
For whom should we let our lights shine? The world! Why? That they might take notice of us and exalt us? No! That they might observe our good deeds and give glory and honour to the heavenly Father? Matthew 5:16. Yes!
I'm sure you are aware that this is the first time the word 'Father' is used in the New Testament. Note also that He is 'your Father', He is our Father, He is my Father.

While God is known to the patriarchs as 'God Almighty', Genesis 17:1, and to the Jews as 'Yahweh', Exodus 3:13-15, we know him primarily as 'Our Father', Luke 11:2.
Jesus called God, 'Abba', which in Aramaic means Father, Mark 14:36; the Holy Spirit calls God, Abba, Father, Galatians 4:6, and Christians can call God Abba, Father, Romans 8:15.
Christians should desire that others see their good works in order that others will be drawn to God. The good works we do shouldn't all be secrets; otherwise, we are hiding under a basket and not fulfilling our purpose as 'light' for God.

I believe there is a big difference between 'shining your light' and 'letting your light shine.' The glory for good works is to go to the heavenly Father, not the individual! Yes, it is pleasing to God for people to see our good works, but only if we aren't performing them to receive personal glory, Matthew 6:1-18.

In the same way, salt isn't to draw attention to itself but to emphasise the natural flavour of the food. Salt shouldn't cover up or overpower the taste of food, and neither should a light draw attention and honour to itself.

After all, people don't praise the streetlights that protect them from thieves and assault, but they do praise the city administration which furnishes the lights! God is the giver of light and every perfect gift, James 1:17.
We are nothing, except His servants. May we remember that and continually seek to direct praise to Him and not ourselves. To do so shows a thankful, humble spirit on our part. Such an attitude pleases God.

How can we be the light of the world when Jesus is the light of the world? John 8:12 / John 9:5. An illustration may be useful to answer this question. The moon, which shines in the night sky, actually doesn't give off any light; it only reflects the light from the sun. In the same manner, we are to reflect the light of Christ in the world, as we walk in the light of God, 1 John 1:5-7.
The primary idea of Matthew 5:13-16 is that Jesus' disciples should have a great positive influence on those they come in contact with. This influence will never materialise if Christians are content to hide in saltshakers or under baskets. You cannot be a secret disciple!

NOT TO DESTROY BUT TO FULFIL

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.' Matthew 5:17

After finishing up His comments on the beatitudes and the importance of His disciples using their influence for good, Jesus begins a lengthy section of discourse on the principles of righteousness. This general theme spans from Matthew 5:17-7:12.
This verse, Matthew 5:17, is a preface for the rest of the chapter. It was intended to prevent a misunderstanding of the things Jesus was about to say. Our Lord plainly affirmed that His purpose in coming to Earth was not to destroy 'but to fulfil', Romans 8:4.
Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'To show that he never meant to abrogate the law, our Lord Jesus has embodied all its commands in his own life. In his own person, there was a nature which was perfectly conformed to the law of God; and as was his nature such was his life.'

To destroy the law would have been to tear it down or demolish it; Jesus didn't come to do that. He came to fulfil the Old Testament prophetically and typically, Romans 10:4 / Galatians 3:23-25 / Luke 24:44.
A major purpose of the law was to bring the Hebrew people to Jesus, that is, to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah, Galatians 3:24-25. That purpose would not be accomplished if Jesus destroyed the law.

'For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.' Matthew 5:18

Jesus basically says, it would be easier for the universe to disappear than for the love of God not to complete its mission. Jesus' meaning is this: the law of Moses will be in force, and nothing will be removed from it, 1. until all is fulfilled or 2. until the world ends, Matthew 5:18.
Jesus refers to the 'smallest letter', which corresponds to the English letter 'i' and the least stroke of a pen', which is the smallest marking to distinguish letters, e.g., the difference between the letters 'c' and 'e'.

For Jesus to say that not even the smallest detail of the law would be removed until all is fulfilled is to indicate His belief in word-for-word inspiration. It is to say that every letter contained in the Old Testament was there because God wanted it there. Nothing was written that didn't belong, and none of it would be taken away until all was fulfilled, Deuteronomy 4:2 / John 5:39-40.

'Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 5:19

It would be a mistake to understand Jesus to be implying that we may deliberately disregard any of God's commandments and still enter into the kingdom of heaven, as one of the 'least'.

It is important to observe that Jesus was referring to the Old Testament when He mentioned 'the least of these commandments', Matthew 5:19. The Lord certainly had the Pharisees in mind when He made this comment, Matthew 23:3 / Acts 23:6 / Acts 26:5 / Philippians 3:5.
They were guilty of dividing the commandments of God into 'lesser' and 'greater' ones, and they taught that the 'lesser' ones were trivial or insignificant and could thereby be disregarded without danger, Matthew 22:36 / Matthew 23:23.
Essentially, they would 'lose' or 'break' what they considered to be the lesser requirements of the law, that is, they would not teach as an obligation, Matthew 15:3-6. In so doing, the Pharisees were the ones 'destroying' the law, not Jesus.
This disposition to distinguish the importance of the various laws of God was a dangerous one. Those who practised it under the Law of Moses would be inclined to carry the same attitude into the kingdom of Christ when it was established.

Even when such a person obeyed the Gospel to enter the kingdom, their attitude toward God's Word would render them 'least' in the kingdom, Matthew 5:3. For us today, Jesus is saying that those who attempt to rank the commandments of God under the New Covenant by order of importance are treading on dangerous ground.
It's not our place to attempt to categorise the Biblical topics that are 'salvation matters' and the ones that aren't, on the basis of our own opinions, Romans 14:1-6.
This isn't to say that we should ignore the distinctions that the Scriptures describe regarding certain matters of importance, Matthew 22:37-40 / Matthew 23:23 / Mark 16:16, but we shouldn't go beyond the clear declarations of God's Word, attempting to classify the relative importance of miscellaneous commands, 1 Corinthians 4:6.
We noted that the disposition that attempts to distinguish the importance of the various laws of God was a dangerous one. Those with this mentality under the Law of Moses would be inclined to carry the same attitude into the kingdom of Christ when it was established.

Even when such a person obeyed the Gospel to enter the kingdom, their improper attitude toward God's Word would render them 'least' in the kingdom, Matthew 5:19.
On the other hand, those who highly regarded God's law under the early dispensation would carry over the same respect for His Word into the Christian age.

Those who faithfully 'do' and 'teach' the commands of God, even the 'least' of them, will thus be regarded as 'great' in the kingdom, Acts 20:27. Greatness in the kingdom of heaven is measured by devotion to all matters of God's law, both the great and seemingly lesser obligations.

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT EXCEEDS

'For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew 5:20

I believe that Matthew 5:20 is the key verse for the Sermon on the Mount. It contains the central idea, or view, for the entire sermon. A large portion of the sermon, especially from this point on, is a development of what true righteousness is in the kingdom of heaven, as opposed to righteousness under the Law of Moses and the Pharisees' interpretation thereof.
The primary difference that will be seen in the following verses is that the Law of Moses regulated civil conduct and dealt with obvious actions of an individual, while the laws of the kingdom of Christ are given to the individual to regulate their inner spiritual condition and motives of conduct.

Jesus declared that a person's righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees if they hope to go to heaven, Matthew 5:20 / Matthew 3:7 / Luke 18:9-14.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The religion of the Pharisees, hence their righteousness, consisted of externals, ceremonials, rituals, liturgies, and formalities of many kinds, with little or no attention being paid to the condition of the heart. Christ flatly denounced such a concept and indicated that no one could be saved in such a state as that of the typical Pharisee of his day.'

The righteousness of the religious leaders was outward only, Isaiah 64:6 / Matthew 23:13-33, but Jesus' disciples must have spiritual righteousness that grows out of love for God and for man.
It must not be self-righteousness or ceremonial righteousness but true moral righteousness, a righteousness that is genuine both privately and publicly, Luke 18:9-14.

MURDER BEGINS IN THE HEART

'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.' Matthew 5:21-22

After our Lord stressed the importance of His followers being truly righteous, He continued His Sermon on the Mount, addressing a variety of subjects that His audience was well acquainted with.

Jesus' use of the phrase, 'you have heard', Matthew 5:21, is accurate since the common people generally didn't have access to a copy of the Old Testament for personal reading; they heard the law read and interpreted by the religious leaders.
Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly says, 'you have heard', indicating that what the people were being taught and the way these Old Testament verses were being interpreted by their teachers were not accurate. The way they were being interpreted often led to confusion and, in more cases than not, division between the rabbis and the people as a whole.

It should be noted that Jesus doesn't take away anything from the Old Testament while addressing the topics in this chapter, Matthew 5:18, but He does add His own teaching to it.

Jesus used the phrase, 'but I say to you', Matthew 5:22, to create a strong contrast between what they had heard of old and His authoritative declarations, Matthew 7:28-29. Jesus quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures, Matthew 5:21 / Exodus 20:13 / Deuteronomy 5:17, which say, 'you shall not murder'.
In the Old Testament, murder was punishable by death, Exodus 21:12, but by the time Jesus came on the scene, the leaders had messed with this law to such an extent that if anyone committed murder, they wouldn't be punished with death but simply be brought to judgement and be spared the death penalty.
However, He supplemented that teaching by declaring mental murder, i.e., unwarranted anger, to also be wrong and cause for judgment. He puts anger at the same level of sin as murder, Matthew 5:22. Anyone who has murderous thoughts in their heart against their fellow brother or sister is considered in the eyes of Jesus to be a murderer.
The Lord isn't doing anything inappropriate here by presenting laws that go beyond explicit Old Testament revelation. Moses announced that the new Lawgiver would speak the words of God and that His words must be heard and obeyed, Deuteronomy 18:15-20 / Acts 3:22-23.
Jesus is doing so on this occasion and preparing His disciples for the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. Even though Jesus' teachings here go beyond the Old Testament revelation, they did not become binding until His death, i.e., when the Old Law was fulfilled, Colossians 2:14 / Hebrews 9:16-18.
Also, nothing that Jesus spoke about in this chapter, or anywhere else, contradicted the Old Law in any way. Thus, even if a Jew immediately started living by the principles Jesus taught, i.e., before they were binding, he wouldn't be violating the Old Testament.

In this text, Jesus separates the sin of anger without cause into three categories. Anger that is unwarranted and not righteous.

1. Silent anger, a person who is angry with their brother but keeps quiet or his anger to himself, Matthew 5:22. Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'So Jesus forbids forever the anger which broods, the anger which will not forget, the anger which refuses to be pacified, the anger which seeks revenge.'

2. Harsh speech, a person whose anger finds expression in labelling someone with harsh words such as 'Raca', meaning 'empty head' or 'good for nothing', Matthew 5:22 / 2 Samuel 6:20.
Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'Raca is an almost untranslatable word, because it describes a tone of voice more than anything else. Its whole accent is the accent of contempt. It is the word of one who despises another with an arrogant contempt.'

3. Bitter rebuke, a person whose anger finds expression by rebuking someone with bitter words, such as 'fool', Matthew 5:22. Calling someone a fool is an attack against their character.
Admittedly, in our culture, this may not seem as bad as calling someone a 'good-for-nothing,' but some translators believe that the word used here for 'fool' expresses strong feelings of contempt, like wishing the worst upon someone or condemning them verbally. Jesus plainly teaches that to be angry without cause makes us guilty. He shows the seriousness of the sin by showing the three respective methods of judgment.

First, punishment by the regular Hebrew court, then condemnation by the 'council', i.e., the Sanhedrin or highest Hebrew court, and finally the divine punishment of 'hellfire', Matthew 5:22 / Matthew 5:29-30 / Matthew 18:9 / Mark 9:43-47 / Matthew 23:15 / Matthew 23:33.
Here we see Jesus explaining the consequences of anger, the anger grows into hatred, which then grows into the action of murder. And notice that Jesus says, 'If anyone is angry with their brother or sister, they will be subject to judgment,' Matthew 5:22.

Sin has its stages, and God takes note of it from its inception in the heart. Our soul is in danger long before our feelings bear the fruits of violence and murder, Matthew 5:22 / Genesis 4:5-8.

True righteousness originates from the inside, and Jesus' teachings go beyond the external actions and into the heart, Leviticus 19:18. Most murderers won't murder without a motive, and the spirit that excludes hatred and unrighteous anger will make committing the act of murder impossible.

Getting angry is not inherently sinful, Psalm 7:11 / Ephesians 4:26, nor is the use of the word 'fool', Matthew 23:17-19. Anger, appropriately expressed in response to rebelliousness against God's will, is righteous indignation, Mark 3:5 / Mark 11:15-17.

But anger in response to personal mistreatment is entirely different and dangerous, James 1:19-20. We must make sure our words are always carefully chosen from a heart filled with love that seeks the best interests of others, Ephesians 4:15. If words flow from our mouth that are abusive and injurious, beware, for the fire of hell approaches, James 3:3-12.

We all need to be very careful of the words we use, especially towards our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we truly understood the consequences of Jesus' words here, I believe we all would be a little more careful in what we say, James 3:9.

The way Christians speak to each other is embarrassing at times, especially if they don't agree with some Bible Scripture. It's amazing when someone receives 'a letter' condemning a person to hell, and it's usually signed, 'in Christian love.'

I mean, when people receive this kind of correspondence, you can almost feel the anger and hatred in the words of the one who sent it. These people need to listen to Jesus' words here and be careful.

PURSUING RECONCILIATION

'Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.' Matthew 5:23-24

Our Lord, after forbidding anger without just cause, proceeds to set forth a proper course for reconciliation. The Israelites considered offering a gift on the altar to be the highest act of worship. Although Christians don't offer gifts to God on a physical altar today, don't think for a moment that this passage is irrelevant to us.

Jesus gave instructions that if someone is offering a gift to God and remembers that they have offended their brother, they should stop and come back to make their offering later, Matthew 5:23-24. As important as worship is, Jesus the Christ teaches that pursuing reconciliation with our brother should take priority.

Carefully note the wording the Lord uses here, 'your brother has something against you,' Matthew 5:23. Clearly, we are the offending party! Either we have sinned against our brother in some way, or they believe that you have. We have the responsibility to go to them if we believe that they are angry with us about something.

It doesn't matter if their reasoning is valid or if they are justified in being upset with us. What matters is that they are offended, and both parties involved should work toward immediate reconciliation, Romans 12:18. Of course, they, too, have a responsibility to come to you if they are offended, Matthew 18:15.

I've often heard Christians say that they have a problem with a brother or sister, so they will refuse to participate in the Lord's Supper. However, this is a misconception because they fail to realise that worship is more than just participating in the Lord's Supper. Jesus demands that people sort out their differences before they come to worship.

Angry feelings must be attended to quickly since they can easily lead to sin, in words and deeds. Thus, we must lay aside our anger the same day to prevent Satan from taking advantage of the opportunity, Ephesians 4:26-27. This anger must be set aside in a genuine attempt at reconciliation.

Truly, offering a gift to God is very important, but reconciliation takes precedence over it, and all other duties and acts of worship, Matthew 5:24. The greatest gift offered to God will not be accepted if it is made by someone who isn't willing to try to be reconciled to their brother. A proper relationship with our fellow man is more important than worship itself.

We cannot love God and hold a grudge against our brother simultaneously, 1 John 4:20-21. This is the case because we are made in the image of God, Genesis 1:26-27, and we cannot hate someone made in God's image and still love God.

'Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.' Matthew 5:25-26

The implication here is that we have done something wrong and our adversary has a case against us. In such circumstances, we should try to make friends quickly and defuse the situation by agreeing with them, and we should try to be reconciled. Otherwise, we are likely to end up in prison!

The word, 'adversary', Matthew 5:25, is a word used by the accuser in a lawsuit and implies in the context that it's better to settle any disputes as quickly as you can before it ends up going to court where the judge will get involved and exercise the law against one of them by that time it's usually too late for reconciliation, because either party may find themselves in prison, Matthew 5:25.

A 'penny', Matthew 5:26, was a small, insignificant copper coin. After the debtor was put into prison, he was held there until the debt was paid, but if he couldn't pay the debt, he would stay in prison until he died.

Jesus' warning against lawsuits is clear, but we could easily avoid all these problems if we simply went and settled matters between ourselves first. Jesus' meaning here is simple: if we wrong someone and don't do everything we can to reconcile with them, we will be judged and punished, perhaps by civil government, but definitely by God, ultimately, Matthew 18:34.

We must love our fellow man! We must take our brothers or sisters to court, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. We must seek to 'live peaceably with all men' to the best of our ability, Romans 12:18. We must pursue reconciliation. If not, we will get what we deserve!

ADULTERY BEGINS IN THE HEART

'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' Matthew 5:27-28

Our Lord began by referring to the seventh commandment, Matthew 5:27 / Exodus 20:14. The Old Law punished the physical act of sin but didn't reach any further. Jesus again goes to the root of the problem, the heart, Matthew 5:28 / Job 31:1, as He did with the prior subject pertaining to anger and murder.

For a person to lust after someone else is to commit sin. Let it be understood that lust isn't just desire, but unlawful or illicit desire. Thus, it's impossible for someone to lust after his or her spouse since there is nothing sinful about those desires. Sexual desire isn't intrinsically wrong.

Sexual desire is God-given and natural, Genesis 1:28. However, it must be fulfilled in the only authorised relationship for such, marriage, Hebrews 13:4. For our eyes to see an attractive person doesn't automatically mean that we've lusted.

However, to focus our thoughts on that individual and have illicit thoughts or fantasies is to be guilty of committing adultery in our hearts, Matthew 5:28. Someone once said, 'You can't keep birds from flying over your head, but you certainly can prevent them from nesting in your hair,' how true!

In like manner, there's nothing we can do to prevent some temptations, but we can always keep them from having a resting place in your heart! It should also be noted that there is a difference between a look of lust and a look of admiration or affection.

For instance, there is nothing wrong with fathers gazing admiringly upon their daughters who have grown to maturity, but they should not desire them sexually. It is possible to recognise physical beauty without lusting in our hearts.

Jesus' teaching in this passage is difficult for many, especially men. Even if a person doesn't physically commit adultery, they still stand guilty before God if they merely have the desire to commit the act. If they stare and wish they could gratify their lust, they have sinned.

Truly, it is impossible for one to actively commit physical adultery without first committing the sin in his heart. Hence, the physical act includes the mental and can be shown to be a more serious transgression, Matthew 19:9. Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jesus, though tempted in all ways, Hebrews 4:15, endured such temptations but did not yield to such sin. He was able to see women as other than objects for His gratification. "He was tempted in all points as we are, but desire was expelled by the mighty power of a pure love to which every woman was a daughter, a sister, or a betrothed: a sacred object of tender respect.'

Our Lord's teaching here clearly shows that we can commit a sin within the confines of our minds. God has always expected His followers to physically abstain from adultery, but to be truly righteous is to develop a mindset that doesn't even desire those things that are unlawful.

If we are able to remove lustful thoughts from our hearts, the physical act of adultery will no longer be a problem. King David would not have committed adultery with Bathsheba if he hadn't seen her and lusted after her, 2 Samuel 11.

If he hadn't committed adultery, then he wouldn't have murdered Uriah, 2 Samuel 11:14-16. Much evil could have been prevented had David simply turned away after spotting Bathsheba for the first time!

It's easy to see how idleness and immodesty led to David's lust and unrighteous actions. If we keep busy doing what is right and dressing ourselves modestly, such will go a long way toward preventing lustful thoughts from harbouring in our minds or the minds of others!

May we endeavour to develop hearts that are pure, Matthew 5:8. May we meditate upon those things that are noble, pure, and virtuous, Philippians 4:8. May we be distinct from the world and not possess 'eyes full of adultery', 2 Peter 2:14.

May we, like Job, make a covenant with our eyes, and decide not to look intently upon others lustfully, Job 31:1. If we can keep adulterous thoughts out of our hearts, physical infidelity will never be a problem.

PLUCK IT OUT OR CUT IT OFF

‘If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.’ Matthew 5:29-30

The words of our Lord are certainly challenging in this passage, though He never intended for them to be interpreted and implemented literally. Self-mutilation is not advocated by these verses. This truth is easily confirmed by showing that God wants us to care for our bodies to the best of our ability, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.
To mutilate our bodies doesn’t bring glory to the Almighty. Additionally, to literally pluck out an eye or two will not cure our struggle with sin. The problem ultimately resides in the heart, the mind, not in the organ of sight, Matthew 5:29. We can be guilty of lust whether we have two, one, or no functional eyes!
Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Mutilation will not serve the purpose; it may prevent the outward act, but it will not extinguish desire.’

Jesus’ point is in emphasising the far greater worth of our spirit over our physical body. He exhorts us to do whatever it takes to keep from sinning, Matthew 5:29-30. No physical sacrifice is too great! Truly, it is better to give up even the dearest and most precious things in this life than to lose our souls in hell.
In a sense, as faithful disciples, we must blind ourselves by choosing not to look with lustful eyes, Matthew 5:28; we must put to death the lust of the flesh, Colossians 3:5 / 1 John 2:15-17. The thought expressed by Jesus in Matthew 5:30 is similar to that of the previous verse.
The only difference is that he refers to cutting off a hand, as opposed to plucking out an eye. Again, the problem doesn’t lie in the physical hand itself. The hand takes orders from the head. If we use our hands in sinful ways, to steal, for instance, having one less hand will not resolve the problem.

Only a fool would refuse to sacrifice a hobby, a job, a dream, a relationship, or anything else that would cause their eternal home in heaven to be lost. Don’t be a fool! Although many things on this Earth have value, none can compare to your priceless soul.

SENDING AWAY AND REMARRIAGE

‘It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.’ Matthew 5:31-32

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, He briefly mentioned the subject of divorce and remarriage, Matthew 5:31-32. However, He had much more to say about this important topic in Matthew 19:3-12 / Mark 10:9-12, which we will deal with when we get to that chapter. For now, we are strictly going to look at Jesus’ comments on this subject as found here.
A few translations have led to a total misunderstanding of what Jesus means in these verses, hence why it’s important to note the Greek word for ‘divorce’, which is ‘apoluo’, which means ‘send away’ and the Greek word for ‘certificate of divorce’, which is ‘apostasion’.

The Hebrew word for ‘put away’ is ‘shalach’, which means to send away, or out. And the Hebrew word for ‘certificate or bill or decree of divorce’ is ‘kriythuwth’, which means a cutting of the matrimonial bond, i.e. divorce.

Clearly, there are two separate words used to describe two separate actions. Just as there is a legal way to get married, there is also a legal way to get a divorce, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 / Jeremiah 3:8.

There is a huge difference between sending away and divorce; they are not the same action but two separate actions, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 / Jeremiah 3:8. Notice how Matthew 5:31-32 should read.

'It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces 'apoluo' his wife must give her a certificate of divorce 'apostasion.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces 'apoluo' his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced 'apoluo' woman commits adultery.'

Jesus said that when the man who marries the woman who was 'put away' and the woman who is 'put away' remarries, they commit adultery. Why? Because they aren't in a legal, official situation where they are free to contract new relationships, they are still legally married.

The Jews thought they could just go ahead and 'put away' their wives for any old reason, but Jesus says, if they're going to 'put away' their wives, they better make it legal, they better give her a 'certificate of divorce,' Deuteronomy 24:1-4.
Otherwise, whenever any of them marry again, they will be committing adultery, and they know what the penalty is, stoning to death, Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25 / John 8:5.
Today, marital unfaithfulness doesn't necessarily mean the end of the marriage, but in Bible times it did because the person doing the marital unfaithfulness was put to death by stoning. Hence, a certificate of divorce isn't required when someone's partner is dead, 1 Corinthians 7:39.
If a man ever gave his wife the 'certificate of divorce', then he had some obligations to their wife, he had to return the dowry, he had to provide for his wife if they 'sent them away', Genesis 29:18-27 / Genesis 34:11-12 / Exodus 21:10-11 / Exodus 22:16-17 / 1 Samuel 18:25 / 1 Kings 9:16 / Hosea 3:2.
This was the Jews' loophole, they 'put them away' without the official 'divorce'. This is what shocked the disciples later, Matthew 19:10. If there is a legal divorce, then the husband would be required to return the dowry.
Whatever price he received from the father for the girl that he married would have to be returned. It shocked them in a society where women had no rights because they didn't have to think of that, Exodus 21:10.
They could just send their wives away for any old cause as far as they were concerned. Now Jesus says, no, they can't do that; they have to respect their wives. They have taken her into their home, they have married her, and they can't just dismiss her.

When we read the original Greek word, and we replace the word 'divorce' in these verses with the proper word which should be used, 'apoluo', that is 'send away', we discover that Jesus wasn't emphasising divorce as we understand it today.

He was emphasising the way the Jews were just sending their wives away, without making it legal, without giving them the 'certificate of divorce', the 'apostasion', Deuteronomy 24:1-4, because without this certificate of divorce, the women couldn't get married again.

BEING PEOPLE OF OUR WORD

'Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfil to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.' Matthew 5:33-37

After finishing His thoughts on the subject of divorce and remarriage, our Lord stressed the importance of being people of our word. Jesus begins these comments by referencing Leviticus 19:12 and Deuteronomy 23:21-23.

In this passage, to 'swear', Matthew 5:33-34, is to utter an oath; it is to appeal to a higher being or thing in order to attest to the truthfulness of our words. Under the Old Law, making oaths was acceptable, though swearing falsely was never viewed favourably.

Over the centuries, the Jewish people had developed the idea that an oath wasn't binding unless the name of God appeared in it. They would therefore use various oaths to suit their purpose of adding weight to their statements or promises, but they wouldn't feel obligated to keep such an oath if they had not explicitly sworn to God, Exodus 20:7.

The Jews had other strange rules regarding which oaths were binding and which ones weren't, Matthew 23:16-22.

When Jesus said Do not swear at all', Matthew 5:34, His meaning was this: do not swear at all in the manner I am about to illustrate.

Do not make oaths that you don't intend to keep, Matthew 5:33 / Numbers 30:2. Do not think that we can word a promise in a special way and, in so doing, make it void or meaningless. A false oath is always false, whether it is explicitly made in the name of Deity or not.

To swear by 'heaven' or 'the earth' or by 'Jerusalem', Matthew 5:34-35, in an effort to make an oath that didn't have to be kept was wrong since all of the statements ultimately refer back to God anyway.

Heaven is 'God's throne', Matthew 5:34 / Isaiah 66:1-2, the earth is 'His footstool', Matthew 5:35 / Acts 7:49, and Jerusalem is 'the city of the great King', Matthew 5:35 / Psalm 48:2.

It didn't really matter if God's Name was explicitly mentioned! A person's word was to be their bond! Those who thought they could speak oaths in a certain way and not be required to fulfil them were only fooling themselves, much like some today who make an agreement but later deny the validity of such because they had their 'fingers crossed', or some other such childish nonsense.

Jesus' example in Matthew 5:36 is distinct from the previous illustrations He has offered. We can indeed change our hair colour today, but this isn't our Lord's point. He seems to be declaring that it isn't wise to swear by our own life since we have no inherent control over such, James 5:12.

Jesus' concluding point is a powerful one, Matthew 5:37. Instead of making oaths, we would be better off simply living in such a way that whatever we state will be accepted as the truth.

Our character and life should confirm the truthfulness of our words so that no oath is necessary. A righteous person should be content making a sincere affirmation or denial of any statement, and others should be satisfied to take such a statement at face value.

Many who study this passage naturally reflect upon certain oaths that are commonly made today, and they wonder, is it wrong to affirm a judicial oath, for example, or exchange marital vows? I believe the answer is 'no'. Allow me to explain why.

It is common in wedding ceremonies for couples to pledge their love and faithfulness to each other, but these vows simply explain the extent of the 'yes, I will be your husband or wife' affirmation. Marriage vows are promises that don't require us to swear or make an oath upon a higher being or thing.

In a judicial setting, however, there are times when one is required to swear or make an oath. Although such should not be necessary for a Christian, it appears that complying with such isn't wrong. Jesus Himself answered under oath before the Sanhedrin, Matthew 26:63-64.

Were His words any more truthful under oath? Of course not, but Jesus didn't resist the authority of the high priest in this regard. Thus, it would be difficult to conclude that we should resist the authority of our government in judicial proceedings.

Paul also made oaths on certain occasions. They seem to centre around the notion that God was a witness to the truthfulness of the apostles' statements, Romans 1:9 / 2 Corinthians 1:23. Therefore, it would seem to be acceptable for one to use such language today for emphasis.

The examples of Jesus and Paul strongly indicate that the words of the Lord in Matthew 5:33-37 should not be interpreted in an absolute sense. The thrust of the teaching is to correct the abuses of oaths common among men, Matthew 23:16-22, not to forbid every type of oath.

Ultimately, God wants us to be people of our word. Our word should be our bond. We shouldn't feel a need to voluntarily make an oath. We shouldn't feel a need to say, 'I promise'. A simple 'yes' or 'no' ought to be sufficient, Matthew 5:37 / James 5:12.

When we affirm that we will do something, do it! Stick by our word regardless of the cost to ourselves, Psalm 15:4. The only exception to this would be if our words would end up forcing us to commit sin. In that case, we should break our word and seek forgiveness for making such a foolish promise, to begin with.

Furthermore, when we don't want to do something, or simply cannot, then we declare so. Don't say 'maybe' when we know the answer is 'no'. Don't say 'yes' when we don't mean it. When we give our word, regardless of the situation, people are listening and watching to see if we mean what we say.

It is difficult to trust a person when their words don't harmonise with their actions. It is better to say nothing than to lie, Matthew 12:36-37, but the best course of action by far is to speak the truth plainly and be a man or woman of our word.

'You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' Matthew 5:38

This law was just because the punishment fit the crime, Matthew 5:38 / Exodus 21:24. It is likely this law was to be applied judicially and not personally by the one wronged, lest it be perceived as an act of vengeance, Leviticus 19:18. Although the Old Law's teaching on this subject was clear, Jesus had a new revelation to share. The Jews twisted the teaching of the Old Testament law on this matter; they basically took these principles and applied them to their everyday relationships.

The 'eye for an eye' was a civil law of the Old Testament where the people had the authority to punish offenders, but the punishment must fit the crime, Exodus 21:23-24.

The retaliation law that was given to Israel was more compassionate than the law that existed previously to the giving of the law to Israel. In reference to this law, Jesus stated that love should succeed over the will to retaliate against our neighbour, Leviticus 24:19-20.

The principle of the law would be that the death penalty would be given to those who voluntarily murdered another person. If someone voluntarily took the life of another, he had his right to life taken from him, Deuteronomy 19:21. This law made accusers think twice before slanderously accusing someone of a deed for which they had no evidence. We have to remember that the law of the land before God gave his instructions was really bad.

If you kill my child, I will kill all your children, your wife, your brothers, your whole generation! If you knock out my tooth or eye, I will knock out all of yours and kill you also.

Here in Matthew, Jesus is teaching against the concept of retaliation. What Jesus was condemning was the Pharisees' misapplication of the principle of this law. They were using the principle as a justification for personal revenge.

They misunderstood the principle of the law. That principle is that there is a punishment for the violation of the law, and the punishment must match the crime. In other words, the death penalty wouldn't be given to one who told a lie.

GOING THE SECOND MILE

'But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.' Matthew 5:39-41

1. Jesus shares an example of non-resistance to personal insults, Matthew 5:39.
Rather than resist an insult, such as a facial slap, 2 Corinthians 11:20, we should meekly endure it and suffer another rather than resisting evil with evil, Proverbs 15:1. It's better to suffer ill-treatment than to resist or retaliate against those who would persecute us, 1 Peter 2:18-20.
2. We see an example of non-resistance to judicial injustice, Matthew 5:40 / Exodus 22:26 / Deuteronomy 24:13.
Disciples need to remember that physical things, such as clothing, are replaceable and truly insignificant in the big picture. Wasting precious time fighting over matters such as these isn't helpful for the follower of Christ; rather, it is a hindrance.

3. Jesus gives an example of non-resistance to government oppression, Matthew 5:41 / Romans 13:1.
On that day, the Roman soldiers had the authority to require a person to carry their baggage or armour one mile, Luke 23:26. The Jews had mile markers along the roadsides, and they would typically drop the baggage after the first mile. Jesus commands a willingness to go two miles! Imagine the soldier's surprise! The individual is obviously not thinking about their 'rights'. They aren't harbouring hateful thoughts toward the soldier for 'making' them carry the soldier's load.

They are willing to cheerfully comply and serve. The meaning for us is that we should perform beyond the call of duty. We should do more than what is expected. Truly, love begins where duty ends.

'Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.' Matthew 5:42

If someone is in need and asks for help, we should not refuse to give what we can, Matthew 5:42 / Luke 6:29-30 / Romans 12:21. The disciples shouldn't retaliate by withholding from those who would ask of them, Deuteronomy 15:8-10 / Galatians 6:10 / James 2:14-17. The disciples must willingly give when compelled by those who would demand of them according to law, Luke 6:29-30.
Jesus' words in this section are perhaps best understood as general principles of non-resistance and not as absolute commands to always be applied literally, just as Matthew 5:29-30 are not to be applied literally.
After all, did the Lord really intend that evildoers be free to slap or insult us over and over again? Are we always to give to those who ask of us, turning no one away? The answer is no, John 18:20-23 / 2 Thessalonians 3:10.
Jesus' point is that small injuries or offences are to be gracefully passed over. If someone slaps us, we've been insulted, but it's not an assault on our lives. We shouldn't feel humiliated but should rejoice in the opportunity to return good for evil, Matthew 5:10-12, assuming that we didn't deserve the slap.
To let someone have your coat or other possession or to go with them two miles is to show in attitude, word, and deed that you are not filled with covetousness or hatred but with a spirit of love.

This is the type of righteousness Christ expects of His disciples, Romans 12:17-21. This type of response will have the best chance of touching the hearts of others for the Lord.
To insist on every individual right or to retaliate against every personal injury is to dispute continually with all men. Such actions describe one filled with selfish pride, not humility, Matthew 5:3-5. This type of response glorifies Satan, not God!
Wrongdoing that is committed against Christians originates from Satan, but Christians must resist the temptations of Satan, James 4:7. However, be careful not to misapply this passage. Jesus never said not to restrain the murderer's

hand. He never said not to oppose the wicked tyrant. And, He never intended for our behaviour to encourage greed or laziness in others.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

'You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Matthew 5:43-48

The law commanding love for our neighbour, Matthew 5:43 / Luke 6:27, is found in Leviticus 19:18, but the law to hate our enemies is not found explicitly in God's Word.

However, the Hebrews were forbidden to make peace with the people of Canaan, Exodus 34:11-16 / Deuteronomy 7:1-6, and the bloody wars which were waged by God's own command inevitably taught them to hate their enemies. This was even the feeling of their most pious men, 2 Kings 13:19.

In contrast, Jesus desires His disciples to practice love rather than revenge. He wants us to have a selfless concern for the ultimate good of others, Luke 7:27-36 / Luke 10:25-37.

He wants us to love our enemies, Matthew 5:44 / Luke 6:27, not in an emotional sense, which would be impossible, but in the sense that we seek what is in their best interest.

It's in this manner that we can and must love our enemies. Jesus' life perfectly illustrated this principle of righteousness, Luke 10:25-37 / Acts 7:60 / 1 Samuel 24:13.

We love our enemies when we bless them, do good to them, and pray for them, Matthew 5:44 / Luke 6:27-28. These things are not possible if hatred resides in our hearts.

Even if these activities don't change them, they will help us develop love like God's. Truly, this is how we should properly respond to persecution. This should deepen our sense of awe concerning divine love.

Imagine how putting into practice Jesus' teaching would affect the world we're living in now. Imagine a world where good was returned for evil! What if we practised what Jesus did? In what way would Jesus' teaching on loving and praying for our enemies help us in our outreach efforts?

It certainly tells us that we will have enemies and we will be persecuted at times, but it also teaches us to continue to love them and pray for them. Remember that prayer may not change their attitude towards you, but it may change your attitude towards them, John 15:18-21.

1. Jesus shares an example of non-resistance to personal insults, Matthew 5:39 / Luke 6:29.

Rather than resist an insult, such as a facial slap, 2 Corinthians 11:20, we should meekly endure it and suffer another rather than resisting evil with evil, Proverbs 15:1. It's better to suffer ill-treatment than to resist or retaliate against those who would persecute us, 1 Peter 2:18-20.

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Disciples need to remember that physical things, such as clothing, are replaceable and truly insignificant in the big picture. Wasting precious time fighting over matters such as these isn't helpful for the follower of Christ; rather, it is a hindrance.

If someone is in need and asks for help, we should not refuse to give what we can, Matthew 5:42 / Luke 6:30 / Romans 12:21. The disciples shouldn't retaliate by withholding from those who would ask of them, Deuteronomy 15:8-10 / Galatians 6:10 / James 2:14-17. The disciples must willingly give when compelled by those who would demand of them according to law, Luke 6:30.

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However, be careful not to misapply this passage. Jesus never said not to restrain the murderer's hand. He never said not to oppose the wicked tyrant. And, He never intended for our behaviour to encourage greed or laziness in others.

'Do to others as you would have them do to you', Luke 6:31 / Matthew 7:12, is often referred to as the Golden Rule. This is the principle of loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Jesus shows that this simple principle, which summarises all the Law and the Prophets say about how we should treat others, Luke 6:31 / Matthew 7:12. This is a fundamental principle of the Christian life that manifests one's relationship both with one's fellow brother in Christ, as well as non-Christians.

This isn't a selfish motivation for being kind to others, but a mental check by which we can continually guard our behaviour in relation to others. This fundamental principle is the foundation upon which is built all that God would have us do in our relationships with others, Romans 13:8-10 / Galatians 5:14.

If the way we go about sharing the Gospel with others is a reflection of what God has done in our lives, what does this tell us about how we should share the Gospel with others?

We need to remember how the Gospel was shared with us, with love, patience, compassion and understanding of where the other person is at, 2 Timothy 2:23-26.

This principle that Jesus sets forth touches every aspect of our lives and is the best moral rule we can live by. It far exceeds its declaration in the negative sense, that is, 'do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you,' which was taught by men such as Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, and Hillel.

The rule, as stated by Jesus, is supreme in that it requires doing good to others and not merely refraining from doing them harm. It is not always easy to see things from another's perspective, but one should always try to do so and then direct one's conduct accordingly.

This verse, Luke 6:31 / Matthew 7:12, is certainly an appropriate conclusion to any instruction on moral duties because of its exceedingly broad scope. Interestingly enough, Jesus comments that this principle is really nothing more than a summary of the Old Testament!

A person who is practising the Golden Rule will not murder, lust, commit adultery, divorce unscripturally, make false promises, hate others, judge unrighteously, etc, Matthew 5:17-48.

For a Hebrew of Jesus' day to faithfully obey the Golden Rule was for them to live obediently under the Mosaic law. In so doing, they would exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 5:20. But, what about today? Let us consider some practical examples of how the Golden Rule should be applied in various circumstances of life.

1. We want to be able to trust in and confide in a friend.

Thus, we should be trustworthy and never betray something told to us in confidence, Proverbs 10:9 / Proverbs 27:6.

2. We do not want to be misquoted.

Thus, we will be very careful not to misquote another person or take out of context what they have said or written, Genesis 2:17 / Genesis 3:2-3 / Matthew 4:1-11.

3. We would like for others to give us the benefit of the doubt.

Thus, we must be inclined to believe the best about others and give them the benefit of the doubt, 1 Corinthians 13:5.

4. We don't like for anyone to hurt our feelings, mock, or ridicule us.

Thus, we will be very careful not to do so to others, Matthew 22:39 / Luke 6:31-36.

5. We like for our friends and family to show an interest in what we're interested in.

Thus, we will genuinely reciprocate that behaviour, even though their interests may be unimportant to us otherwise, Philippians 2:3-4.

6. We should treat every woman with the same respect we would want other men to give to our wives, Ephesians 5:25-29.

7. We do not want others to listen to us with the idea of catching us in a mistake.

Thus, we will not listen to others with that kind of critical attitude, Psalm 31:14.

8. We should be as sympathetic to someone mourning the loss of a loved one as we would wish others to be sympathetic toward us in those circumstances, Romans 12:15.

9. We should show the same interest in saving a lost soul as we would want them to show us if we were lost, Luke 15:1-10.

10. When necessary, we will correct and rebuke others in a way in which we would want to be corrected or rebuked, Ephesians 4:15 / 1 Peter 3:15.

We could go on and on, for certainly there are an infinite number of applications for the Golden Rule in everyday life. There are numerous topics that we haven't even mentioned in regard to this principle.

Take some time to really think about how we would like or expect to be treated, and then make sure we're living up to our own standards in the way we behave toward others.

It's not enough to simply avoid doing something wrong or harmful to another. We must also desire to do that which is good for them! James 4:17. There is no reward in a love that acts out of selfish motives to do something for others for the purpose of receiving something in return, Luke 6:32-34. True love must be unconditional; it mustn't seek a reward.

God loves sinners, Luke 6:33-34, even dying for them while they were yet in sin, so Christians should love all men, sinners included, even their own personal enemies! God's love is impartial; He loved us when we were His enemies, Romans 5:8.

The character that Jesus has just explained identifies those who are of the spirit of the Father, and thus, sons of the Father, Luke 6:35. Christians are to be merciful just as their Father is merciful, Luke 6:36.

Christians should show mercy to others because they need mercy so much themselves. Mercy toward all people should mark disciples' attitudes and actions as it marks God's.

Matthew's account tells us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, Matthew 5:48. Can we be perfect like God? This question: can we be perfect like God is? is based on the verse from the 'Authorised Version', where the first four words suggest that 'perfection' is a goal which we are urged to attain.
The later revisions, however, offer us renderings in which the language isn't only much plainer and therefore easier to understand, but which also reveal that the verse relates to an imperative, to something that is to be obeyed and is therefore much more daunting!

The Revised Standard Version, for example, reads, 'You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect'. In other words, what we are facing isn't a request or an exhortation, but a command that is as plain as any other command found in the Word of God.

Can we possibly obey this command, or is it a demand that is too exacting? Does it impose upon us an unrealistic standard? In short, is this something we can never realise this side of Heaven? Or, is it perhaps not meant to be taken seriously? I suspect that we are inclined to take the latter view!

Whenever we encounter difficult verses, we are likely to tell ourselves that they aren't meant to be taken literally, and then we hurry on to look at something in the Scriptures that is less demanding!

IDEALISTIC? OR PERFECTIONIST?

Not surprisingly, Matthew 5:48 has prompted a wide range of interpretations and explanations. At one extreme, there is the 'idealistic' explanation of those who tell us, 'it is not to be taken seriously', whilst, at the other extreme, there is the view of those who teach that believers are required to attain a state of 'sinless perfection', in which they don't and even can't commit sin.
I'm sure most of us have met people who have claimed that they have reached a stage in their spiritual growth when they never sin. And, of course, the notion is utterly ridiculous!

It is summarily dismissed by the apostle John in 1 John 1:8 and 1 John 1:10. You will, however, find that the response that the 'sinless perfectionists' make to this argument is erroneously based on 1 John 3:9.
But, when they use this verse, they fail to recognise that the words 'cannot sin', in the Greek text, represent the 'aorist tense', which is the tense that describes something that is 'ongoing, continuing, or incomplete'.

The N.I.V. renders this verse a bit better: 'No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.' For this reason, some translations read, like the N.I.V. 'he cannot keep on sinning'.

In other words, the child of God doesn't habitually sin. Whilst he may be exposed to temptation and may even fall, he doesn't continue to commit the same sin over and over again. Sin isn't his normal way of life.

He doesn't practice sin. He doesn't live in sin. And what is more, when he realises that he has been 'caught in a sin', to use Paul's words in Galatians 6:1, he knows that, because he is sincerely repentant, he may seek the forgiveness that is always available, 1 John 1:9.

TWO IMPORTANT WORDS

Look carefully at what the Lord says. He doesn't say, 'You must be sinless as God in heaven is sinless,' because at that time, He wasn't discussing either sin or sinlessness.

There are two words in the verse that are supremely important, the words 'Father' and 'perfect', and we need to look at them in that order.

1. THE WORD 'FATHER'

This is the more important of the two because 'Father' is the word which immediately speaks to us of relationship. What Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:48 rests on the principle that every new relationship brings new responsibility. Test this statement! Examine it from whatever angle you please. Consider it in connection with any human relationship into which we may possibly enter, and you will find that the principle remains true and unshakeable.

In the 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus has been speaking to His disciples about their relationship to the heavenly Father. He has said, in effect, 'God is your Father, and because this is so, it follows that you bear the responsibility of children, to be like your Father'.

Notice that He says, 'as your heavenly Father', or 'like your heavenly Father'. He presents the Father as our model, our example. Now, this is the essence of true worship. It has been said that 'the sum of true religion is to imitate the God whom we worship'. This is why Paul wrote, 'Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children,' Ephesians 5:1.

2. THE WORD 'PERFECT'

There are four New Testament words which have been translated by this word, and, unfortunately, we often make the mistake of failing to understand its true, biblical meaning.

How often have you heard it said, 'There is nothing perfect in this world!' Such expressions have become almost proverbial, and we are inclined to accept them as though they express an infallible truth, which they do not!

There are things in this world which are 'perfect' in the sense that they can't be improved upon. And there are certain matters in which we may become perfect if we have the desire. Think about the meaning of that word.

We all know the meaning that we attach to it today. The modern definition of 'perfect' means 'without flaws or faults'. But, when the New Testament was written, the word had a quite different meaning. In Matthew 5:48, 'perfect' is the translation of the Greek word 'teleios', and means, 'full-grown, mature, or complete.' Sometimes it means 'an end'.

1. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking about eternal life? Matthew 19:16-22. He had done so very much and was admirable in so many ways, but he was conscious of a lack in his life. Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect…' Matthew 16:21. In other words, 'If you wish to be complete…'
Referring to teachers and teaching, James 3:2, uses the same word when it reads, 'We all make mistakes, but if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man'. This means being fully mature in this respect.
2. 1 Corinthians 2:6 reads, 'yet among the mature (Greek- 'perfect') we do impart wisdom.'

Other passages to look at are Hebrews 5:9, where the writer says, 'once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him'. And 1 Corinthians 14:20, 'Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults,' and, especially, 1 Corinthians 13:10, 'But when the perfect comes…' The word, again, is 'teleios', 'the complete'.
In all of these passages, the word 'perfect' doesn't mean 'perfect' in the sense of 'sinless', but means 'fully-grown, mature, or complete', so, with this in mind, let's return to Matthew 5:48 and look at it in its original context.

THE VERSE IN ITS PROPER SETTING

You will notice, I am sure, that Jesus speaks these words found in Matthew 5:48, as He deals with the Christian law of forgiveness. He is speaking about love, and we must, once again, pay special attention to the name He uses for God.
It's the name 'Father'. He is saying that as a Father, God is our example, our model in the exercise of love, and as His children, we must be complete, full-grown, and mature, in this aspect of our own character.

He is saying, in effect, it is easy for you to love those who love you! But for you who call God, 'Father', the standard is much higher. I say that because of the love of your Father, and with His help, you must not only love your friends but also those who even hate you.

And when you have reached the point where you can love those who are unkind to you, or speak evil about you or treat you badly, you will, in this aspect of your character, be like your heavenly Father. You will have become spiritually mature. Perfect!

You see, then, that the principle presented by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:48 applies to every possible aspect of human life. But here it is expressed in connection with the great law of love. To love only those who love us is to be imperfect in love. But to love those who do not love us in return is to be perfect in love.
In conclusion, we need to remember that when we read such words of the Lord Jesus, we mustn't turn away from them as though they have no message for our time, or as though they demand that we attempt the impossible. It's fatal at any time to read His words and then say, 'This is demanding perfection from me, and perfection is impossible'.

We should read the New Testament Scriptures with this fact fixed in our minds: the Lord, Jesus, always means what He says! And He never demands the impossible!

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

'Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 'So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' Matthew 6:1-4

DOING GOOD TO PLEASE GOD

Our Saviour here teaches the general principle that man must not engage in acts of 'righteousness' in order to receive the attention and praise of other men, Matthew 6:1. This truth is applied to three actions in this chapter: charitable deeds, praying and fasting.
These were three major areas in which the Pharisees of Jesus' day clearly manifested their hypocrisy and impure motives. True followers of the Lord must exceed their type of righteousness, Matthew 5:20.
Jesus declares that those who perform acts of righteousness in order to obtain praise from men will receive just that, the praise of men, Matthew 6:2 / Matthew 6:5 / Matthew 6:16.
They won't enjoy any spiritual benefit from the heavenly Father for those actions, though they could have. God will only reward acts of righteousness that result from proper motives.

A good example of a person doing a charitable deed with a proper motive can be seen in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37. The Samaritan acted benevolently toward the man in need. Of course, had there been an audience when the priest or Levite went by, the man in need probably would have received help sooner!
Here, Jesus speaks about the genuine and eternal reward in heaven. On the one hand, there is 'blowing your own trumpet', Matthew 6:2, so to speak; this speaks of the reward being short-lived, uncertain, and unsatisfying, a reward of popular applause or approval.
Some believe that this practice of 'sounding a trumpet', Matthew 6:2, before doing a charitable deed was literally practised; others understand the reference figuratively.
In either case, the hypocrites of today don't blow literal trumpets to foretell their acts of benevolence, yet they certainly do use methods to call attention to their generosity that they might receive personal glory.

Notice Jesus uses the word 'when', not if, Matthew 6:3. When we do good for someone else, 'our left hand shouldn't know what the right hand is doing', Matthew 6:3. The idea here is that a Christian's generosity should be a natural part of their life.
It should come so spontaneously, and with so little thought, that one part of the body should almost be able to engage in it without the other parts knowing. This figure of speech clearly forbids us from boasting about personal acts of goodness.

The Christian should always have respect for the greater. Christians shouldn't give for public display, 'look at what I'm doing' so to speak, but their giving should be as private as possible in order that our motives for giving be kept pure.

The statement doesn't demand that good works be done secretly or that they cannot be made known by others, Mark 12:41-44 / Acts 4:32-37 / 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Jesus is not forbidding the publicity of good works; He is forbidding the attitude that desires publicity.
Are we certain Jesus isn't teaching us to do all good deeds secretly? Yes, even though the next verse mentions good deeds being done in secret and rewarded openly, Matthew 6:4. If we conclude that all good deeds must be done secretly, then we will contradict what our Lord taught earlier in Matthew 5:16.
A Christian's goal in life should be to work in such a way that others will not see them but their good deeds. That's what the focus should be on, the good deed, not the mortal man or woman doing good. This is the difference between 'letting our light shine' and 'shining our light,' Matthew 5:16.
It's worth noting that there are essential requirements for secrecy in this area of righteousness. Secrecy in giving personal aid and assistance to helpless or unfortunate people is commanded by Christ and has these obvious qualities to commend it.

1. It assures the purity of motive in the heart of the giver by removing the temptation to hypocrisy.

2. It protects and honours the privacy of the recipient, a privacy that is crucial to their recovery and restoration.

3. It protects the benefactor from receiving a load of calls upon his generosity.

4. It provides a decent basis for the development of true love and friendship between the helper and the person helped.

5. It honours this specific commandment of Christ, and, to the Christian, this is the most important of all, Romans 12:6-8.

In what ways can we give? We can give our time, our energy, our ears, our finances, food, water, shelter, etc. How does giving help us in terms of evangelism?

Giving helps because when we give, we're demonstrating Christ-likeness, we're pointing people to Jesus through our giving, and when we do it secretly, we're helping prevent boasting in ourselves. This is one reason why giving is a gift; it's not just the ability to give but the ability to give secretly.

Ultimately, we must desire that the praise be given to God for good works accomplished and not to ourselves, Matthew 5:16. We shouldn't rob God of the glory that is rightfully His by focusing our praise upon the creation rather than the Creator, and we shouldn't rob ourselves of the 'reward' that Almighty God has in store for us when we seek His approval rather than the glory of men, Matthew 6:4.

HOW TO AND HOW NOT TO PRAY

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

Many passages in the New Testament emphasise the importance and necessity of prayer for all Christians. However, Jesus addresses the subject with the most depth, giving practical advice on how to pray and how not to pray.

Jesus expects His disciples to pray, as is clear by His use of the word 'when', not 'if', Matthew 6:5-6. Jesus is emphasising the need to be 'sincere' in prayer. Those who pray to be seen by men, as those who do charitable deeds with the same motive, have no reward from the heavenly Father, Matthew 6:5.

Hypocrites or pretenders are often diligent to exercise their 'religiousness' in the most obvious way in order to gain the acclaim of others. These individuals are full of pride and lovers of themselves. Such does not please the Lord, Luke 18:10-14 / James 4:6 / Matthew 23 / 2 Timothy 3:2-9.

Going into a room and closing the door to pray, Matthew 6:6, suggests that Jesus is stressing the advantage of solitude in prayer. We can more easily develop sincerity in prayer privately.

Generally, there will be fewer distractions and disturbances since we can better control the environment when isolated from others. The essence of prayer is seeking after God, and it is undoubtedly easier to seek Him out in solitude because the temptation to pray to be seen by men is removed.

God rewards those who petition Him in a proper spirit by granting their requests that are made in accordance with His will, 1 John 5:14-15. We mustn't conclude that Jesus is here prohibiting public prayer.

The New Testament authorises Christians to engage in public prayer, Acts 2:42 / 1 Timothy 2:8 / James 5:16, although it should be noted that Christ seemed to pray more often when He was alone, Matthew 14:23 / Matthew 26:36-46 / Mark 1:35 / Luke 5:16 / Luke 6:12 / Luke 9:18.

Our Lord underscores the need for 'simplicity' in prayer, Ecclesiastes 5:2. We must avoid using meaningless, mechanical phrases. The pagans were often guilty of such, 1 Kings 18:26 / Acts 19:34. Note that Jesus doesn't condemn repetition in prayer; He condemns 'babbling' which is a vain repetition, Matthew 6:7-8.

A prayer can be repetitive and still be meaningful, Matthew 26:44. Offering thanks for food at every meal could turn into vain repetition, but not if we are truly grateful and mindful of the fact that God is the One who gives all things.

The beauty of the Lord's model prayer, which we will consider shortly, is its simplicity. It is less than sixty words in Greek. If we follow Christ's example, our public prayers will be shorter, and our private prayers will be longer.

To have God as our Father is to have the 'security' of knowing that our prayers are heard; thus, vain repetition is unnecessary. Our needs are known even before the first petition is uttered, Matthew 6:8.

Consequently, some wonder why prayer is necessary. It cannot be said that God is ignorant and in need of being informed, nor is He reluctant that we need to persuade Him. It appears that God imparts His gifts in response to our eagerness to receive them, Luke 11:5-13 / James 4:2.

Even if this weren't the case, we should pray simply because we are commanded to do so, 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Since such is physically impossible, perhaps the meaning is that God expects His children to have a mindset that continually seeks to be in tune with Him. If such is correct, then to 'pray without ceasing' is to be mindful always of the Lord and His will in our everyday decisions and activities.

It's to communicate with the Lord silently and informally throughout our day, offering brief words of thanks and praise as well as confessing shortcomings and expressing petitions. These brief prayers can and should be offered regularly as we go about our business.

Let me hasten to state that I am not advocating that all of our prayers be brief, isolated thoughts. I believe it is wise to also make a custom of offering more in-depth prayers at certain times during the day. Daniel is an excellent example of this, Daniel 6:10.

God must be approached with confidence, not doubting, in prayer, Hebrews 4:16 / James 1:5-8. Even if we feel inadequate to express ourselves fully before God, we can be comforted in the realisation that God knows our hearts, Romans 8:26-27.

Patience and persistence are also required, Luke 18:1-8. It must be remembered that the Father 'is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think', Ephesians 3:20.

There's nothing more terrifying than when a person becomes a Christian, and they don't know how to pray, they don't know what to say or how to say it, they don't know where to begin and where to end.

This is to be expected, after all, Jesus' own disciples didn't know how to pray, even though they had heard and seen many people pray. But there must have been something about the way Jesus prayed and the words He used that encouraged the disciples to want to learn, Luke 11:1.

'This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.' Matthew 6:9-13

In addition to the principles of prayer that Jesus shared with His disciples, He also offered an example for them to consider and learn from. There are a few religious groups that repeat this prayer every time they meet together, but Jesus never intended for these words to be recited week in and week out.

If He wanted this prayer to be recited, then this would go against everything He taught earlier about vain repetition in prayer, Matthew 6:7. Notice that Jesus didn't tell them they were to use these exact words.
He said this is HOW we should pray, we should pray in this manner, Matthew 6:9. We would call it a model prayer because the prayer itself reminds us of what our prayers should be about.
When Jesus prayed, He always addressed the heavenly Father, Matthew 6:9, and He did so in a reverent manner, Psalm 145:1 / Mark 14:36. God is our Father, and we are His children. Many times, Jesus got into trouble with the religious leaders because He called God His Father.
This is all about our relationship with God, and so, when we pray, it's always good to begin our prayer by recognising who He is and who we are in relation to Him.

The word 'hallowed', Matthew 6:9, is similar to the word 'holy,' which means to be separate for God's purpose, to be dedicated to Him. Remember that God is a Holy God and His name is holy and He deserves our respect because He is in heaven.
It's here we see the balance of our relationship with the Lord, yes, He is our Father, but He is also to be hallowed by us, kept holy. We must respect Him when we're speaking to Him in prayer.

God's Name should be considered holy; it is not common or something to be treated lightly. When we address the Father in prayer, we should be as respectful as possible.

After all, we're not just speaking to anybody but to the Almighty, the only true and living God! If we give respect and honour to our earthly father, how much more should we give to God!

Jesus told them to pray that God's kingdom come, Matthew 6:10. At the time these instructions were given to the disciples, the kingdom of God hadn't yet come, Matthew 16:18-19 / Mark 9:1 / Acts 2. The kingdom of God has come, and Christ is now reigning, Colossians 1:13 / 1 Corinthians 15:24-25. Instead, we should pray that the kingdom is enlarged.
The disciples were to pray that men would accept the kingdom reign of Jesus in the sense that the will of the Father be done on earth as it is done in heaven, Matthew 6:10.
As the will of the Father is done in the hearts of men and women on earth as it is done in heaven, then the kingdom comes. Jesus here asks the disciples to pray that people accept the heavenly kingdom's reign in order that they accept His kingship that was yet to come.

The words, 'Your will be done,' are a petition of the present, Matthew 6:10. This has everything to do with the will of God, and our prayers need to be in accordance with the will of God.
To offer such a prayer is to commit ourselves to the doing of God's will as well as to the teaching of that will to others and encouraging them to also submit to it. This is essentially a prayer for the spread of the Gospel and obedience to it. We should pray that God's will be done everywhere, at all times, and by all beings.

The whole point of this is basically praying that those in the world who don't have Christ will accept what God has done for them and come to be obedient to Him and His will, and so, enjoy the benefits of living in God's kingdom.

Notice also that God is the focal point in the prayer, we start by praising Him, for who He is, whilst recognising His holiness, and then we pray that God's deepest desires and will for mankind, will be established on earth, just as it has been established in heaven. To know what the Lord's will is, we need to study His Word, Romans 12:1-2, and spend time with mature Christians.
Notice how we've moved from the focus of being on God to ourselves in Matthew 6:11. Notice that He speaks to our daily needs. In the A.A., they have a saying which says, 'keep it in the day,' which basically means take one day at a time. I think that's good advice because this is what Jesus says over and over again, Matthew 6:28-34.

Notice our daily needs are the basic requirements for life: food, clothing and drink. When the Israelites were in the desert, God provided Manna 'daily', Exodus 16:21.
The petition for 'daily bread', Matthew 6:11, isn't for milk and honey, the symbols of luxury, but for bread that will be sufficient for this day, Exodus 16:12-31.
God will supply all necessary daily needs if we seek His kingdom first, Matthew 6:25-33 / Philippians 4:19. Of course, we must realise that there is a difference between our wants and our needs.
We must be careful not to let prosperity interfere with thankfulness for daily needs, Proverbs 30:8-9. None of us has a promise that we'll be here tomorrow, that's why we have to learn to live and rely on God 'one day at a time', as Lina Martell once sang.
God is the one who is the giver of all blessings, and He's the one who will take care of our needs, but we need to learn to put our trust in God to provide what we need today, even though there may be times when we can't see what will happen tomorrow, 1 Timothy 6:7.
Jesus uses the word 'debts' here in Matthew 6:12, in a spiritual way. Our sins are like spiritual debts to God, Matthew 18:21-35. Jesus elaborates upon this thought immediately after the close of this model prayer.
It's difficult enough to pray for forgiveness when our hearts are broken because we know we've hurt God with our actions or thoughts, but it's even more difficult to forgive those who have hurt us, especially if they are Christians who should know better.

But notice the condition that Jesus places upon our prayer for forgiveness, He says we can only ask for forgiveness when we have also shown forgiveness toward others, Matthew 6:12. In other words, we can't expect God to forgive us if we're not willing to forgive others.
Now we can fight and try to justify our unforgiveness to others, but notice that Jesus stresses this point again in Matthew 6:14-15. It never ceases to amaze me that people hold on to grudges for years. I was speaking to someone recently who was telling me about a brother who really offended him many years ago, and he still has the emails to prove it!
We need to remember that we have all sinned against each other at one time or another, and we need forgiveness as much as the next person.

Do we really believe that God will forgive us if we're holding people's sins against them? Yes, it's hard, yes, we can't forget, as God can forget, but we must forgive, otherwise, there's no forgiveness for us.

Jesus is also teaching us here that we need to admit that we sin, and we too need forgiveness, and so when we become Christians, confessing our sins to God is really important; otherwise, no forgiveness will be available to us, 1 John 1:8-10.
Jesus made this request of the Father, 'Do not lead us into temptation', Matthew 6:13. This request may seem somewhat troubling in light of James 1:13. Why would anyone pray that the Father does not lead him or her into temptation if God does not tempt anyone in the first place?
The solution is that this phrase could be translated as 'Do not lead us into trials'. There are plenty of trials to deal with in life without us praying for any more! Of course, when trials are present, we learn to face them joyfully, James 1:2-4.
Jesus isn't saying that God will lead us into temptation, James 1:13, but what He is saying is that we need to ask God for deliverance from temptation, in order to help us with our weaknesses, and to strengthen us against the works of the devil. If we want to resist the devil so that he flees from us, we need to stay close to God and submit to His ways, James 4:7-10.
Many people misinterpret 1 Corinthians 10:13. Yes, we all get tempted, yes, God won't allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but He doesn't provide a way of escape from the temptation.

The Greek text in 1 Corinthians 10:13 implies that God will give you the strength to endure the temptation; in other words, God will be with you and help you through that temptation.
Next is an element of prayer that is rarely heard publicly, 'deliver us from the evil one' or keep us from evil, Matthew 6:13 / Luke 22:31-32. Prayers for forgiveness are heard regularly, but not for the prevention of sin.
Faithful disciples of Christ should pray to be delivered from the evil one; they should pray to be able to escape the severe temptations that the devil may present to them. The second half of this verse highlights the fact that our prayers and lives should always praise God.

Prayer is critical in the life of the Christian, and the 'Lord's Prayer' or maybe we should call the 'disciple's prayer', after all, He's teaching them how to pray, and we see the example of how to pray. A parallel to this section of text can be found in Luke 11:1-4.
Therein, Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them how to pray. The Lord then proceeds to utter a prayer very similar to the one Matthew records. The fact that Jesus responds to His disciples' requests implies that we can learn how to pray.

It isn't a gift that is possessed by some and not by others, but a talent in which we may grow and develop. One of the greatest needs in growing as Christians is to learn to be more prayerful.

To do so will teach greater dependence upon God and cause all to be more introspective. Our Father wants us to be prayerful people; He wants us to be sincere and feel secure in the prayers we offer to Him.

May we always be mindful of the beauty of simplicity when it comes to talking to Him, as well as the benefits of seclusion. Let's strive to recognise God's awesome nature in our prayers as well as His plan for our lives.

May we appreciate the providence of God, which sustains us on a daily basis and utter prayers that reflect our reliance both physically and spiritually upon Him. Let's strive to manifest a gracious disposition to others as we endeavour to more fully comprehend our own personal need for forgiveness.

We must remember who God is, we must remember that He is a Holy God, and speak to Him with the utmost respect; we must remember that our prayers need to be in accordance with His will, and He is desperate for His will to be carried out here on earth.

Take one day at a time and trust God to provide our daily needs, not our daily greeds, ask God to help us to forgive others whilst we ask God to forgive us, and finally ask Him to help us through those temptations which the devil sends our way.

FORGIVENESS

'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.' Matthew 6:14-15

Here are the terms and conditions for forgiveness, Matthew 6:14-15. We must be willing to forgive others, as we received forgiveness from God at our baptism, Acts 2:38. Having a forgiving spirit identifies us as possessing the nature of God who forgives, Ephesians 4:32 / Colossians 3:13.
If we cannot forgive our people, then certainly we aren't of the nature of God, and thus, not a candidate for heaven, Matthew 9:2-6 / Matthew 18:21-35 / Luke 17:3-4 / James 2:13.

When I was younger, I was made to apologise to my brother for something I hadn't done. Needless to say, I wasn't very happy about it, but as my parents left me no other choice, I had to apologise. I remember afterwards my brother just smiling and mocking me because he knew I didn't do anything wrong against him.

Being accused of something you haven't done isn't a pleasant experience, but when it comes to sin, we're all guilty. You don't have to look very far to see all the evil which is in our world; it's all over our newspapers and television screens.

Sadly, when it comes to sin, many people are in the habit of comparing their sins with those of others. However, we can't compare our sins with others and say, 'At least I'm not a murderer, I only stole some sweets from the shop'. 'At least I'm not an adulterer, I only told a lie', Romans 3:10.
No! God has no standard of sin; in His eyes, sin is sin, and we're all just as bad as one another, no matter what sin we commit, Romans 3:23. God asks us to look deep within ourselves and admit our guilt because if we don't admit guilt, we can't accept forgiveness, 1 John 1:8-10. Anyone who says they aren't guilty can't accept forgiveness because forgiveness is only for guilty people!
In other words, you can't forgive innocent people if there's nothing to forgive! As long as we insist on our innocence, we can never accept forgiveness at the hand of God. So God insists that we admit our guilt because He wants so much to forgive us and because He wants so much to live with us in loving fellowship, Isaiah 59:1-3.
But there can be no loving fellowship unless our rebellion against God is dealt with, and it cannot be dealt with unless we admit sin exists. The Bible insists that Christ died for every one of us and that He died to rescue us from sin, John 3:16 / 1 John 2:2. Christ comes confronting us with our sin and tells us that He is the way out! John 14:6.
Instead of shutting God out of our lives, we must let Him work with us and in us to deliver us from the power of sin that's much too strong for us. When we admit our own sinfulness, we will readily be able to forgive others as God has forgiven us.

Stott says the following.

'Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offences of others, it proves that we have minimised our own.'

The cross doesn't make forgiveness easy, but it does make it possible, Luke 23:34. We must learn to root out any bitterness we have towards others, Ephesians 4:26-27 / Ephesians 4:31 / Hebrews 12:14-15. We must learn to bless those who hurt us, Romans 12:14. We must forgive others as God forgave us, Matthew 6:14-15 / Matthew 6:12 / Matthew 6:13-14.

FASTING IF APPROPRIATE

'When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' Matthew 6:16-18

Our Lord begins by saying 'when you fast', not 'if you fast', Matthew 6:16. He implies that His disciples will practice fasting, i.e., abstaining from food and perhaps fluids for an extended period of time.

The hypocrites in Jesus' day made sure they looked like they were fasting by purposely neglecting to wash their faces and anoint their heads, Matthew 6:17-18. They wanted to appear miserable so everyone would know what they were 'enduring'.
Those who fast in this manner are not pleasing the Lord, and they won't derive any spiritual blessings from such, Matthew 6:16. It is best to conceal our fasting, Matthew 6:17-18, if possible, since the act is intended for self-abasement, not the cultivation of pride.
Much can be learned about fasting by analysing Bible examples of it. There appear to be both physical and spiritual reasons for fasting. Please reflect upon the following reasons.

1. When a friend or loved one is sick, fasting is appropriate.

David ended up fasting for a week in that context for his child who was ill, 2 Samuel 12:15-16 / Psalm 35:13.
2. When a friend or loved one has died, fasting is appropriate.

At the death of King Saul and his sons, the people fasted, 1 Samuel 31:13.
3. When we desire to seek the Lord and His blessings, fasting is appropriate.

The first reference to fasting is in the Book of Judges, Judges 20:26. The last reference to fasting is in the Book of the prophet Zechariah, and devout Jews fasted, Zechariah 8:19.
Most of the fasting was undertaken voluntarily and was not undertaken at the command of God, but devout Jews undertook to fast for at least two reasons. Not for health reasons, but for the following reasons.

1. Because they believed it was a way of attracting the attention of God. If they fasted, they thought that God noticed them.

2. Because they thought that, if they fasted, God would be prepared to do something about the situation that had caused them to fast.

If you think about this second reason, you will see that if a man thought his fasting had influenced God to act, it was very easy for him to imagine that he, personally, was someone special!

The reality, although, through the centuries, the Jew, especially after the Babylonian Captivity, introduced fasts for a whole range of reasons, but only one fast was specifically commanded by God, and that was the fast associated with the Day of Atonement, the most important and solemn Day in their religious Year, Leviticus 16:29.
In Leviticus 16:29, the expression, 'deny yourselves' or 'afflict your souls' is the expression for fasting, and this was the only fast that the Jews observed faithfully every year.
When we examine the New Testament, it surprises some people to find that the Lord only mentioned fasting twice, Matthew 6:16-18 / Mark 2:18-22. Notice that both passages above record Jesus' response to the practice of that time.
But also, notice, although about sixteen times He says, 'it was said by those of old time, but I say to you', Jesus doesn't use these words because this kind of fasting about which He was speaking wasn't covered by the Mosaic Law, but because it was something that the people had taken on themselves in the old law.

In Acts 13:1-3, Luke records that the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul on the First Missionary Journey. With prayer and fasting, they fasted in connection with the appointment of Elders, in the congregations that they established during that journey. Please note that the whole church didn't fast, it was only those mentioned in Acts 13:1 'Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul.'
In 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, Paul mentions sexual fasting, but neither here nor anywhere else does he impose it as a command. In 2 Corinthians 6:5 and 2 Corinthians 11:27, he refers to what he suffered for the sake of the Gospel and

speaks of times when he went without food. But this wasn't because he was 'fasting', but because he had no food to eat!

There are times in life when we are in need of spiritual renewal or special help and guidance. Such times require a deeper focus that fasting can help provide. For example, consider the following: 2 Chronicles 20:1-3 / Esther 4:3 / Esther 4:16 / Acts 10:30 / Acts 13:1-3.

4. When we are grieving over some calamity, fasting is appropriate.

In Ezra 10:6, it is recorded that Ezra 'ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those in captivity.' Nehemiah 1:2-7 / Daniel 6:18-28.

5. When we are repenting of sin, fasting is appropriate.

Jonah records the penitence of the Ninevites after Jonah preached to them, Jonah 3:5 / Jonah 3:10 / Acts 9:9.

I don't claim that the items on this list are exhaustive or mutually exclusive, though I do believe they cover the primary reasons why those of old fasted. All of these reasons are still relevant for us today, and those seeking to do God's will should still fast at appropriate times, Matthew 9:14-15. Fasting should be considered an aid to meditation and prayer, Matthew 17:21 / 1 Corinthians 7:5.

However, since the New Testament doesn't regulate the frequency or duration of fasting, such must be left up to each individual. We have no right to bind or create laws where the Lord has not, but we most certainly should stress the importance of fasting for those who are physically able to participate in such.

The answer to the question, Should a Christian fast? is, therefore, 'yes! If they want to!' but remember that fasting, like 'bodily exercise' may do a little good, but 'godliness is profitable for all things!' 1 Timothy 4:8.

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Matthew 6:19-21

A topical study of the Gospels reveals that Jesus spoke on the subject of money or materialism often. He evidently considered the love of money and material things to be a serious problem that needed to be addressed continually, 1 Timothy 6:10. We haven't changed much in the last two thousand years; the problem remains today.

In the first century, the idea of a secure bank was unknown, and the safest way to keep their money was to bury it, Joshua 7:21 / Matthew 25:18. However, doing so would subject the money, which was composed of metal, to rust and corrosion, Matthew 6:19-20.

They could choose to keep their treasure above ground, but then took the risk of having it stolen by a thief breaking in, Matthew 6:19. In actuality, the Greek words here literally indicate that the 'thieves dig through.'

This statement is accurate since houses of that day were frequently made of loose stone or sun-dried bricks. It was easier for a thief to dig through the wall than attempt to break through a more secure door.

Thus, there really was no absolute way to protect their physical treasures. Any of them could be stolen, metal was subject to corrosion, and clothing could be destroyed by moths.

To 'treasure' something is to love that object more than anything else. To 'treasure' the things of this world is foolish because they are both uncertain and temporary.

Happiness may be found in such 'treasures' for a while, but not true, lasting joy. These verses don't teach that it is sinful to be materially rich in the present world. To be rich is dangerous, but not sinful, Matthew 19:23-24.
However, this passage does teach that we must 'possess' whatever material goods we are blessed with and not vice versa. To possess a large amount of money or resources isn't wrong, but to love those things and consider them to be a 'treasure' is to fall into Satan's trap, 1 Timothy 6:7-10 / Luke 12:15 / Hebrews 13:5.
Anyone with such a mentality will hoard these possessions to harm others and himself. Instead, those who are rich should be careful to remember that they can only trust in God and not in themselves or their earthly treasure. Let them do much good with the things the Lord has entrusted them with, 1 Timothy 6:17-19.
Jesus makes a strong case for laying up treasure in heaven while exposing the folly of hoarding earthly treasure by contrasting the corrupting forces of this world with the security of heaven, Matthew 6:20-21.
To practice righteousness to be seen by God and to bring glory to His name is to make a deposit in God's heavenly 'bank,' Matthew 6:21. There is great security in knowing that such treasures cannot be stolen or damaged. The riches of heaven are eternally secure for the person who continues to treasure them.

'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.' Matthew 6:22-24

Jesus focused on 'treasures', i.e., whatever is most important to our 'heart', Matthew 6:19-21. It is foolish to store up earthly treasures, for they do not last, but heavenly treasures are eternal. In Matthew 6:22-24, He also addresses this theme.
We cannot serve earthly riches and God simultaneously, Matthew 6:24. There can only be one master in a person's life. If we make physical riches our master, then we have chosen a treasure that will not last. If we make God Almighty our master, then we have wisely chosen an everlasting treasure.
What does Jesus mean when He speaks of good eyes, bad eyes, darkness, and light? Matthew 6:22-23 / Luke 11:34.
Understanding His point isn't nearly as difficult when we observe that Jesus is contrasting earthly and heavenly treasures in the verses both immediately before and after. Thus, it's reasonable to suggest that He is still addressing this theme in these verses in the middle.
The eye allows images, that is, light inside the body, Matthew 6:22 / Luke 11:34. Our body will be 'full of light' if our eye is 'good', i.e., healthy, and allows us to see things clearly and in proper perspective.
The person with such good spiritual 'eyesight' sees money as a tool to help further the Lord's work and not as something to lavish upon themselves. But, if our eye is 'bad', i.e., not healthy, then our body will be 'full of darkness', Matthew 6:23 / Luke 11:34.
We will not see things clearly or in a proper perspective, physically or spiritually. It's entirely possible for us to start with a healthy 'eye', but it can become dimmer and dimmer until it is full of the evils of materialism and immorality.

As Christians, we must ensure that the light within us isn't darkness, Luke 11:35. If our whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on us, Luke 11:36.
Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jesus, of course, used the body to represent the whole inner person, the personality, in the parable. The person who believes all of Jesus' teaching will experience full illumination.'

In reference to serving two masters, Matthew 5:24, it should be remembered that God is a jealous God, Exodus 20:5. Just as no right-thinking husband will accept a rival for the affections of his wife, so God will accept no rival for our affections.

If a person loves anyone or anything more than they love God, then that person is not a true disciple, Luke 14:26-33. They are serving another 'master.' Also, it should be recognised that a person doesn't necessarily love what or whom they claim, they love that to which they give foremost devotion and attention, Matthew 19:21.

Jesus contrasts 'God' with 'money', i.e., riches, Matthew 6:24. It's impossible to serve these two masters simultaneously because the only way to obey the one is to disobey the other! If we love and treasure physical things, then we will not serve God with all our hearts, Mark 12:30-31.

God will not accept just part of our service but demands that we love Him supremely, James 4:4 / 1 John 2:15. However, the devil will gladly accept only a portion of our service, for he knows that in getting a part of it, he is truly getting all of it.

The primary thrust here seems to be pointing out the danger of self-deception. A person might falsely reason that they can serve riches as long as they are serving God by means of certain formalities. Jesus says that such isn't possible.

We're either with God or against Him; there is no middle ground, Matthew 12:30. Where is our treasure? If we answer that question honestly, we'll know who our master is!

DO NOT WORRY

'Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life? 'And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.' Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus now addresses the subject of worry in a most powerful way. Jesus' use of the word 'therefore', Matthew 6:24 / Luke 12:22, indicates that He is drawing a conclusion from His thoughts in Matthew 6:19-24, namely, that we must live for God and not for the world. We must trust God and not physical riches.

When Jesus stated, 'do not worry about your life,' Matthew 6:25 / Luke 12:22, He wasn't making a suggestion; He was giving a command that we ought to obey. Jesus wouldn't command us not to worry if it wasn't possible. Worry is a pain we inflict upon ourselves that does not have to be there.

Are you like me? You could break the commandment not to worry, several times before you even get out of bed in the morning, Matthew 6:25 / Luke 12:22 / Philippians 4:6. If we are spiritually perceptive, we will realise that life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing, Matthew 6:25 / Luke 12:22-23.

After all, earthly riches can provide food and clothing, but only God can give life and a body. Since God is the giver of both life and body, certainly He is capable of sustaining the one and covering the other.

Jesus strengthens His argument by referring to the 'birds of the air', Matthew 6:26 / Luke 12:24. They never plant, they never harvest, and they never stockpile for later. They don't 'treasure' earthly things as man does, yet God takes care of them and provides for all their needs!

Surely, He will do the same for us since we are 'of more value than they', Matthew 6:26 / Luke 12:24. We are of more value than the birds and other animals because we are made in God's image and because of our potential to serve. Jesus wants us to trust in God's providence. God will feed us before He feeds His birds!

Because of the previous facts, He has mentioned, Jesus asks what good does it do to worry? Matthew 6:27 / Luke 12:25-26. Worrying is useless, and nothing productive is accomplished by it. It can't make us one inch taller, it can't make us live one day longer, but it can shorten our lives.
Worrying has never been prescribed as a solution to a problem! Imagine a doctor recommending worrying to solve our ulcer! Imagine a preacher rebuking us for neglecting to engage in our daily worrying. Imagine a teacher urging their students to go home and worry about the test.

What good is it going to do us to worry? We are inflicting ourselves with a pain that is absolutely useless and does not help us one iota. Life is so much more than what we worry about, and worry indicates that I am allowing the external to dominate the eternal on my priority list.

If I'm counting on God not to change His mind on Judgement Day about my salvation, Romans 8:1, why do I live like He's going to change His mind tomorrow about what I need? We act as we believe in a God that can provide salvation, but nothing else.
Despite the fact that He gives testimony through nature, that He can provide, Matthew 6:28 / Matthew 6:26 / Luke 12:27 / Luke 12:24. In the months ahead, we will see the grass grow, the birds fly, the flowers bloom and the trees bud.
The Bible says we are in the hands of God, He opens up His hands and provides every living thing with what it needs, and we are in good hands with God, Psalm 145:16. We should put forth the effort to dress modestly, but there is no need to worry about attire.
The lilies of the field are some of the most beautiful things on Earth, yet they do not worry or work at it; God 'clothes' them, Matthew 6:29 / Luke 12:27. If God clothes the lilies, which neither labour nor spin and if He clothes them more beautifully than Solomon in all his glory, then, how much more will He clothe His people? Matthew 6:30 / Luke 12:28.
Worry portrays a false view of human beings as if we were only machines that need to be fuelled and lubricated. We are bombarded daily with adverts that intentionally create anxiety, with the message that we are nothing more than complex machines which require maintenance.

They tell us we need new clothes, we need a new brand of mobile phone, we need a new home, we need a new car, we need a different shaped tea bag. And if we buy these things and take care of our machine, we might get a few more miles out of it.

Jesus is here to tell us that we are more than that; we are more than just a machine to be maintained. He says that kind of orientation is absurdly unworthy of what a human being really is, and He is calling us to a higher ambition. The problem with worry is that it makes us forget the promises of God.

Trusting God to meet our needs doesn't mean we don't have to work, working is one way God gives us the ability to provide, He gives us the ability to work, Romans 8:32.
It doesn't mean we ignore other people's needs, when we see a need we shouldn't say, 'Trust in God, He'll meet our needs', God could be meeting that need through our generosity.

Worrying is unnecessary for the person who has faith that fully relies upon and trusts God! Who will deny that God has made the fields and flowers beautiful? If the Lord does that for something that will be burned up as fuel in an oven, will He not provide for His children's needs even better?

Jesus begins summarising, stating that we ought not to worry about the necessities of life. God's care for the flowers and birds, Matthew 6:28-29 / Luke 12:27-28, should teach us to expect that He will show more interest in providing

for those who have been fashioned for eternity, Matthew 6:31 / Luke 12:29. After all, God gave His Son for us; why would He withhold the necessities of life? Romans 8:31-32.
Worrying is unbecoming of true disciples. It's perhaps to be expected that those who are not believers in God would have life's necessities as their main interest, but Jesus tells His followers that they have a heavenly Father who will provide these things for them, and they are to trust Him to provide.

This is the case because He is both knowledgeable of our needs and able to supply them. Jesus also shows worry to be destructive. Worry robs us of our spiritual values and encourages us to focus on things in this world.

An example of this can be seen in Luke 10:38-42. Martha was more concerned about being a good host, rather than learning as a disciple; her worrying wasn't good. Today, many still allow worry to interfere with being the kind of disciples that God would have them to be.
Can we trust God to provide our daily needs like food, drink and clothes? Matthew 6:31 / Luke 12:29. Didn't God supply food every day for His people in the wilderness? Exodus 16:4.
Didn't God supply water for His people to drink in the wilderness? Exodus 17:6. Didn't God miraculously preserve their clothes and shoes for forty years? Deuteronomy 29:5.
What makes a pagan? Matthew 6:32 / Luke 12:30. A pagan looks for life in the external, instead of the eternal. The pagan might be the politest, kindest, decent person we have ever met; he's a pagan, and he's looking for life in all the wrong places. And if we are trying to find life in the external, we will worry.
If a person seeks only the material things of life, they will likely find them, but they cannot expect the spiritual. However, if a person seeks that which is spiritual, then they can expect both. That is a wonderful promise from God!

Notice, Jesus didn't say 'Stop seeking,' Matthew 6:33 / Luke 12:31. That's not the issue; the issue is, what are we going to seek this week? He tells us the thing we should want most, and that is God's kingdom and doing what God wants. We will worry tomorrow, not because our problems are too big, but because our goals are too small.
We were meant for more than just preserving the body beautiful; we were created to enjoy and to promote the Rulership of God in the world. If that is our priority, we can see that goal, which is truly worthy of what a human being really is. We can seek that goal no matter what happens.

Illness can come, and we can still seek the goal of enjoying and promoting the kingdom of God. We can lose our job or a loved one through a divorce or death, or an investment can go wrong. But nothing can happen to us tomorrow that can keep us from the goal that is worthy of who we really are.

Jesus didn't say, We won't have problems, but He did say that every day has its own troubles, Matthew 6:34. God knows what we need, and God is faithful; God will see to it that we have everything we need to put His kingdom first. God's going to make sure that everything we need to be what He's designed us to be and to pursue what He wants us to pursue, we will have.
Jesus said, 'seek first the kingdom of God,' Matthew 6:34 / Luke 12:31. Literally, this means we are to 'keep on seeking'. To seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness is to endeavour to live a godly, obedient life at any cost, a life that glorifies God in the church, Ephesians 3:21, which is His kingdom, Matthew 16:18-19.
To accomplish this is to live by the principles set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as the rest of the New Testament. To be worried about matters of life implies that we don't trust God completely. If we don't trust God fully, then our treasures are on the Earth, and our master is money, Matthew 6:19-24.
Such a person may be seeking the kingdom partially, but such is not sufficient. God doesn't want to hold second or third place, or even lower, in our lives. He expects that we make Him our number one priority! Mark 12:30.

The fact is that all of our worrying will not give us control of tomorrow; it will only make us miserable today, Matthew 6:34. It's foolish to attempt to anticipate tomorrow's troubles today and to try to bear them today. As we noted earlier, much of our unhappiness arises from the dread of that which never comes to pass.
If there is one thing we should start tomorrow, it should be to improve our prayer lives. The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. Can you imagine what would happen if we spent more time praying instead of worrying?

We would have much less to worry about. We can't control tomorrow, politicians can't control tomorrow, our friends and family can't control tomorrow, but God can.

It should be noted that there is a big difference between worrying about the future and preparing for it to the best of our ability. All are to be good stewards of God's entrusted blessings, but none should worry about tomorrow if they are doing their best to serve God faithfully today.

God will always listen to any of our problems, and by improving our prayer lives, we are recognising that it's God who controls tomorrow, not us. When we pray, we receive the greatest cure for worry; we experience the touch of the eternal.

God is going to respond to our prayers when we talk to Him about our concerns. He will do something about that concern if it's in accordance with His will, and He is going to send us a peace that cannot be explained away.

When we pray, God sends us a peace that we simply cannot understand because it's beyond our understanding. God protects us from unnecessary worry when we turn the worry over to Him and leave that worry with Him, Philippians 4:6-7.
The word 'worry' is used repeatedly in this context, and if God is truly our Master, then there is no need to have anxiety or doubt regarding anything. God will take care of us, Romans 8:28.
The worrier doubts and is double-minded; such a person is unstable and lacking in faith, James 1:6-8. Such a person fails to realise the benefits and peace of mind that come from relying upon God and not upon physical riches or ourselves, Philippians 4:6-7.
I find it interesting that the Greek word for 'worry' is the word 'merimnao', which basically means distraction. Read through Matthew 6:25-34 / Luke 12:22-31, again, but instead of reading the word 'worry', replace it with the word 'distraction'. When you do this, I believe this puts a whole new perspective on what Jesus is teaching us here.
He's saying we shouldn't allow ourselves to get distracted by the everyday needs of our lives; God will take care of them for us. He doesn't want us to get distracted, but He wants us to stay focused on serving God in His kingdom and continue to seek His righteousness.

The same idea is found in 1 Peter 5:7. Peter literally says, 'cast all our distractions upon God, because God won't be distracted from meeting your needs.'
Perhaps this is what Peter had in mind because the word 'worry' or 'anxiety' is the Greek word 'merimna', and it means 'distraction'. Peter and Jesus are both saying, Don't let your basic everyday needs distract you from seeking God's kingdom today.

Turn your worries over to God, 1 Peter 5:7, means to let go of it, let God take care of our distractions because He's not going to get distracted from meeting your needs.
We will still have those things on our mind, but when we give them to God, we won't be controlled by our anxieties because we trust God to take care of them for us. We might as well give our worries over to Someone who can do something about tomorrow because we can't.

Do you know that doctors are prescribing more and more drugs for anxiety than for any other illness? Do you know that the single most common sin that will steal our joy is the sin of worry? Worry is the fine we pay when we look for life in all the wrong places.

When we look for life in things that weren't intended to give life, worry will be the tragic, yet inevitable result. We're all created by God to need something to live for, something to give meaning to our existence and something to set our hearts upon.

Is worry a problem in your life? This next part examines what Jesus taught about worrying and offers some practical suggestions for overcoming it. There are many enemies of the mind, but worry may be the most destructive. Some have compared worry to a rocking chair; it gives us something to do, but does not get us anywhere!

Worry has also been likened to an old man with a bent head, carrying a load of feathers which he thinks are led. Worrying is a serious problem in the twenty-first century. If we allow it, worry can destroy us by slowly taking over our minds and bodies!

People worry about most anything and everything. For instance, people worry about things that have already happened. Such is pointless since the past cannot be changed. One should learn from the past, seek forgiveness on God's terms when sin has been committed, and move on; that's what the apostle Paul did, Philippians 3:13.
People also worry about things that will inevitably happen. Many fear growing older or dying, but again, such is futile. Rather than worrying about these matters, it would be better to simply prepare for them to the best of our ability.

We must remember that death is not the end, Hebrews 9:27, and that there are blessings to be had in old age, 2 Corinthians 4:16. Additionally, people worry about things that will never happen. The fact that most of our fears will never come to pass should help us understand the futility of worrying.
Mark Twain once said the following.

'I have worried over a great many things in life, the most of which never happened'.

Finally, people worry about things that God has already taken care of. In Mark 16:3, the women who went to anoint Jesus' body early Sunday morning expressed concern over who would move the stone away from the tomb. As it turned out, God had already taken care of the matter.
How often does He share His compassion with us? Every day, every morning, Lamentations 3:22-23. When Jesus taught the people how to pray, He told them to pray for their daily bread, Matthew 6:11.
How many times have we missed today's blessings by worrying about tomorrow's possibilities? Worrying is a sin because it makes us miss today's grace.

God gave us food today, He gave us clothes today, He gave us friends today and a place to worship today. Are we missing our reason to rejoice today because of something that might happen tomorrow?

Don't let tomorrow keep us from living today fully, Psalm 118:24. We've got today to hug our kids or kiss our wife or husband. We've got today to give someone a smile. We've got today to make a new friend or do something for an elderly person. We've got today to read our Bibles and get down on our knees to worship God.
Jesus says, Don't let food, drink, clothes or even tomorrow distract us from serving God today because He'll take care of those things for us. I don't know what will come to each and every one of us tomorrow.

I don't know what distractions will come our way, but I do know that when worry knocks, we don't have to let it in; we can let faith in instead. Wouldn't it make more sense to give our worries and our lives over to Someone who can control tomorrow?

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

‘Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ‘Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.’ Matthew 7:1-5

JUDGING OTHERS

Jesus in Luke 6:37-42, and here, teaches against the legalistic judging that the Pharisees were practising; their self-righteous legal system of doctrine moved them to be critical of others who didn’t agree with them on every point of their theology.

The word ‘judge’ used here, Matthew 7:1 / Luke 6:37, is the Greek word, ‘krino’ which is used in places like, John 12:48 / Acts 17:31 / 2 Timothy 4:1. The use of the word, ‘judge’ therefore is speaking about the kind of judging that speaks of someone’s salvation, or the lack of it, in others.

Christians shouldn’t practice this kind of judging, after all, not even Christ did this while He was on earth, John 12:47. The problem with judging someone in terms of their salvation is sinful because God is the judge and He knows people’s hearts and motives better than anyone, and He has a date set for this kind of judging, 1 Corinthians 4:4-5.

Luke tells us that we shouldn’t judge or condemn but ‘forgive’, why? Luke 6:37. Because we have been forgiven and we need forgiveness as much as the next person, and who are we to withhold forgiveness from others, when we needed it so much ourselves? Luke 6:37 / Matthew 18:21-35.

Luke tells us to ‘give’, Luke 6:38. It’s the nature of godly people to behave as God. God is a giver, and so, His people should give. Those who love their brothers and sisters in Christ don’t stand in judgment over them.

The thrust of what Jesus states here is that we will be dealt with in final judgment by God in the same manner in which we treat our fellow man, James 2:12-13.

Therefore, when we measure mercy to others, God will, in turn, measure mercy to us, Matthew 7:2 / Luke 6:38.

That’s the biggest problem with this kind of judging: it’s judging with condemnation attached. In other words, they become the judge, juror and jailor.

Luke also adds a parable, Luke 6:39, which basically means that those who are spiritually dead can’t lead anyone onto a spiritual life, because both are spiritually blind. No one can lead above and beyond his own spiritual stature, Luke 6:40.

Those who disciple others will lead them to be like themselves. If the teacher is spiritually blind, the student will become like his teacher, spiritually blind too, John 13:16 / John 15:20.

We must always look at others with an attitude of love; otherwise, legalism moves us to be critical and unmerciful in judgment concerning another’s beliefs and life. God will severely judge those who harbour such attitudes toward our fellow man, Matthew 18:21-35.

‘You’re judging me!’ is a common response uttered by many today whose toes are stepped on by the truth. The implication is that no one has the right to draw attention to a fault in their life.

Although some forms of judging are prohibited by Scripture, there are other types that we are commanded to engage in. The Bible is a beautiful book, isn't it? It contains the wonderful message of God's love for us. Part of the beauty of God's Word is its simplicity.

In my Bible, the New Testament is only about two hundred and fifty pages long! Yet, I've seen commentaries written by men that consume the same amount of space in only discussing one New Testament book!

We tend to make things unnecessarily complicated, but, in general, God doesn't do this. God has given us His inspired, revealed will, and we can understand it if we diligently desire to do so.

But, at the same time, we need to realise that there are a few things in the Bible that are somewhat difficult to comprehend. Peter acknowledges this very thing concerning Paul's letters, 2 Peter 3:16.
Essentially, he says that those who are unstable and untaught will twist the Scriptures to their own destruction when they encounter a passage that is difficult to understand! That is, they misuse these difficult passages by teaching error, and they will suffer the loss of their souls as a result.

What should we do when we encounter a passage of Scripture that is difficult for us to understand? We should be very careful, careful to study the verses completely in context and careful to consider all other passages on the same topic.

If we do this, we can have some confidence that we are not twisting the Scriptures to our own destruction. We must always remember that if we come to a conclusion that is contrary to clear Biblical teaching elsewhere, then we've made a mistake and our conclusion, whatever it may be, is invalid.

I wrote all that to help prepare us for analysing one difficult passage in the New Testament; however, I don't believe that Jesus intended His words to be difficult to understand.

For some people, these words are difficult. Many incorrectly believe that these verses teach us that it's absolutely wrong to judge others. This is simply not true; it is not always wrong to judge others.

Jesus is laying down a general principle here, but He isn't limiting all types of judging. How do we know? Well, the Scriptures authorise certain actions that simply cannot be done without humans exercising judgment upon others. Let me give you a few examples to think about.

1. Consider our judicial system.

God has given authority to civil governments to make judgments, Romans 13:1-7, and we are to obey our leaders unless they instruct us to go against the Lord's ways, Acts 5:29.
2. Consider the church.

The body of Christ has the responsibility to exercise judgment on those who walk disorderly. The judgment to be exercised is that of discipline or withdrawal of fellowship. Numerous passages support this truth, Matthew 18:15-20 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 / 1 Corinthians 5.
3. Look at the immediate context.

We are not to cast our pearls before swine, Matthew 7:6. But, how can we obey this command without making some judgments? Jesus warns His followers to beware of false teachers, Matthew 7:15. However, if we could never make judgments about individuals, then how could it ever be determined who is a false teacher and who isn't?
4. The title of this lesson proves that judging others is not always wrong.

The title comes from John 7:24, which is a direct quote from the Lord Himself! Jesus instructs us in that verse to judge with righteous judgment, and we will consider exactly what that means shortly.

But, for now, it should be exceedingly clear that God requires us to make certain types of judgments, and thus Luke 7:37 / Matthew 7:1 must not be interpreted as an absolute prohibition against all types of judging.
If this doesn't mean that all types of human judging are wrong, then what type of judging is Jesus speaking against here? I believe the Lord is speaking against judging that is unmerciful, hypocritical, or vengeful. Let's consider these three aspects one at a time.

1. We must not judge unmercifully.

If we aren't merciful to humans in our dealings with them, then they are not likely to be merciful to us, Matthew 7:2 / Luke 6:36. The way they judge us will be a reflection of the way we have judged them. Remember Haman? He was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, Esther 7. What Solomon said truly applies to the realm of human judging, Ecclesiastes 10:8. And, even more importantly, eventually, we will all be judged by God Himself, and He will take into consideration the way we have judged others.
If we are merciful, He will be merciful to us. If we are cold, unloving, and unforgiving toward others, God will treat us similarly, Luke 6:36 / Matthew 5:48 / James 2:13 / Matthew 18:21-35. Jesus has little use for followers with harsh, bitter, and fault-finding spirits.
2. We must not judge hypocritically.

This seems to be the fundamental thrust of Matthew 7:3-5. Jesus uses the term 'hypocrite' for those who judge others and do not examine themselves first. They are in no position to judge others or assist them when they suffer from an even greater problem!
Both parties described have a problem with sin, depicted by the speck and plank in their eyes, Matthew 7:3-4 / Luke 6:41-42. Common sense tells us that both need to remove the foreign objects, that is, sin from their eyes, Matthew 7:3-4 / Luke 6:41-42, that is, life.
The plank of wood in our own eye expresses the hypocritical mistake of the legalistic judge who considers themselves righteous while judging the faults of another in comparison to their own self-righteousness, Matthew 7:3-4 / Luke 6:41-42.
Their system of religion moves them to be judgmental of small matters in the lives of others who don't conform to their regimented beliefs, while at the same time, there is a major flaw in their own life. This is basically a picture of a person who ignores his own grievous sins while trying to correct the relatively minor shortcomings of another.

The speck of dust and the plank, Luke 6:41-42 / Matthew 7:3-5, represent the inequality between that which is tiny, insignificant, almost invisible, and that which is obvious, flagrant, and obtrusive.
The legal system of judgment by which the faultfinder lives makes it impossible for them to be an objective judge of others. In order for us to correctly evaluate others, we must first recognise our own sinful state, Galatians 6:1.
Don't miss this important point here: just because someone has a speck of dust in their eye, doesn't mean they can ignore it. Jesus says it still needs to be removed, and this is done by admitting that we have faults, and we need forgiveness, 1 John 1:8-10.
Christians mustn't allow sin to reside in their lives, even to a small degree. When a person has successfully overcome a problem with a particular sin, they will then be in a better position to assist someone else with a similar problem.

Those who are no longer in sin will be better able to 'see clearly' and assist others, Matthew 7:5 / Luke 6:42. Jesus isn't condemning this type of judging but encouraging it.
Paul elaborates upon this thought in Galatians 6:1. It is not wrong to realise that a brother or sister has a problem with sin. It's not wrong to confront them and help them overcome it.
However, if we are burdened with the same sin ourselves, or perhaps one even more heinous, then we aren't going to be able to do them much good. Often, humans engage in hypocritical judging without even being aware of it.

I'm reminded of the true story I read about two well-known preachers of the past. One of the men admired the other very greatly and had an opportunity to meet him one day. The admired preacher answered the door with a cigar in his mouth.

The other preacher was aghast; he couldn't believe it! He bluntly asked, 'How can you, a man of God, smoke that?' In response, the other preacher pulled the cigar from his mouth, put his finger on his visitor's rather inflated stomach, smiled and said, 'The same way as you, a man of God, could be that fat.'

What can we learn from these two men? Humans are often blind to their own vices. Both of these men had a problem, namely, they were not taking care of their bodies as they should, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. We must be good stewards of our physical bodies just as we are of our time and other resources. We should take care of our bodies to the best of our ability.
Being significantly overweight and smoking are both provably bad for our health. We should try to help one another overcome problems like these. Let us be careful not to judge others hypocritically.

These men were guilty of it, and so are we sometimes. Even great men like David have been guilty of it! 2 Samuel 11 / 2 Samuel 12:1-7. Let us be exceedingly careful in our efforts to avoid hypocritical judgment.
3. We must not judge vengefully.

Although it isn't mentioned explicitly in this passage, Jesus seems to also be condemning judgment that is vengeful. Embedded in the Greek word for 'judge' in Matthew 7:1 / Luke 6:37 is the idea of condemning someone and even sentencing them.
We don't have the right to do this as individuals, even if we have been wronged by someone, Romans 12:19. God is the ultimate judge. He has reserved the right of vengeance for Himself.
So far, we've seen that there is the wrong kind of judging. When we judge without mercy, when we judge hypocritically, or when we judge vengefully, we are not being pleasing to God.

But what about the right kind of judging? John 7:24 instructs us to 'judge with righteous judgment'. How can we know if our judgment is righteous? I believe the key to judging righteously is found in our attitude.
We must have a good attitude in order to judge righteously, an attitude that manifests several characteristics. Some of these characteristics have already been indirectly mentioned, but now let's examine them more closely.

1. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of love.

Our love should be seen at all times, but especially when we are confronting someone regarding sin in their life, John 13:35.
2. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of consideration and compassion.

Paul wrote about being humble toward one another, valuing them more than we do ourselves. To put their interests first, in Philippians 2:3-4. Peter wrote about being sympathetic towards each other, to love one another, to be compassionate and humble, in 1 Peter 3:8.
To correct someone in sin should not be a joyful privilege but a serious duty, James 5:19-20. We should feel compassion for a brother or sister who is overtaken in sin; we should not rejoice in their shortcomings or think ourselves superior. If we aren't humble and spiritually minded, Galatians 6:1, then we aren't well-equipped to help someone else overcome their sins.
3. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of forgiveness.

May we never forget that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God', Romans 3:23. That would include you and me. When we identify sin in the life of someone else, we cannot do it from the perspective of perfection; none of us is sinless.

Instead, as Christians, we should be addressing sin in the life of someone else from the perspective of having been forgiven an exceedingly large debt ourselves, Matthew 18:21-35.

4. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of self-examination.

This point has already been addressed earlier, though it can be supplemented well with two passages, 2 Corinthians 13:5 / Romans 2:21. When we are loving, considerate, compassionate, and willing to forgive others and examine ourselves, then we're ready to use the Word of God to judge others, not according to appearances, but righteously. We can only do this by examining fruit, Matthew 7:20.

When examining the actions and words of others, we must ask, are these actions and words in harmony with the Bible? This is how judgments should be made, not according to my personal likes or dislikes, but according to the Scriptures. We should be making judgments like this all the time.

Even as I write, you should be examining my words and judging whether or not I speak the truth. This is a good thing, Acts 17:11. Let it also be observed on this point that we must be exceedingly careful in judging a person's intentions since we don't know the hearts of men like God does, Romans 8:27-29.

Caution is always in order in this regard. If the Bible is the standard we use for judging, and we use it correctly with a proper heart, then we will not go wrong, because in essence, we are merely passing down the judgment that God has already given! Psalm 119:172.

Righteous judgment can only be based upon the Word of God! For example, if we know that a person is engaging in sexual immorality and we go to them humbly and tell them that they are sinning and need to repent, they might respond by saying, 'we're judging them and that I have no right to do so,' but they're wrong.

We're merely passing down God's judgment that He has made known through His word. We shouldn't be there addressing this person if we're not interested in trying to help them.

We shouldn't be there if we don't love them and their soul. We shouldn't be there if we ourselves are not right before God. If we're hypocritical or if our motives are improper, the chances of them repenting are very unlikely.

The same could be said for any sin, not just sexual immorality. If we know that a person is teaching false doctrine, if we know that a person is using profanity, if we know that a person is walking disorderly, etc., then we have a responsibility to help them.

Our own life needs to be right first, and then, with God's Word and a proper attitude, we can help others. But we can only judge them by their fruits with the Word of God, for this is what we ourselves will be judged by, John 12:48. There is a right way to judge and a wrong way. It is only when we have a 'clear vision,' a proper, helpful attitude, all the facts in perspective, and a knowledge of God's Word that a just and correct judgment on any issue can be made.

Why would judging our brothers and sisters condemnably damage our outreach efforts? It gives the impression that some are more 'righteous' than others, it gives the impression that others need 'more' forgiveness than others, Romans 3:10 / Romans 3:23. Let us abstain from improper judgment and practice righteous judgment as God expects us to and let us be wise enough to receive it gracefully from others.

DOGS AND PIGS

'Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.' Matthew 7:6

In the first century, dogs and pigs were considered to be unclean animals; they were not domesticated and were sometimes fierce. The connection of this verse to the previous ones is not obvious.

Jesus had been speaking about judging in Matthew 7:1-5. Perhaps Jesus is now trying to prevent His disciples from drawing the false conclusion that all judging is wrong.
The Lord commands that holy things are not to be given to dogs, and pearls are not to be thrown before pigs, Matthew 7:6. Obviously, in order to obey this command, some judging is necessary, but what does Jesus mean by these statements? Let's first state what we know His prohibition does not mean.
1. He does not mean that there are some who should not have the opportunity to hear the Gospel.

The Gospel message is for all. God wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth, Mark 16:15 / 1 Timothy 2:4.
2. He does not mean that we are to predetermine which individuals would be good prospects for conversion.

Who would have ever known that Saul of Tarsus, the great persecutor of the church, would be an ideal prospect for Christianity, Acts 9.
3. He does not mean that we are to have a self-righteous attitude and withhold the Gospel from those who aren't 'righteous' like us.

We are to esteem others as better than ourselves and look out for their best interests, Philippians 2:3-4.
Now that we've mentioned some common misconceptions in this passage, let's talk about what Jesus does mean in this verse. Quite simply, Jesus is warning us that certain things cannot be given to some individuals or types of persons.

Specifically, He means that we should be wise in our attempts to preach to individuals who thrust the Gospel away and reject it. The most holy things ought not to be offered indiscriminately to all persons; the dogs and swine refer to people who are mean and vicious and who have no desire to apprehend spiritual things.

When the precious spiritual truths of love and mercy are extended toward the ruthless and hard-hearted, they are received with criticism and mockery. How someone receives the pearls of truth determines their true nature.

Once a vicious nature is discovered, then it's useless to offer opportunity by continually preaching and teaching the precious truths to the one who continually rejects such.

When we encounter individuals who don't want anything to do with the Gospel, we should 'shake the dust off our feet,' Matthew 10:14, and go to those who want it. We can't do this without making a judgment!
It is a foolish waste of precious time to try to force the Gospel on those who resist it, for they don't understand the beauty or value of it, and persistent presentation of it only provokes their anger!

Nevertheless, in order to determine whether or not one actually will reject the Gospel, they must first be given a chance to hear it. To judge anyone on the basis of physical appearances or habits and conclude that they would not be interested in the Gospel is premature judgment and wrong!

Let us strive for a humble attitude as we preach God's saving Gospel to all, but let us also cherish and respect the preciousness of it by not forcing it upon those who reject it and are unappreciative of our efforts, Acts 17:32, i.e., the dogs and pigs of our day. For New Testament examples of this, read, Matthew 21:23-27 / Acts 13:42-52 / Acts 19:9.
Although we are not to judge vengefully, unmercifully, or hypocritically toward our fellow man, there must be some discerning of character based upon the evidence at hand, Matthew 7:20. May God give us wisdom in this regard!

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!' Matthew 7:7-11

There is a progression here of one's intensity by which we seek God's help. By faith, one must seek God according to His will. As opposed to the self-righteous hearts of dogs who continually reject all righteousness, the humble-hearted must intensify their dependence on God for direction in life. We need to believe that God will provide.

Our Lord is again teaching on the subject of prayer in this context. Asking is making a request with our voice, seeking is the act of pursuing someone or something, and knocking is an effort to open and pass through an obstacle, Matthew 7:7 / Luke 11:9.
All three of these verbs are continuous in Greek, i.e., one must continue to ask, seek, and knock, and they seem to be communicating the same basic idea in a progressive manner.

When we pray to the heavenly Father, we must do so seriously, not vainly. Prayer is not to be an empty ritual. To pray correctly, we must not only 'ask' for a blessing, but we must also faithfully 'knock' and 'seek' for the fulfilment of our request, Matthew 7:8 / Luke 11:10 / Luke 18:1-8.
Prayer isn't an opportunity to make requests for things we aren't willing to work for or are too lazy to sincerely pray for again if the petition is not immediately answered in the affirmative!

Prayers that are pleasing to God are offered from the heart zealously. When a person puts little heart or passion into their prayers, should they really expect God to put much heart into answering them?

We must continue to ask, seek, and knock according to the Lord's will, and He will bless us, Matthew 7:7-8 / Luke 11:9-10. This is a promise of God, and He is faithful to keep His word!
Let me hasten to state that although there are no explicit restrictions placed upon this teaching here, the rest of the New Testament does establish some parameters, Matthew 6:14-15 / James 1:6-7 / James 4:3 / 1 Peter 3:7 / 1 John 3:22 / 1 John 5:14.
I believe one proper application of this verse is that those who are genuinely seeking the truth are going to find it. I do not believe that there is anyone who has lived or will live, who sincerely desired to know the truth, who did not have an opportunity to come in contact with it, Acts 10. No one can truly believe in this promise unless they have great faith in the providence of God.
Jesus illustrates the willingness of God to care for His children. An earthly father wouldn't mock his son's request for help by giving a stone or a snake or a scorpion, Matthew 7:9-10 / Luke 11:11-12, nor would God do such a thing in the spiritual realm, Matthew 7:11 / Luke 11:13. It's the rule with God to answer prayer, but how and when He answers is His choice. His wise answers are often not the answers we feel we should have.
Bread and fish were common foods for the peasants of Galilee. Human parents 'give good gifts' to their children to the best of their ability because they love them, that is, they wouldn't give them a stone instead of bread or a serpent instead of fish, Matthew 7:11.
But, how much more will God the Creator, whose love and ability to give are infinitely beyond any earthly parent, 'give good things to those who ask Him!', Matthew 7:11 / Luke 11:13.
Jesus is comparing human parents, who are 'evil', with God Almighty, who is perfectly good and righteous in every way. Have you considered that God's love for you is even greater than your parents' love for you? This truth must be remembered when petitions are offered to the Lord and not answered as we think they should be.

Our prayers should always centre around the fact that God knows best and He has our best interests in mind, regardless of how He answers. To illustrate that God can be trusted to respond to our prayers, Jesus told the parable of the friend who calls at midnight, Luke 11:5-13.
Hospitality was of paramount importance in the biblical world, and when a guest arrived, even unexpectedly, even at midnight, there was no question that hospitality must be extended.

So, when the man in the story finds himself without enough bread for his guest, he goes to a friend and asks to borrow some, even though he must wake up his friend's entire household.

Hearers today might empathise with the woken-up friend and think that the midnight caller is pushing the limits of friendship, Luke 11:7. But in the culture of the biblical world, it is the woken-up friend who is behaving badly.
The ability of his friend to provide hospitality, and thus his honour, is at stake. Jesus says that the man will eventually respond to his friend's request, not because he is a friend, but because of his friend's shamelessness, Luke 11:8.
His friend displays no shame in asking for help to meet the requirements of hospitality. The woken-up friend would incur dishonour if he failed to help his neighbour in this essential obligation. So, he will respond because of social pressure at the very least.

Jesus' parable implies that if it is so among friends with their mixed motives and self-interest, how much more so with God, who wants to give us what is good and life-giving, and who is invested in keeping God's name holy.

The discourse in Luke comes later in Jesus' ministry and nearer to Pentecost than does the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew. Therefore, Jesus can be more specific with reference to the needs of His disciples.

From the passage here, it's clear that God's children shouldn't hesitate to pray to the Father for the measure of the Holy Spirit which has been promised to baptised believers, Luke 11:13 / Acts 2:38, and who is a guarantee of our inheritance, Ephesians 1:13.
Luke says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask, Luke 11:13. When this statement in Matthew it is to be considered with Luke 11:13, as both Matthew and Luke are stating that one receives the good things that result from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Father's very best gift. He's the gift of Himself to dwell with us and within us forever, Acts 2:38.
The Lord doesn't just give good gifts; He gives the greatest gifts, James 1:17. As we ask, seek, and knock, let us never view prayer as striving to conquer God's reluctance but rather as the act of laying hold of His willingness, Ephesians 3:20-21.

THE GOLDEN RULE

'So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.'
Matthew 7:12

Throughout the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifies many moral duties. He now proceeds to close this portion of His lesson by setting forth a general principle, often referred to as the Golden Rule. 'Do also to them', Matthew 7:12, is often referred to as the Golden Rule, Matthew 7:12 / Luke 6:31.
This is the principle of loving our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus shows that this simple principle, which summarises all the Law and the Prophets say about how we should treat others, Matthew 7:12. This is a fundamental principle of the Christian life that manifests one's relationship both with one's fellow brother in Christ, as well as non-Christians.

This isn't a selfish motivation for being kind to others, but a mental check by which we can continually guard our behaviour in relation to others. This fundamental principle is the foundation upon which is built all that God would have us do in our relationships with others, Romans 13:8-10 / Galatians 5:14.
If the way we go about sharing the Gospel with others is a reflection of what God has done in our lives, what does this tell us about how we should share the Gospel with others?

We need to remember how the Gospel was shared with us, with love, patience, compassion and understanding of where the other person is at, 2 Timothy 2:23-26.
This principle that Jesus sets forth touches every aspect of our lives and is the best moral rule we can live by. It far exceeds its declaration in the negative sense, that is, 'do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you,' which was taught by men such as Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, and Hillel.

The rule, as stated by Jesus, is supreme in that it requires doing good to others and not merely refraining from doing them harm. It is not always easy to see things from another's perspective, but one should always try to do so and then direct one's conduct accordingly.

This verse is certainly an appropriate conclusion to any instruction on moral duties because of its exceedingly broad scope. Interestingly enough, Jesus comments that this principle is really nothing more than a summary of the Old Testament!

A person who is practising the Golden Rule will not murder, lust, commit adultery, divorce unscripturally, make false promises, hate others, judge unrighteously, etc, Matthew 5:17-48.
For a Hebrew of Jesus' day to faithfully obey the Golden Rule was for them to live obediently under the Mosaic law. In so doing, they would exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 5:20. But, what about today? Let us consider some practical examples of how the Golden Rule should be applied in various circumstances of life.
1. We want to be able to trust in and confide in a friend.

Thus, we should be trustworthy and never betray something told to us in confidence, Proverbs 10:9 / Proverbs 27:6.
2. We do not want to be misquoted.

Thus, we will be very careful not to misquote another person or take out of context what they have said or written, Genesis 2:17 / Genesis 3:2-3 / Matthew 4:1-11.
3. We would like for others to give us the benefit of the doubt.

Thus, we must be inclined to believe the best about others and give them the benefit of the doubt, 1 Corinthians 13:5.
4. We don't like for anyone to hurt our feelings, mock, or ridicule us.

Thus, we will be very careful not to do so to others, Matthew 22:39 / Luke 6:31-36.
5. We like for our friends and family to show an interest in what we're interested in.

Thus, we will genuinely reciprocate that behaviour, even though their interests may be unimportant to us otherwise, Philippians 2:3-4.
6. We should treat every woman with the same respect we would want other men to give to our wives, Ephesians 5:25-29.
7. We do not want others to listen to us with the idea of catching us in a mistake.

Thus, we will not listen to others with that kind of critical attitude, Psalm 31:14.
8. We should be as sympathetic to someone mourning the loss of a loved one as we would wish others to be sympathetic toward us in those circumstances, Romans 12:15.

9. We should show the same interest in saving a lost soul as we would want them to show us if we were lost, Luke 15:1-10.
10. When necessary, we will correct and rebuke others in a way in which we would want to be corrected or rebuked, Ephesians 4:15 / 1 Peter 3:15.
We could go on and on, for certainly there are an infinite number of applications for the Golden Rule in everyday life. There are numerous topics that we haven't even mentioned in regard to this principle.

Take some time to really think about how we would like or expect to be treated, and then make sure we're living up to our own standards in the way we behave toward others. It's not enough to simply avoid doing something wrong or harmful to another. We must also desire to do that which is good for them! James 4:17.

THE NARROW AND WIDE GATES

'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.' Matthew 7:13-14

Because the way requires humility that is combined with suffering and persecution, few will enter the gate into heaven, Matthew 7:13-14 / Luke 13:24 / Acts 14:22. This gate is wide, and many will enter the gate to condemnation into hell, which is the way of indifference, self-righteousness, laziness and hypocrisy.
The fact that Jesus here states that it is widely assumed that most people will be lost. Most people who live upon the face of the earth will choose not to obey God, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10. People must enter through the narrow gate, which implies the road will be difficult; not many will find it, but the reward will be worth it.
Such things as self-denial, the forgiveness of others, commitment, meekness, rejection of the pursuit of wealth as the main goal of life, and countless other basic Scriptural principles are opposed to the natural man whose baser instincts propel him constantly in the direction of the wide gate and the broad way.

Only those who are truly spiritual, who have set their minds upon the things in heaven, shall enter and negotiate the straitened way that leads to life, and we must remember that God will keep on saving men until the fullness of His purpose is achieved, Romans 11:25.
Luke's account happens later in Jesus' ministry, but Luke clearly tells us that only a few are saved, Luke 13:22-24. This question stimulated Jesus' teaching concerning the narrow gate. It's a fact of historical significance.
Throughout history, few people have been obedient in comparison to the population of the world. As in the few eight souls who were saved in Noah's ark, so few who will be obedient to the gospel at any one time in history, 1 Peter 3:20-21. We must enter the gate purposely, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.
The gate is narrow, not because it's the fault of God, but because of the unwillingness of people to submit to the will of God. People make the gate narrow because of their own rebellion against God, and they will not be able to enter because they are either trapped by their love of the world or are caught in the deception of their own devised religions.

Many religious people cannot enter because they have tried to make their own gate through which to enter. Since they have convinced themselves that their gate is the right gate, they will not seek to enter the true gate, John 14:6 / Acts 4:12 / Ephesians 4:4-6.
If we know that many souls will be lost, what should this teach us about our evangelism efforts? Are we as concerned as Abraham was over those souls who lived in Sodom? Genesis 18:22-32.

Are we as concerned as Paul was over his fellow Jews? Romans 9:1-5. There should be a sense of urgency. We quarrel and fight over issues, and the focus ends up being taken away from the lost and put on ourselves. We must remember that every single soul is important to God, and we should be going out of our way to help them seek Him through the narrow way.

TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS

'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.' Matthew 7:15-20

The term 'prophets', Matthew 7:15, technically only includes those who claim inspiration, though practically speaking, it would include any teacher who claims to be delivering a message from deity, either directly via inspiration or indirectly via the Scriptures.
Jesus wasn't just a prophet; He was the prophet, Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Consequently, Jesus' warning should be considered as potentially applicable to anyone who claims to teach God's ways to anyone, myself included.
A false teacher should be characterised as one whose teachings do not harmonise with God's Word and as one who is unwilling to repent of their erroneous views when brought to their attention.

Although there are many teachers with an outward demeanour of innocence and gentleness, Jesus says that some of them are ravenous wolves inwardly, Matthew 7:15 / 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.
Jesus warned that many false teachers would come, Matthew 24:4-5 / Matthew 24:11 / Matthew 24:24, as did the other writers of the New Testament, 1 Peter 2:1-3 / 1 John 4:1-6 / Jude 1:4. This is one reason elders are to be appointed to shepherd the flock and guard them against false teachers, Acts 20:28-29.
They will devour many souls, leading themselves and others down the pathway to destruction, 2 Peter 2:1-3. But how can one distinguish between a sheep and a wolf in sheep's clothing, since their appearance is essentially the same? Matthew 7:15.
The answer is simple: we must examine their 'fruit'! Matthew 7:16 / Matthew 7:20. We must examine their actions and their teachings carefully and determine if such is in harmony with God's Word or not.
We must make judgments of this sort all the time. Even at this very moment, you should be examining my words and judging whether or not I am writing the truth, Acts 17:11.
It's entirely possible to have a good tree and a bad tree that look nearly identical in trunk, limbs, and leaves, yet they differ in the quality of fruit they produce, Matthew 7:17-18.
It would be unwise to interpret Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:18 in an absolute way. Surely there are good trees physically that may occasionally produce a bad piece of fruit.
Likewise, it would seem reasonable to suggest that a bad tree might occasionally produce a good piece of fruit. This is why we must be 'fruit inspectors.' And, when one inspects 'fruit,' we must use God's standard for determining what is good, Galatians 5:22-23.
Eventually, the hypocrisy of all false teachers will be exposed by those who observe them carefully. Such must be true because, as the Lord declared, 'a bad tree bears bad fruit', Matthew 7:19 / Luke 6:43-45.
Jesus' point should be viewed as a general truth. Good trees are the ones that generally produce good fruit. If a tree is producing a quantity of bad fruit, then that tree itself cannot be good. The same is true with people.

The Scriptures teach elsewhere that the duty of man is to fear God and obey Him, Ecclesiastes 12:13. Fulfilling this duty is synonymous with bearing good fruit. If we aren't fulfilling the duty for which we were created, God will eventually throw us into the eternal fire.

God calls us to be fruit inspectors, Matthew 7:20. While we have no right to sentence and condemn others, Matthew 7:1-5, we are to discern or judge whether or not a person is a false teacher.

We should not blindly accept or support any spiritual idea or religious person. We must carefully test the fruit and hold fast to that which is good, 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

And, may we realise that others are examining the fruit we produce! If we're a 'good tree', keep producing for the Lord! If we're a 'bad tree', repent while we still can, for the axe of God's judgment and the fire of His wrath are approaching! Matthew 7:19 / Matthew 3:10 / Luke 3:9-17.

TRUE AND FALSE DISCIPLES

'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' Matthew 7:21-23

I wonder how many people are going to come up before the Lord's counter, expecting to get into heaven even though they are not truly prepared. Many feel they are right with God, but they make sincere yet big mistakes in their life choices, expecting God to make an exception for them. Jesus, as He neared the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, delivered some hard words relating to this theme.

Jesus spoke the truth plainly, didn't He? It's not enough just to cry out, 'Lord, Lord!' Matthew 7:21-22 / Luke 6:46.

The idea of saying, Lord twice gives us the impression these people would beg and plead with Jesus. We must do the will of the heavenly Father if we hope to be saved! Matthew 7:21.

These verses clearly disprove the notion of salvation by faith only, though many denominations teach such. We must obey the will of the heavenly Father to the best of our ability, Luke 6:46.

There are 'many', Matthew 7:23, who will try to rationalise their way into heaven by listing certain accomplishments or acts of service, but it won't work. The problem ultimately is that the Lord doesn't know them! Even though they have done some good deeds, they are guilty of practising sinful behaviour, 'lawlessness'!

They are not right before God in taking the broad path that leads to destruction, Matthew 7:13. They feel that they deserve salvation for certain acts of service, even though they haven't genuinely been obedient.

Notice, Jesus didn't say they actually did prophesy in His name, and in His name drive out demons, and in His name perform many miracles. He said, This is what they claimed, Matthew 7:22 / Acts 19:13-16 / 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11.

Many religious people believe in Jesus and have the appearance of righteousness, but will end up in hell, even though they feel they should not receive condemnation.

Let it be understood that to prophesy, cast out demons, or do many wonders does not excuse anyone from obeying God's revealed will! As important as these actions may appear to people, to do these things doesn't necessarily mean that they are producing good fruit; to obey God is to produce good fruit! Matthew 7:18-19.

When we stand before God's throne in judgment, the stakes are of an eternal nature. Those who are sincere but wrong won't make it into the heavenly abode. Why? Because Jesus didn't know them, Matthew 7:23 / Matthew 25:1-13 / John 10:27-28. We must do everything within our power to ensure that we are not of that number! We must believe and obey God's word today! Matthew 7:21 / Luke 6:46.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

‘Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.’ Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish builders at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. He made sure His audience understood the meaning by explaining it.

After all of the teachings in the sermon, it was important that the people understood that simply listening to His words was not enough. In Luke’s account of this parable, Jesus begins by asking the question, ‘Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?’ Luke 6:46.
Human nature is such that most who heard His powerful words that day would walk away impressed but not changed; most would hear but not do. Thus, Jesus challenged His listeners to action. He wants all to be wise men who hear and do, such can be described as building our ‘house on the rock’, Matthew 7:24.
That’s the real point which Jesus is driving home. We cannot just say we are Christians or be a part of the church or read the Bible and then not do what the Word of God says, John 13:17 / Luke 6:47 / James 1:22. This kind of life will not stand up against the problems that come our way in life.
In the area of Palestine, there were low valleys and gullies that had been exposed to water from rain and storms. During heavy rainfall, these became swollen rivers that washed away everything in their paths. The Jordan River was one that was often swollen, especially in the wintertime, as the snow melted from the mountains.

Notice that Jesus mentions rains, floods, and winds, which suggest oppositions from above, beneath, and all around, Matthew 7:25 / Luke 6:48-49. The stability of the wise man’s house was due to the fact that it was built, not upon ‘a rock,’ but upon ‘THE rock’! Matthew 7:25 / Luke 6:48.
Who or what is the rock? The rock is nothing more nor less than ‘these words of mine,’ namely, the words of Christ, Matthew 7:24 / Matthew 7:26 / Luke 6:47 / Luke 6:49. Only the life founded upon and guided by the principles of Christ shall stand. His teaching is the rock, all else is shifting sand.
It should be noted that the difference between these two builders is not in their craftsmanship or the quality of materials used. It can be assumed that both men do their best in building their ‘house’.

However, the difference is that one chose their foundation wisely, Matthew 7:24, while the other was careless, Matthew 7:26 / Luke 6:48, which makes this point clear.
A foolish builder would build his house without thinking about what kind of foundation there was. He might have liked the way the building site looked. Perhaps he decided to ignore the warnings of people who had experienced the past floods.

That’s how we live our lives if we don’t live them according to the Word of God. We just do what feels right at the time. We don’t listen to warnings, or we ignore God’s wisdom, Proverbs 14:12.
Sand is always moving, always shifting, always changing, and it’s unstable, Matthew 7:26-27. Many people believe that because they belong to a certain religious group, their house will stand. Some think that if they build on their good deeds, their house will stand.
Some think that if they build on their righteousness, their house will stand. Some build on their own wisdom and understanding and believe their house will stand. There are many people who build their lives on shifting sand. They may listen to sermons and Bible classes, but they don’t live according to what the Bible says.

The wise builder, on the other hand, carefully plans his house. He investigates the building site to make sure that it will sustain his building. He judges the soil and elevation to make sure that there are no flood hazards. He will listen to the warnings of those who know the area. He builds with confidence and knows his building will last.

In like manner, anyone who builds their character, i.e., their 'house', by hearing and doing what Jesus teaches will stand approved of God on the Day of Judgment, their house will not 'fall', 1 Corinthians 3:11 / Matthew 10:22. As the hymn writer says, 'On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.' Psalm 62:6.
We can live our lives with confidence when we live according to the Word of God, but we must remember, it's not just about listening to the Word of God or talking about the Word of God, but it's about doing! It's about putting the Word of God into practice in our lives, James 1:22-25 / John 14:23-24.
Everyone who hears the Word of God is building a house. The one who hears God's Word but doesn't do what it says is like a foolish builder who builds his house on sand, Matthew 7:26. That house will be crushed in a storm, Matthew 7:27 / Luke 6:49.
The one who hears the Word of God and obeys it is like a wise man that builds his house on solid rock, Matthew 7:24-25 / Luke 6:47-48. That house will stand up to any storm. Wise people build their faith on the foundation of God's Word. This faith stands strong against the storms of life.
If we claim to love God, we must do as He says, John 14:15 / John 15:12 / John 15:14 / 1 Corinthians 8:3. Jesus ended, not with words of comfort, but with words of tragedy, 'it fell with a great crash,' Matthew 7:24 / Luke 6:49. Even a single lost soul is a terrible waste in the eyes of God.
How can Jesus' teaching about the wise and foolish builders help us in our outreach efforts? It's short, simple and straight to the point. We meet lots of people with different religious backgrounds, but sadly, many are built on sand. We can use this example of Jesus to help them build a solid foundation on truth.

'When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.' Matthew 7:28-29

The people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because 'He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes', Matthew 7:28-29. Jesus didn't quote rabbis to establish the things He was speaking, which was the common practice of the day. Instead, He merely spoke the truth.
How great a loss it would be for any Christians to never hear or study the Sermon on the Mount! But there is an even greater loss, and that is to fail to obey the truths contained therein once they are heard! May we always endeavour to be diligent hearers and faithful doers of God's Word! James 1:22-25.

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

'When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately, he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." Matthew 8:1-4

JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH LEPROSY

After His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus comes down and is followed by a large crowd. Within the crowd, there is a man with leprosy, Matthew 8:1-2. The term 'leprosy', which includes the words leper, lepers, leprosy, and leprous, occurs sixty-eight times in the Bible, fifty-five times in the Old Testament, 'tsara'ath' and thirteen times in the New Testament, 'lepros', 'lepra'.
In the Old Testament, the instances of leprosy most likely meant a variety of infectious skin diseases, and even mould and mildew on clothing and walls. In the New Testament, it seems to mean an infectious skin disease. The disease itself was considered by some as some kind of sin, but not necessarily a specific sin relating to the lepers themselves.

THE LIFE OF A LEPER

We can't begin to imagine what life would have been like for a leper as they lived in their own colonies, separated from society, Leviticus 13:45-59. Their food and clothing needs would have been provided by their families and close friends.
Living in isolation can never be easy, not being able to shake someone's hand or hug your husband or wife or even your children. Imagine never being able to go to the temple to worship God, imagine not being able to work, imagine the itchiness and daily struggles they would have had!

This was through no fault of their own, but because they were lepers, they couldn't associate with society because they were classed as unclean by the law, Leviticus 13:45-46 / Numbers 5:2.
The man's faith in Jesus is obvious as he requests Jesus to heal him if He was willing, Matthew 8:2. He is in great need, but he knows who can heal him. Jesus' response is far more than a momentary pang of conscience, a tug at the heartstrings that lasts a few moments and is then forgotten.
Compassion speaks of sympathy that desires to remove the cause of the suffering. This provides us with an insight into the heart of God. He is a compassionate God.

Jesus reaches out and touches him, Matthew 8:3. Touching is an effective way of communicating. Jesus didn't have to do this; a spoken word would have sufficed, but so much is said by a touch. Jesus was coming into contact with the untouchable; he was entering into his world.
Jesus' touching the leper tells us something about the ministry of Jesus; alienation is being removed, and reinstatement is taking place. Jesus doesn't rebuke him for the uncertainty in his words. Jesus didn't say, 'What do you mean, if? What kind of faith is that?' Compassion doesn't respond in that way.

Jesus was more than willing, and with the words, 'Be clean,' the man was healed. Notice he was healed from his leprosy immediately, Matthew 8:3. The healing is instant; there's no need for a medical examination.
No need to place him on a period of probation just to make sure that the leprosy has really gone. Jesus made no deal with the leper, no money changed hands, and no performance was given, only love from the compassionate Christ.

Jesus said to the leper, 'Don't tell anyone,' Matthew 8:4, simply because at this point in His ministry, He didn't want to be bombarded with other people coming to be healed. He still had a lot of work to be done at this stage, Matthew 9:30 / Matthew 12:16 / Matthew 17:9 / Mark 1:44 / Mark 3:12 / Mark 5:43 / Luke 4:41 / Luke 9:21.
Jesus tells him to show himself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them, Matthew 8:4. After any leper was cleansed of his disease, the law said they were to present themselves to a priest in order to

receive confirmation that he was clean, Deuteronomy 24:8 / Leviticus 13:1-6 / Leviticus 13:45-49 / Leviticus 14:1-32 / Luke 5:14.

LIFE-CHANGING HEALING

Imagine how his life would have been changed after his healing, imagine them hugging their wife or husband and children for the first time in whatever amount of time they've had this disease.

Imagine being able to go to the priests to show themselves and to be able to socialise again and worship God in the temple again. To get a mainstream job and walk through the marketplace places in Jerusalem. This healing was life-changing on all kinds of levels, physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually.

THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION

There are only two, possibly three people who were ever commended for their faith by Jesus, which incidentally were two, possibly three Gentiles, one or two Roman Centurions, Matthew 8:5-13 / Luke 7:1-10, and a Syro-Phoenician woman, Mark 7:24-30.
You may wonder why I wrote one, possibly two Roman Centurions. The answer is simple, there are some who believe that the account in Matthew of Jesus healing the centurion's servant, Matthew 8:5-13, is a totally different story from the one we find in Luke's account, Luke 7:1-10. In other words, some believe that these are two accounts of two separate miracles.

SIMILARITIES

1. They both record that the event that happened took place while Jesus was in Capernaum, Matthew 8:5 / Luke 7:1.
2. They both record the centurion, Matthew 8:5 / Luke 7:2.
3. They both record the centurion's servant who was seriously ill, Matthew 8:6 / Luke 7:2.
4. The centurion's unworthiness is recorded in both accounts, Matthew 8:8 / Luke 7:6-7.
5. The centurion recognises his own authority and the authority of Jesus in both accounts, Matthew 8:9 / Luke 7:8.
6. The centurion's faith is recorded as great, and Jesus' response of amazement is recorded in both accounts, Matthew 8:10 / Luke 7:9-10.

DIFFERENCES

1. The Greek word 'pais', translated 'my servant', Matthew 8:6, literally means 'a boy' or 'the boy of me'. In other words, this could be referring to the centurion's own son.
The Greek word 'doulos', translated 'my servant', Luke 7:2, literally means 'slave' or 'bond servant'. In other words, this could be referring to the centurion's slave.

2. Jesus has just finished his sermon on a level place, Luke 6:17.
This isn't the same place as the sermon on the mount, Matthew 5:1. One is delivered on a level place, and the other is delivered on a mount. These are two different sermons, delivered in two separate places, to two different audiences.
3. The main reason some think these are two different miracles is that Matthew records that the Centurion himself went to see Jesus, Matthew 8:5, while Luke records that the centurion sent some elders, Luke 7:3-5.
Answers in Genesis gives the following reason for believing that they are the same account.

'When looking at the two texts in total, Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10, it seems quite likely that when Jesus came near to the centurion's house, Luke 7:6, He was probably within shouting distance. Consequently, when Jesus was talking to the centurion's friends, He either spoke loudly enough that the centurion could hear and was thus addressing him directly, or he spoke to the friends as people who were direct mouthpieces for the centurion. Luke 7:9 states that while talking to the centurion's friends, Jesus marvelled at him, i.e., the centurion, so it is quite possible that Jesus was talking to the friends of the centurion, but looking directly at and addressing the thoughts and intentions of the centurion. The centurion may have been mindful that Jesus would be considered ceremonially impure if He came into a Gentile's house (as mentioned in a different context in Acts 10:28, and therefore stood outside the house, so that if Jesus persisted in coming to the centurion, He would not be defiled. Remember that on another later occasion, Matthew 16:23, Jesus addressed someone directly who was the controlling force behind another, even though they were not present, 'get behind me, Satan' to Peter.'
MacKnight, in his commentary, gives the following reason for believing that they are not the same account.

'There might have been two centurions. Both made the same speech to Jesus, one through his friends, and the other in person, but this circumstance may be accounted for. As the faith of the first centurion, who was a heathen, took its rise from the extraordinary cure wrought on the nobleman's son, John 4:46-54, the faith of the second centurion might have taken its rise from the success of the first, which could not fail to be well known both in the town and in the country. To conclude that two centurions should have had, the one his son, the other his slave, cured in Capernaum with like circumstances, is no more improbable than that the temple should have been twice purged, the multitude twice fed, and the fishes twice caught by miracle, and with the same circumstances.'
In the grand scheme of things, it matters very little if they are or are not the same account. It's certainly possible that Matthew and Luke wrote about two different accounts, and it's certainly possible that Jesus had a very similar situation arise in the same town with another centurion or the same centurion with another servant.

THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION

'When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly." Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?" The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." Matthew 8:5-9

Capernaum was a large Galilean fishing village and a busy trading centre. It appears that word got out that Jesus was in Capernaum because a Roman centurion sent Jewish elders to find Jesus, Luke 7:3.
Although Matthew records that the centurion himself came to Jesus, Matthew 8:5, it's possible the centurion didn't come to Jesus himself because he would be classed as unclean, Acts 10:14 / Acts 10:28.
A centurion was a Roman officer who was in charge of one hundred men, and there are several centurions mentioned in the Scriptures, most of whom appear to have more faith than the Jews did, Matthew 27:54 / Acts 10:1 / Acts 27:3 / Acts 23:17-18 / Acts 27:43 / Acts 21:32.

THE CENTURION'S LOVE FOR HIS SERVANT

The centurion or his servants came to Jesus and informed him about his servant. The Greek word 'pais', translated 'my servant', Matthew 8:6, literally means 'a boy' or 'the boy of me'. In other words, this could be referring to the centurion's own son, or he could be saying that his servant is like a son to him.
Under normal circumstances, if a slave died, they would simply replace them because they were seen as a piece of property. But notice his love for his servant, he is highly valued in his eyes, and he's about to die, Matthew 8:6 / Luke 7:2.
He probably already spent lots of money with the local doctors, but he's desperate, and he comes to Jesus for help. We don't know exactly how he came to trust God, but no doubt his Jewish friends must have influenced him to some degree, Luke 7:4-5.

THE CENTURION'S UNWORTHINESS

The centurion says that he didn't deserve to have Jesus to go to his house, Luke 7:6-7 and heal his servant but he acknowledges Jesus as worthy and all-powerful, Matthew 8:9. He knows that Jesus has the power to speak things into being, Luke 7:7, just as He spoke the world into creation, Psalms 148:5 / Colossians 1:16.

THE CENTURION RECOGNISES AUTHORITY

The centurion not only recognises his own unworthiness and how worthy Jesus is, but he also recognises that Jesus has supreme authority, Matthew 8:9. Remember, this centurion had one hundred soldiers under his command; he knows all about giving commands, he knows all about people obeying his commands, Luke 7:8.
He was wealthy enough to own at least one slave, and so, like others in Jesus' day, he may have tried to threaten Jesus, but he didn't. He believes that Jesus is who He says He is, and the centurion sees the authority he has as a gift from God, Daniel 2:21 / Romans 13:1, the One who is above all things, even above Roman officers.

JESUS' RESPONSE

'When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.' I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 8:10-12

When Jesus heard what the centurion said, he was amazed, Matthew 8:10 / Luke 7:9. Why? In all of Israel, the people who should have known better, the people who have read and heard all about God's wondrous works. Jesus couldn't find anyone with such great faith, Matthew 8:10 / Luke 7:9.
Notice that Jesus declared His amazement at the centurion's faith to the crowd, Matthew 8:10, just as He was amazed at the other centurion's faith, Luke 7:9, and just as He was amazed at the Syro-Phoenician woman's faith, Matthew 15:28.

Remember, the only other time Jesus was amazed in the Bible was when He saw the lack of faith in his hometown, Mark 6:5-6. Jesus says that many Gentiles will come into the kingdom reign of God, Matthew 8:11 / Psalm 107:3 / Isaiah 49:12 / Isaiah 59:19 / Genesis 12:1-3 / Isaiah 2:2-3 / Isaiah 11:10 / Malachi 1:11 / John 10:16 / Acts 2:39-41 / Acts 11:18 / Acts 14:27.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'In addition to the interest provoked by the projected entry of the Gentiles into Christ's kingdom, there is also the obvious intention of Jesus to declare that the patriarchs mentioned here are truly saved and that they make up a part of the great family of the redeemed. This has the same prophetic import as Paul's words concerning the breaking off of the natural olive branches and the grafting in of the wild olive branches, Romans 11:17-24. The 'outer darkness' is a reference to hell or the place of final disposal of the wicked. Interestingly, Christ used various expressions descriptive of the final place of destiny for the wicked, referring to 'unquenchable fire', Matthew 3:12, in one place, and to 'outer darkness' in another. The sons of the kingdom mentioned are the leaders of the Jewish nation who rejected Christ.'
Some of the Jews rejected Jesus, John 1:11, and as a result, God would reject them, Matthew 8:12 / Matthew 11:11 / Matthew 22:13 / Matthew 21:43 / Matthew 25:30 / 2 Peter 2:17 / Jude 13.
The weeping and gnashing of teeth, Matthew 8:12, are used figuratively to speak of the terrors of hell, Matthew 13:42 / Matthew 13:50 / Matthew 22:13 / Luke 13:28.

'Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.' Matthew 8:13

Notice that Jesus didn't even have to go to the servant's house for the miracle to happen, Matthew 8:13 / Matthew 9:29 / Luke 7:10. Many so-called 'faith healers' today tell us that they can't heal anyone unless they come to their services, but distance was no problem for Jesus.
Many so-called 'faith healers' today claim that if a person doesn't get healed, it's because of a lack of faith on the person's part; however, the Bible doesn't even tell us if the servant had any faith.

When the disciples couldn't drive out a demon from a young boy, Jesus didn't say it was because the young boy didn't have any faith or enough faith, but because the disciples didn't have enough faith, Matthew 17:19-20 / James 5:15-16.

THE CENTURION'S FAITH

Essentially, the centurion had the same kind of faith as Abraham had, Genesis 15:6, because he believed Jesus and took Him at His word. It was accredited to him as righteousness. A Roman centurion who wasn't even a Jew had more faith than the people who grew up with Jesus and saw Him live a perfect life.
Taylor, in his commentary, says the following.

'This centurion placed Jesus on the throne of the universe, regarding him as the ruler of the world, and as having all things under his command. He saw him, not merely as Messiah, but as God Incarnate, and therein lay the superiority of his faith to that of any of the Israelites. Not even any of the apostles, at that time, had reached the lofty altitude on which this Gentile soldier stood.'

The centurion came to Jesus with humility, acknowledging His authority by faith, Hebrews 11:1 / Hebrews 11:6. Jesus proved the centurion's faith was real and proved His own Deity when He miraculously healed the servant.

Jesus didn't need to prove anything to anyone, but He still chose to heal the centurion's servant, who was highly valued and deeply loved. As someone once said, 'Faith honours God, and God honours faith!'

JESUS HEALS MANY

'When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.' Matthew 8:14-15

Jesus came into Simon Peter's house and found his mother-in-law sick in bed with a high fever, Matthew 8:14 / Luke 4:38-39. Here is the proof which tells us that Peter was indeed married, 1 Corinthians 9:5. Mark records that Andrew, James and John were also present during this event, Mark 1:29-34.
Notice what Jesus did: He spoke to her, raised her up, and the fever left her. She then began waiting on Jesus and the disciples, Matthew 8:15. He also healed many others who were brought to Him. Several features of Jesus' healing are noteworthy.
1. He healed immediately, with no delay, Matthew 8:2-3 / Mark 5:42 / Mark 10:52 / Luke 5:25 / Luke 13:13.
2. He healed everyone who came to Him regardless of their disease, Matthew 8:16-17 / Luke 4:40-41.
3. He healed so completely that Simon's mother-in-law was able to get up and start waiting on them.

After a fever breaks, it normally takes a few days for a person to recover their strength. Jesus' healings put people back as if they had never had their disabilities in the first place!

4. Jesus sought to avoid publicity. He ordered the demons not to announce who He was, Mark 1:24 / Mark 1:34 / Mark 3:12.

'When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases." Matthew 8:16-17

When evening came, it appeared that many people came to Jesus to be healed of their demon possession, Matthew 8:16 / Matthew 4:24, and with just a word, He drove many spirits out of people. All this healing was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah, Matthew 8:17 / Isaiah 53:4 / 1 Peter 2:24.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Christ fulfils the prophecies in all respects and is himself the completion and truth of them, as being the lamb and victim of God, which bears and takes away the sin of the world. The text in Isaiah refers properly to the taking away of sin and this in the evangelist, to the removal of corporeal afflictions but, as the diseases of the body are the emblems of the sin of the soul, Matthew, referring to the prediction of the prophet, considered the miraculous healing of the body as an emblem of the soul's salvation by Christ Jesus.'

DEMON POSSESSION TODAY!

1. There is no indication that demon possession occurred before the ministry of Jesus and His apostles.

We have no references to it in the Old Testament; Saul was not demon-possessed, 1 Samuel 18:10. And the first we hear of this is in the Gospels during the ministry of Jesus.

The last we hear of it is during the ministry of the apostles. This suggests that demon possession was something God allowed for a short time in order to demonstrate the power and authority of the Lord Jesus and His apostles.

2. There is no instruction in the epistles on how to cast out demons. If demon possession is a problem for the church today, then surely believers need to be able to cast out demons and to do so, we must know how.

Because there is no such instruction, this isn't a problem now. If demon possession continued today, Satan would have more power than God, for he could send his demons into people, but God's people couldn't cast them out.

3. What is sometimes called 'demon possession' today doesn't match up with the accounts we find in Scripture.

We don't find people, for example, who break the strongest of chains, as the possessed man of Gadara did, Mark 5:3-4 / Luke 8:29.

4. Most alleged demon 'exorcisms' today are secluded, back-room affairs that are only later publicised.

Yet when Jesus expelled evil spirits, His miracles were publicly viewed by astonishing multitudes, Luke 4:36.

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

'When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." Matthew 8:18-22

Before Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, a teacher of the Jewish law came to Him, Matthew 8:18-19 / Luke 9:57. This scribe had probably not yet counted the cost of discipleship. While on earth, Jesus had no personal house or place to stay that He could call His own, Matthew 8:20 / Luke 9:58.

By referring to Himself as the Son of Man, He declared that He was the Messiah, Matthew 8:20 / Luke 9:58. Jesus was referring to Himself as the Messiah because the Jews used the term 'Son of Man' to refer to the Messiah, Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus used this term a lot, and He used that term at least forty times.

One of Jesus' disciples felt he still had responsibilities toward his father, who was either dying or had just died, Matthew 8:21 / Luke 9:59. He was one of the groups known as 'wait a little' Pharisees, who always proposed something else to do first. I guess we would call this procrastination, the idea of putting things off until a later time. Jesus used physical death in this context to refer to spiritual death, Matthew 8:22 / Luke 9:60. In other words, 'let the spiritually dead bury their own physically dead.'

Jesus knew that if this disciple returned home to his old ways, his old standpoints, and his old habits, he would never come back to follow Jesus. On the surface, Jesus' words may seem a bit harsh or even unfair, but Jesus had nothing but love for the man and the man's eternal destiny in mind.

Jesus was demanding total commitment on the part of the disciples to the work of the kingdom, Luke 9:23 / Matthew 10:37. Nothing must come between the disciples and the work to which God would commission them. The disciple's destiny mustn't be diverted, Luke 9:57-62.

1. Christians must be willing to sacrifice any permanent place of dwelling, Luke 9:57 / Luke 2:7 / Philippians 3:20-21.

2. We must be willing to love Christ more than anyone else, Genesis 29:30-31 / Luke 14:25-26.

To be a disciple of Jesus, we cannot love our family and our own life more than we love Jesus. If any situation develops in our life when we have to make a decision between following and serving Jesus or our own family, our

eternal destiny would command that we follow Jesus, Matthew 22:37-40. We must be willing to sacrifice our entire life, Luke 14:25 / Romans 12:1-2.

At this time in the ministry of Jesus, commitment to follow Him was demanded. There were certainly others who were following Jesus other than the immediate twelve. Jesus taught that all must commit themselves to follow Him.

3. Christians must be willing to put Jesus before their social responsibilities and family relationships, Luke 9:61.

I know this is difficult for some people, but Jesus must always be first in our lives.

4. Christians must be willing to give their full attention to the work in Christ's kingdom, Luke 9:60.

It was now a time to look forward and not back, Luke 9:62 / Genesis 19:26. Those who look back aren't much use to Jesus in His kingdom. When a person looks back, they are really questioning their faith in the One who is before them.

When the kingdom reign of heaven is done on earth in the hearts of men, then kingdom business must always supersede that which is of this world, Matthew 6:31-34. Christians can't trust in God as they do kingdom work, whilst at the same time, look back in order to trust in the things of this world, Luke 14:25-33.

People were following Jesus to Jerusalem for various reasons. However, it was at this time in Jesus' ministry that He was nearing Jerusalem and the cross. In these verses, we see Jesus sought to sift out of the multitudes those who were not willing to pay the cost of being a true disciple, Matthew 7:13-14.

Again, these are hard words for those who aren't willing to commit themselves totally to Him. The reality is that many will fail, but those who do succeed will have a tremendous influence on the world with their lives. We must count the cost involved in becoming a Christian, Luke 14:28.

A lot of people find it difficult to become Christians simply because they aren't willing to pay the price of discipleship. This is something that many preachers must accept and not get disheartened with.

Counting the cost of what it will take to be a disciple assumes that some may make the decision to turn away from the Gospel. Though Paul was a chosen vessel for God's work, Jesus still showed him all things that he had to suffer in order to carry out his mission, Acts 9:16.

The early disciples were shown what the cost of discipleship would be in their lives. They, as well as all disciples, must go through many sufferings in order to be saved, Revelation 2:10.

Those who convert to Jesus, and then fall away will be mocked by those who never wanted to become disciples in the first place, Luke 14:29-30 / 2 Peter 2:20-22.

Before a king goes to war with the enemy, he must first consider whether he has enough power to win the battle. Before one becomes a disciple, he must first consider whether he can win the battle, Luke 14:31-32 / Ephesians 6:10-18.

Jesus' emphasis is that one must seriously consider one's call to discipleship. His emphasis is on the seriousness with which we must consider being a disciple of Jesus, 1 Kings 19:20-21.

Those who do not take their discipleship seriously will inevitably become indifferent and lukewarm, Revelation 3:16. Their attitude of indifference and lukewarmness will be as leaven, and thus, affect the entire group of disciples.

Jesus is the King who is coming against all those who have not obeyed the Gospel. He is coming with destruction, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. If one would have peace with King Jesus at the time of His final coming, then he must sit down and consider Jesus' conditions for peace. His conditions begin with obedience to the Gospel.

The rich young ruler who wanted to be a disciple of Jesus had to pay this price because his riches stood between him and his commitment to Jesus, Mark 10:17-31. If one wants to be a disciple of Jesus, he must be willing to forsake all that is necessary in order to be such, Philippians 3:7-11.

We must count the cost involved in becoming a Christian. If someone isn't willing to forsake all for Jesus, Luke 14:33, then that which they aren't willing to forsake will eventually be their stumbling block over which they will fall as a Christian.

CONCLUSION

All these demands of Jesus were met with genuine excuses from different people who wanted to follow Jesus, but when push came to shove, there was no excuse; it was people who simply failed to count the cost or simply found the cost involved too high a price.

I wonder what price people put on their souls today! Mark 8:36-37. Why is it so important to share the costs involved with someone before they decide to become a Christian? Being a Christian is serious business; it's all about sacrifice and commitment to Christ and His kingdom.
We don't want people to say, 'Hey, I signed up to become a Christian, but I wasn't aware of all this sacrifice stuff and commitment! But more importantly, we don't want any Christian to fall away simply because they didn't have at least some understanding of what's involved in living the Christian life.

What about those who say, 'wow, that's a lot of things, I've got to 'give up'?' Maybe we should focus a little more on what a person receives, in return for their sacrifice, Philippians 3:8.

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

'Then he got into the boat, and his disciples followed him. Suddenly, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" Matthew 8:23-27

This event is also recorded by Mark in Mark 4:35-41 and Luke in Luke 8:22-25. In the evening, Jesus suggests that He and his disciples go to the other side, that is, the other side of the Sea of Galilee, Luke 8:22 / Mark 4:35.
One of the reasons Jesus chose fishermen was because of their easy access to boats; they may even have used a specific boat for Jesus' ministry, Matthew 8:23 / Mark 4:36.
A great storm arose, Matthew 8:24 / Luke 8:23 / Mark 4:37, and the disciples panicked. These fishermen were scared; this must have been some storm! Remember that most of the disciples were hardened fishermen, and they would be used to being in storms.

THE STORM

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'In one sense this was a very ordinary scene on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is small; it is only thirteen miles from north to south and eight miles from east to west at its widest. The Jordan Valley makes a deep cleft in the surface of the earth, and the Sea of Galilee is part of that cleft. It is 680 feet below sea level. That gives it a climate

which is warm and gracious, but it also creates dangers. On the west side, there are hills with valleys and gullies; and, when a cold wind comes from the west, these valleys and gullies act like gigantic funnels. The wind, as it were, becomes compressed in them, and rushes down upon the lake with savage violence and with startling suddenness so that the calm of one moment can become the raging storm of the next. The storms on the Sea of Galilee combine suddenness and violence in a unique way.'

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following about the boat.

'It was covered, hidden, the waves rising high above the boat, breaking on it, and gradually filling with water.'

Jesus consistently demonstrated His authority by doing things that were totally beyond human capacity. In this case, while the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee by boat, Jesus fell asleep on a cushion, Matthew 8:24 / Luke 8:23 / Mark 4:38.
In desperation, they awoke Jesus, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' Matthew 8:25 / Luke 8:24. Mark says 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' Mark 4:38. Of course, He cares.
Jesus then turned to the disciples and reproved them for their lack of faith, Matthew 8:26 / Luke 8:24 / Mark 4:40. Though they had seen Jesus perform many miracles, they were always amazed by each new one. Jesus got up and calmly rebuked the wind and the sea, Matthew 8:26 / Luke 8:24 / Mark 4:39, and the storm ceased. The word 'quiet' means to muzzle.
Notice that Christ calmed the storm with one word. What a difference one word can make. When our lives are filled with turmoil, one word from Christ can change everything. Matthew also records that Jesus uses similar words to calm the storm, Matthew 8:26.
This is the point that Jesus wanted the disciples to understand. At this time, all things were under the care and control of Jesus because He was head over all things, John 13:3 / John 17:2. They said, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?' Matthew 8:27 / Luke 8:25 / Mark 4:41 / Psalm 89:8-9 / Psalm 93:4.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'It was then plain that every area of existence was totally under our Lord's authority. The spiritual world, the physical world, time, life, and death were, and are, utterly subject to his will.'

Once we recognise that Jesus is God and the Creator of all that exists, Colossians 1:16, then we will realise that nothing is outside the power of Jesus to control. For this reason, it is faith in Jesus that brings peace of mind, Psalms 4:8 / Acts 12:6 / Philippians 4:7.

HOW WELL DO WE SLEEP?

Considering the things that the disciples had already seen Jesus do, their doubts about His ability to quiet the storm are astonishing. They had seen Him heal multitudes of people, cast out demons and prove Himself equal to any task at hand. Suddenly, they despaired because of a storm at sea. Obviously, they didn't really think Jesus could solve this problem because they were amazed when He did.

How could they have been so slow and so distrustful? What about us? Do we not believe that Jesus can handle any situation if we trust and obey His will? Have we not seen in the Scriptures how Jesus can solve every problem?

How do we react when we confront a fresh crisis in our lives? Do we trustingly and confidently turn to Jesus, or do we throw up our hands in despair? How well do we sleep?

In the presence of Jesus, there should be a great emotional calm in our lives, Psalm 65:7 / Psalm 89:9 / Luke 4:39. Sometimes the best thing to do amidst life's storms is simply to stop, be still, and know that God is there and present, Psalm 46:1-10.
God never sleeps, Psalm 121:4-6, and He will never abandon us, Hebrews 13:5. It's always better to be in a boat with Jesus during a storm than to be in the storm without Jesus.

JESUS RESTORES TWO DEMON-POSSESSED MEN

'When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs." He said to them, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.' Matthew 8:28-34

Jesus and His disciples went to the eastern shore of Galilee, a place called Gerasenes, Matthew 8:28 / Luke 8:26 / Mark 5:1. This must have been a Gentile area as there were many pigs around and we know that the Jews saw pigs as unclean animals, Leviticus 11:7 / Deuteronomy 14:8. It's here Jesus meets two men who are demon-possessed who lived in tombs, Matthew 8:28 / Luke 8:27 / Mark 5:3.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'Mark and Luke mention only one of these people, Mark 5:2 / Luke 8:27, the principal one. Note that neither Mark nor Luke states that there was 'only one' of these men. The fact of demon possession is plain here. These were possessed not merely with one, but with many, demons.'
Gill, in his commentary, says the following.

'Mark and Luke mention only one demoniac, probably the fiercer of the two.'

There are many views today concerning demonic possession; some argue that it still exists, whilst others don't. It's generally supposed that no such thing as demon possession exists on earth today.

If that supposition is correct, it would simply mean that the power of Jesus Christ in destroying the works of the devil, which was His purpose in coming into this world, 1 John 3:8, was effective and that Satan's demonic followers are not able to work the havoc upon the human personality in this age, as formerly.
The multiplication of such disorders in the times of Christ should, in such a view, have been expected as the demons recognised the holy Saviour and His purpose of destroying them.

Mark stressed the unnatural strength of this caveman, using two entire verses to stress it, Mark 5:3-4, but Matthew supplied the significant fact that his wildness had closed the area to human traffic, Matthew 8:28, and Luke, the equally significant fact that he was naked, Luke 8:27.
Luke also adds that the man was seized by the demons many times despite being chained and guarded, Luke 8:29. Such a person had no doubt cast a terror over the entire village, Zechariah 13:1-2.
Night and day, he would cut himself, which shows us how much self-harm this demon was causing him, Mark 5:5. The demon-possessed always appear to have been able to recognise Christ.

The man's worship of Jesus is a reference to his falling down before Him, Luke 8:28 / Mark 5:6. In view of the man's behaviour, after he was healed, it must also have included on the man's part, if not the demon's, an adoration of the Lord spiritually.
The effect of his possession was that of splitting the personality, making it impossible in each instance to distinguish between what was done by the demon and what was done by the man.

The demon-possessed men recognised Christ as the Son of God, and so, they ask, 'What do you want with us, Son of God?' Matthew 8:29 / Luke 8:28 / Mark 5:7. He asks Jesus a question, but in doing so, he reveals he knew Jesus and His power and authority.
This name of God, 'Most High', Luke 8:28 / Mark 5:7, is very ancient, appearing in connection with Melchizedek, Genesis 14:18, Balaam, Numbers 24:16, and in the Song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32:8. The Hebrews didn't invent or evolve monotheism, that being the original view of the Father, even prior to Abraham.
Jesus commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man, Luke 8:29 / Mark 5:8. Notice the words, 'us' and 'they, Matthew 8:29, which imply there is more than one demon addressing Jesus. Notice the word 'my', Mark 5:9, is singular and 'we' is plural, Matthew 8:29.
This is a further indication of the separation that the demon had inflicted upon the man. This is seen when Jesus asks their name, and they reply, 'legion', for there were many demons who went into the man, Luke 8:30 / Mark 5:9.
Christ asked, 'the man' his name, Luke 8:30 / Mark 5:9, not because the Lord didn't know it, but because He sought to bring the man back to a sense of his own identity, and the identity the demon had taken as shown in the reply.
A legion was four or five thousand men, although no truth may be certain in such a reply from such a source. It's at least in harmony with the idea of multiple possessions in some cases, Mary Magdalene being another example, Mark 16:9.
Notice again in Mark 5:10, the confusion with the words 'he' and 'them'. It's as if he cannot make up his mind whether he is one or a Legion! It has been suggested that the speaker was the leading demon speaking for all the rest, but the view is precarious. Of course, we don't have the exact words of the petition, only Mark's account, which gives it indefinitely.
Notice also that these demons appear to know their destiny: 'Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?' Matthew 8:29 / Matthew 25:41 / Acts 16:16-17 / James 2:19 / 2 Peter 2:4 / Jude 6. They knew that Jesus had absolute power over them, and they were well aware that their destiny was destruction, Matthew 25:41.
The demons were fearful of having to depart the dwelling they had seized in the poor man, and they pleaded not to be sent away. They begged Jesus repeatedly to send them away, but not into the Abyss, which is described as a bottomless pit, Luke 8:31 / Mark 5:10, that is, the grave, although some understand this as a dwelling place for demons until Judgment Day, Revelation 9:1-2 / Revelation 11:7 / Revelation 17:8 / Revelation 20:1 / Revelation 20:3.
Notice again, 'he' begged the Lord in Matthew 8:31 / Luke 8:32 / Mark 5:10, but it's 'they' who do the pleading, Luke 8:31 / Mark 5:12, making it sure that the demons were the ones pleading.
The request of the demon appeared to have been predicated upon God's prior promise that the demonic world would be vanquished at some time certain in the future; hence, his invoking God's name in the request, Luke 8:28 / Mark 5:7 / Zechariah 13:1-2.
A glimpse of God's ultimate plan of destroying evil surfaces here in the demonic knowledge that such destruction is in store for them and that an appointed time, Matthew 8:29, for it has already been determined, Acts 17:31 / Zechariah 13:1-2.
There was a large herd of pigs feeding, Matthew 8:30 / Luke 8:32. Around two thousand pigs were feeding on the side of the mountain according to Mark 5:11-13.
And so, after requesting permission to embody the pigs, Matthew 8:31 / Luke 8:32 / Mark 5:12, Jesus sends them into the herd of pigs, Luke 8:33 / Matthew 8:32 / Mark 5:13.

Of all the lower creation, only the serpent, Genesis 3:1, and swine are revealed in Scripture as possessed of an evil spirit. The serpent is a symbol of intellectual cunning and the pigs of gross uncleanness, suggesting that in both categories, there is a great temptation to the human family.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This shows that the emissaries of Satan are restricted and may not enter even a herd of swine without the Lord's permission. Other restrictions of Satan are given in 1 Corinthians 10:13, and Matthew 13:25.'
The pigs then rushed into the sea and drowned, Matthew 8:32 / Luke 8:33 / Mark 5:13 / Job 1:12-22. Notice that Christ didn't destroy the pigs; the demons did. Christ's permission of such a thing is no more than God's permission of all-natural disorders like earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, droughts, tornadoes, etc., which kill millions of people, not pigs alone, and yet all thoughtful persons find no difficulty reconciling this with God's love and justice.
The pigs roamed the countryside as a result of a great multitude of people who gathered around the Lord, His disciples, and the man from whom the legion of demons was cast out.

Notice the contrast in the man, he was naked, bleeding, furtive, dwelling in tombs, constantly crying out, etc, but notice the change, he is now clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus! Mark 5:15. This shows what Christ does; He really can transform lives.
Despite Jesus healing the man and finding him sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind. Despite these two men's lives being transformed, the crowd appear to be scared, Matthew 8:33 / Luke 8:34-35 / Mark 5:14-15.
Why were they scared? Possibly because they did not want Jesus' kind of power in their midst. Possibly because they thought Jesus was going to wipe out every pig in the region, which would mean a loss of property and revenue.

At first, it may seem incredible that the people of the town did not want Jesus to stay, Matthew 8:34 / Luke 8:37 / Mark 5:17 . But think about what they had just lost; they had just lost two thousand pigs. Some people owned them, some people were planning to make money slaughtering, processing, and selling them. He had hurt the town's economy.
They evidently loved material possessions more than they loved Jesus, and because of that, they missed out on the supreme privilege. They asked Him to leave, Matthew 8:34 / Luke 8:37 / Mark 5:16-17.
Whatever the reason, it's clear they were so blinded by the physical loss that they asked Jesus to leave the area. Jesus listened to them, left and would never set foot in the area again. How sad to see Jesus being rejected once again, despite doing a wonderful thing, not only for the men who were possessed but for those who lived in the area.

One can appreciate the feelings of the man whose life had been so distraught by the powers of darkness, and whose feelings of love and gratitude toward Jesus caused him to desire constant fellowship with the Lord, Luke 8:38 / Mark 5:18. Those who have tasted the blessing of the Lord desire to be ever in His company and partakers of His companionship.
Luke and Mark record that one of the men who was possessed was commanded by Jesus to tell others what God had done for him, which he proceeded to do, Luke 8:38-39 / Mark 5:18-20.
On some occasions, Jesus prohibited the beneficiaries of His miracles from speaking of them, Mark 1:40-45, but here, it was commanded, why? Simply because this was a Gentile area, He was on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus didn't want to be crowded by spectators in the Capernaum area, west of the Sea, but in this wicked town, He was in no danger of becoming too popular.
The people in this place needed someone to report the miracle. It's of the greatest significance that Jesus here referred to Himself as 'the Lord' who had done for the man 'great things' and 'had mercy upon' him, Mark 5:19. Attempts to get rid of Jesus in all ages have generally been as futile and ineffective as were those of the village of the Gerasenes.

The word 'Decapolis', Mark 5:20, means 'the ten cities' which lay in the area, nine of them east of Lake Galilee. It must have been a very effective witness indeed which was provided by that previous terror of the tombs who went up and down the area extolling the power and mercy of Jesus, whom he also, no doubt, identified as 'Lord'.
No wonder it is said that 'all the people were amazed,' Mark 5:20. Do we ever invite the Lord to leave our lives because we love material things more than we love Him? Luke 8:36-37.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

'Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.' Matthew 9:1-8

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYZED MAN

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is one of those 'mighty works' mentioned by Jesus in his reproach of Capernaum, Matthew 11:23 / Mark 2:1. Important details are mentioned in Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26, which are not contained in Matthew 9:1-8. Mark says that he was carried by four men, and Luke relates the breaking up of the roof to let him down to Jesus.'
As a result of His teaching and miracles, Jesus' popularity grew rapidly. So many wanted to hear Him that they filled the house in Capernaum where He was teaching and crowded around it, Matthew 9:1 / Mark 2:1-2.
Just then, five men arrived, eager to see Jesus too, Matthew 9:2. One of them was paralysed, and the other four carried him on a stretcher, Mark 2:3. It was impossible for them to get in through the door, so they climbed up on the roof, dug a hole in it and let the paralytic down through the opening they had created, Mark 2:4.
We can imagine the commotion among the crowd in the house below. We can only imagine what is going through the minds of those who owned the house. Notice Jesus saw their faith, Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5 / Luke 5:20, but He speaks directly to the lame man and tells him that his sins were forgiven, Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5 / Luke 5:20.
Did the lame man demonstrate any faith, or was it just his four friends' faith? It's hard to tell from the text, but it does appear that Jesus is speaking about the faith of the four men.

The lame man may have demonstrated his faith in Jesus by allowing his friends to take him to Jesus in such a dramatic way, with the hope of being healed. Maybe his four friends told him about Jesus, and they believed Jesus could heal him, and so the lame man just went along with the idea, thinking he had nothing to lose.

Nevertheless, Jesus tells the lame man his sins are forgiven, Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5. That was probably not what the man or his four friends had expected, but it is every man's greatest need. We are not told what the man's disability was; perhaps he had an accident, perhaps he was born with his disability.

Perhaps, as the popular view was at the time, his disability may have been caused by some sin he was involved in during his life, John 9:2. We can't be sure, but we do know that sin can have a devastating consequence in our lives.
Notice the lame man, those who brought him in and everyone else didn't say a thing; it was only the teachers of the law who were present who thought Jesus had blasphemed because God alone can forgive sins, Mark 2:6-7.
The scribes and Pharisees thought it blasphemy to assume the position of God by forgiving sins, Matthew 9:3 / Mark 2:7 / Luke 5:21 / John 10:31-36 / Leviticus 24:15-16. Although they were right, they didn't recognise that Jesus was indeed God in the flesh, John 1:1-3 / John 1:14.
Jesus knew in His spirit what they were thinking, Matthew 9:4 / Mark 2:8 / Luke 5:22, and so, He read their minds and asked, 'Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or get up and walk? Matthew 9:5 / Mark 2:9 / Luke 5:23 / Matthew 12:25 / Psalm 139:2 / Luke 6:8 / Luke 9:47 / Luke 11:17.
The answer to this question was simple: both were possible with God, but impossible with men, Mark 10:27. If Jesus has the power to heal someone, then He certainly, as the Son of man, has the authority to forgive someone's sins, Matthew 9:6 / Mark 2:10 / Luke 5:24 / John 3:2 / John 20:30-31 / Acts 2:22.
To prove His ability to forgive sins, which was something invisible and therefore impossible to verify, He healed the paralytic who then got up and walked, Matthew 9:6-7 / Mark 2:11-12 / Luke 5:25.
Jesus proved His power to conquer the invisible, that is, spiritual problems, by overcoming a visible, physical problem. The crowd was dumbfounded, Matthew 9:8 / Mark 2:12 / Luke 5:26. They had never seen anything to compare with Jesus, Mark 2:12 / Luke 5:26.

WHO WILL REACH JESUS?

Consider the five men as they approached the house in which Jesus was teaching. They had come in order to see Him, but their way to Jesus was blocked by a big obstacle, the crowd. Many would have simply turned around and gone back home. Not these men.

They were determined, even desperate, in their desire to see Jesus. Their procedure, un-roofing the roof, was radical, but it worked. Even today, those who want to come to Jesus frequently encounter barriers in their path.

The only ones who actually reach Him, are those who are absolutely determined and who refuse to allow anything to keep them from following Him. How determined are you to be with Jesus?

THE CALLING OF MATTHEW

'As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:9-13

Capernaum was the location of the tax office, where taxes, tolls and land duties were collected for both the Romans, who occupied Palestine and the Herodians, who ruled Galilee.

It hardly needs to be said that those who were involved in the work of collecting money for either Romans or Herodians were despised and hated by the general public, so they had to find their friends among other 'social outcasts', who included prostitutes.

One of Jesus' more surprising actions was calling Matthew to be a disciple, Matthew 9:9. Matthew, also called Levi son of Alphaeus, was a tax collector, Mark 2:13 / Luke 5:27.
In that era, tax collectors were viewed as both thieves and traitors because they used dishonest tactics to raise funds for the hated Roman invaders, Matthew 10:3 / Luke 6:15 / Mark 3:18 / Acts 1:13. Zacchaeus is a perfect example who may have taken more than he needed to from the people, Luke 19:8.
Adding a tax collector to His inner circle was hardly a move that could be expected to increase Jesus' popularity! The expression 'many tax-collectors', Matthew 9:10 / Mark 2:15, is also significant, because it reveals how lucrative the business of tax collection was for both the authorities and the officials who served them! We have evidence of this when Mark records the call of Levi, later named Matthew, Mark 2:13-17.
Jesus asks Matthew to follow Him, Matthew 9:9 / Mark 2:14 / Luke 5:27, and immediately he left everything behind and did so, Matthew 9:9 / Mark 2:14 / Luke 5:28. The word 'followed' is in the imperfect tense, and means that he 'kept following' Jesus. It was a defining moment in his life.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE CALLING

The apostle John records who the first five people were called to follow Jesus. John and Andrew were the initial two people called to be disciples by Christ, John 1:35-39.
Then came Peter, also called Simon or Simon Peter, John 1:40-42, followed by Philip, John 1:43-44, and then Nathanael, Bartholomew, John 1:45. The book of Matthew then records that James, a son of Zebedee and brother of John, was called, Matthew 4:21-22, followed by Matthew's own calling, Matthew 9:9. Why did he leave everything to follow Jesus?

THE RABBI DISCIPLE SYSTEM

Every young Jewish boy grew up wanting to be a rabbi, and every young Jewish boy and girl would at least go to an elementary school called Bet Sefer, that is, 'House of the Book'.

Their job was to memorise the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, what we would call the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

And the best of the best would be able to graduate and go on to the next school of learning, a type of secondary school called Bet Talmud, or 'House of Learning', and their job was to memorise the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

From there, the best of the best of that group would be allowed to apply to Bet Midrash, or 'House of Seeking', which was a type of school for would-be rabbis. A student would find a rabbi that he respected, someone that he wanted to be like, and he would say to that rabbi, 'Rabbi, I want to follow you.'

Now the rabbi's job was to question the would-be disciple to seek to determine, not whether or not he knew the Scriptures, but whether or not he could imitate his teachings, become like him, and pass on his way of life.

And if the student could answer the rabbi's questions to his liking, then he would say to his student, 'Come follow me.' And these are the words that every student longed to hear. And he would leave behind his family, his job, his vocation, and he would go and become a disciple of that rabbi.

Now, if the student didn't quite make the cut, the rabbi would say, 'Ah, my son, you know the Torah, you know the teaching well, but I'm afraid that you cannot be my disciple, go home, make babies, and pray that they become rabbis.'

The very fact that Matthew was a tax collector and the other disciples were fishermen, shows that the disciples, were not the best of the best and they did not make the cut and so when Jesus, a respected teacher of the law, a teacher of God's Word, comes along and says, 'Come follow me', they could hardly believe it and so they leave everything behind. Jesus was inviting them to become like Him.

Matthew was not moved by a passing curiosity in this remarkable Teacher. He made a commitment that day! After deserting his Tax Office at the call of Jesus, Matthew called together 'many tax collectors and sinners' to a feast, Matthew 9:10 / Mark 2:15 / Luke 5:29.
I think that this 'great feast' or 'great banquet', as Luke records, Luke 5:29, was his way of marking his break from his past life, and used as an opportunity of introducing his friends to Jesus.
This calls to mind another incident that occurred about that time and in that region when Andrew broke the news to his brother Simon Peter that he had found the Messiah, John 1:40-42. His response to Peter's scepticism was 'Come and see!'
At that stage, neither Matthew nor Andrew knew enough to say very much about Jesus, but they could bring people to personally meet Jesus! What a great way to evangelise to your friends in an informal way. You invite all your Christian friends and all your non-Christian friends and just let them mix.

It is also interesting to compare Mark's account with that of Luke. Luke describes the meal to which these guests were invited as a 'Great feast', but his language used in describing them is different from that of Mark, Mark 2:15 / Luke 5:29.
Luke describes them as 'a great company of tax-collectors', Luke 5:29. As a Greek, himself, i.e., a Gentile, Luke does not use the religious designation used by Mark who was a Jew, who describes them as 'sinners', Mark 2:15.
I wonder if Luke realised that he, also, as a Gentile, would have been included among the 'sinners'? By the way, the difference in the use of the language used by Mark and Luke is an example of how divine inspiration worked. The Holy Spirit did not inspire Luke to use language that would have been foreign to his thinking.

Luke would never have described non-Jews as 'sinners' or 'Gentiles', which was an even more offensive expression. Greeks would not use such a discriminative term.

It is true that he does use the word 'sinners' in Luke 5:30, but he does so because he is recording accurately, something that had been said by the Scribes and Pharisees.
The scribes and Pharisees were outraged because they thought it improper for a teacher of religion to eat with immoral people, Matthew 9:11 / Mark 2:16 / Luke 5:30.
When Jesus overheard their criticism, He asked, 'Who needs a doctor, the sick or the well?' Matthew 9:12 / Mark 2:17 / Luke 5:31. His purpose, He said, was not to call righteous, but sinners, Mark 2:17 / Luke 5:32. The Lord never hesitated to break society's norms and customs.
Jesus tells them to go and learn what Hosea 6:6 means, Matthew 9:13. Sacrifice was a command of God, 1 Samuel 15:22, but the greater law of mercy must be practised in order to bring sinners to righteousness, Matthew 23:23-24.
Jesus is basically saying to the teachers of the Law, 'I have no message for you! You guys think you are not sick and think you are already righteous.' I wonder what they thought when Jesus said those words!

JESUS QUESTIONED ABOUT FASTING

‘Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” Matthew 9:14-17

Some of the Pharisees and disciples of John came to Jesus, asking why He and His disciples didn’t fast as other religious people did, Matthew 9:14 / Mark 2:18 / Luke 5:30. These events took place at a time of fasting when the disciples of the Pharisees and John’s disciples were fasting and praying, Mark 2:18 / Luke 5:33.

Jesus explained by illustration and said that no one would fast at a time of celebration, such as a wedding, Matthew 9:15. Mark and Luke’s accounts both say, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?’ Mark 2:19 / Luke 5:34.

His own presence on the earth made it a joyous time of feasting because He was the bridegroom. Since fasting should fit the occasion, it was inappropriate in this situation, but there will come a time when the bridegroom leaves, that’ll be the time to fast, Matthew 9:15 / Mark 2:20 / Luke 5:35. Fasting was just not the right thing to do when the Son of God Himself was present.

He also explained that just as no one would put new wine in old bottles or a new patch on old jeans, it was equally out of place to put the newly revealed Gospel of Christ into the old traditional forms of the Jews, Matthew 9:16-17 / Mark 2:21-22 / Luke 5:36-39.

The word, ‘new’ is in reference to Jesus’ teaching and the word ‘old’ is in reference to the Jewish system, Colossians 2:14 / Romans 7:1-4 / Hebrews 10:9-10. Jesus is saying that fasting isn’t required under his new teaching but was under the Jewish system. John was practising the old system requirements, Acts 19:1-4.

Fasting was an accepted part of everyday life in Old Testament times. Bear in mind that Israel was not a political state, but a theocracy, which is a religious state in which the Law and will of God were preeminent.

ARE CHRISTIANS COMMENDED TO FAST TODAY?

The first reference to fasting is in the Book of Judges, Judges 20:26. The last reference is in the Book of Zechariah, and devout Jews fasted, Zechariah 8:19. Most of the fasting was undertaken voluntarily and was not undertaken at the command of God, but devout Jews undertook to fast for at least two reasons. Not for health reasons, but for the following reasons.

1. They believed it was a way of attracting the attention of God. If they fasted, they thought that God noticed them.

2. They thought that if they fasted, God would be prepared to do something about the situation that had caused them to fast.

If you think about this second reason, you will see that a man thought fasting had influenced God to act; it was very easy for him to imagine that he, personally, was someone special! Matthew 6:16-18.

The reality, although, through the centuries, the Jews, especially after the Babylonian Captivity, introduced fasts for a whole range of reasons, but only one fast was specifically commanded by God, and that was the fast associated with the Day of Atonement, the most important and solemn Day in their religious year.

In Leviticus 16:29, we find the expression, 'deny yourselves' or 'afflict your souls'. This is the expression for fasting, and this was the only fast that the Jews observed faithfully every year.
When we examine the New Testament, it surprises some people to find that the Lord only mentioned fasting twice, Matthew 6:16-18 / Mark 2:18-22. Notice that both passages above record Jesus' response to the practice of that time.
But also notice, although about sixteen times He says, 'it was said by those of old-time, but I say to you', Jesus doesn't use these words because this kind of fasting about which He was speaking wasn't covered by the Mosaic Law, but because it was something that the people had taken on themselves in the old law.

In the Book of Acts, Luke records that the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul on the First Missionary Journey, with prayer and fasting. In the next chapter, they fasted in connection with the appointment of elders, Acts 13:1-3. Please note that the whole church didn't fast, it was only those mentioned, 'Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul,' Acts 13:1.
In 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, Paul mentions sexual fasting, but neither here nor anywhere else does he impose it as a command. In 2 Corinthians 6:5 and 2 Corinthians 11:27, he refers to what he suffered for the sake of the Gospel and speaks of times when he went without food. But this wasn't because he was 'fasting', but because he had no food to eat!
The answer to the question, Should a Christian fast? is therefore, yes! If they want to! But remember that fasting, like 'bodily exercise,' may do a little good, but 'godliness is profitable for all things!' 1 Timothy 4:8.

JESUS RAISES A DEAD GIRL AND HEALS A SICK WOMAN

'While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.' Matthew 9:18-19

Jesus and His disciples went on to the western shore of Galilee, Mark 5:21, and the view would have been amazing, and the pulpit was the boat, which wasn't far from the city of Capernaum. As we've already looked at, Capernaum was Jesus' hometown.
In Matthew 9:1, Jesus calls Capernaum His own city. Matthew 4:13 tells us that He had left Nazareth, and was now dwelling at Capernaum, thus fulfilling the prophecy with regard to Zebulun and Naphthalin, Luke 4:16-31.
Christ ennobled Bethlehem by His birth, Nazareth by His education, Jerusalem by His death, and Capernaum by making it His home town. It's here that crowds were expecting Jesus, Luke 8:40.
Jairus was a ruler of the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum, a prominent and respected leader of the people, Matthew 9:19 / Luke 8:41 / Mark 5:22. His willingness to fall upon his knees before the Son of God emphasises the heartbreak which was crushing his soul, Matthew 9:18 / Luke 8:41 / Mark 5:22.
Think about his situation for a moment. Here is a man who sits in the synagogue and hears all the plans and plots to kill this same Jesus, but he comes to Jesus because he obviously believes in who Jesus claims to be and can do. There can be no doubt that many of his peers despised him for humbling himself before the Lord, but what a blessing he is going to receive.

Matthew uses the phrase, 'my daughter', Matthew 9:18, and Luke uses the phrase, 'my only daughter', Luke 8:42, whilst Mark uses the phrase, 'my little daughter', Mark 5:23.

This tells us that this was not only his only daughter but his only child. Notice Mark and Luke say she is 'dying', Mark 5:23 / Luke 8:42. Matthew quoted Jairus as saying, 'she is even now dead,' Matthew 9:18.

A USEFUL TIMELINE

When the father left the child, she was at her latest gasp, and he didn't know whether to regard her now as dead or alive and, because he didn't receive any certain knowledge of her death, he was perplexed whether to speak of her as departed or not, expressing himself one moment in one language, and at the next in another. Jesus agrees to go with him, but it seems a large crowd had got in Jesus' way, Luke 8:42 / Mark 5:24.

JESUS HEALS A WOMAN WITH BLEEDING ISSUES

'Just then, a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.' Matthew 9:20-22

On the way to Jairus' home, Jesus heals a woman with bleeding issues, Matthew 9:20-22 / Luke 8:43-48 / Mark 5:25-34. Mark and Luke's account gives us a lot more detail concerning this woman.

As Jesus was journeying to Jairus' house, a desperate woman in the multitude touched the Lord, Matthew 9:20 / Luke 8:43-44 / Mark 5:27. She had been bleeding for twelve years, Matthew 9:20 / Luke 8:43 / Mark 5:25 / Leviticus 15:25, had gone to many doctors, and spent all of her money, Mark 5:26, but had only worsened.

She's a nobody at this moment in time, but when she heard that Jesus was back in Capernaum, this appeared to her to be her only hope of a cure, and she is determined to reach him. Mark 5:27-28, in the Greek says, 'if she could get to 'The Jesus'. As Jesus was a common name, she knew 'the Jesus' she was seeking, the Jesus who had the power to cure her.

Of course, the problem she faced was immense! Weak and frail and fragile as she was, what chance of reaching Him did she stand when faced with such a crowd of pushing, jostling, excited, noisy healthy people, milling around Jesus? Luke 8:42 / Mark 5:21 / Mark 5:24 / Mark 5:27.

But she persisted and somehow managed to reach Jesus, and she touched Him, and immediately she was healed, Luke 8:44 / Matthew 9:22 / Mark 9:29. She not only knew it, but she felt it, and so did Jesus, Luke 8:46 / Mark 5:30.

I don't think that she expected to be able to have a conversation or a consultation with the great Teacher. Sure enough, when she touched Jesus' coat, she could sense that the flow of blood immediately dried up, and she was well, Matthew 9:22 / Luke 8:44 / Mark 5:29.

Like all male Jews, the outer garment of Jesus, something like a shawl, it had tassels of Blue on its corners. They were there to serve to remind the wearer to keep the Law, and they were regarded as holy.

Not surprisingly, this poor woman thought that, with such a holy person as the Teacher, they would be especially holy, if only she could manage to reach Him. She would then have quietly gone away, but Jesus stopped and said, 'Who touched me?' Luke 8:45 / Mark 5:30.

Not surprisingly, His disciples were astonished! 'Master, you see the people crowding against you, his disciples answered, 'and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' Luke 8:45 / Mark 5:31.

I believe that Jesus already knew who touched Him, and He was giving this poor woman the opportunity of coming forward and declaring herself! In any case, Jesus knew the difference between the touch of the jostling crowd and the touch of faith, and He said, 'Somebody touched me,' Luke 8:46.
The woman came forward and told Him everything, Luke 8:47 / Mark 5:33. No doubt she was apprehensive as she had broken the law by deliberately touching Jesus, and furthermore, in Jewish society of that time, you didn't touch such people as Priests or any religious leader! They were looked upon as holy men, and they liked it that way!
She probably expected a rebuke from Jesus, but there was no rebuke; there was compassion, about which Jesus knew that the heart of that woman was beating fast. She was afraid of the consequences, and she may even have feared that Jairus, the ruler, would speak sharply to her for having touched the Teacher.

Mark and Luke record that Jesus insisted on being told who touched Him, Luke 8:46 / Mark 5:30. The woman subsequently came forward in fear and trembling, Luke 8:47 / Mark 5:33.
But Jesus looked at her and gently spoke some of the tender words of His ministry record, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering!' Matthew 9:22 / Luke 8:48 / Mark 12:34 / Mark 5:44 / Luke 7:50 / Luke 17:19 / Luke 18:42. Do you see what has happened? The 'nobody' has become a 'somebody'! She's gone from being a nobody, 'who', to a 'someone', to a 'daughter'.
Notice again what Jesus called her, 'daughter'! Matthew 9:22 / Luke 8:48 / Mark 5:34. She came to Jesus a 'nobody', for whom nobody cared. She heard Jesus refer to her as a 'somebody', but her status has now changed, and now she hears Jesus call her 'daughter'; she is everybody.
1. Physically, she has suffered from a debilitating haemorrhage for twelve years, as long as the daughter of Jairus has been alive, Mark 5:42, and all the doctors have been unable to help her, Mark 5:26; she was physically exhausted. No doubt the doctors tried all they knew, which by our standards wasn't very much, but they had done their best. They had probably recommended such medication as 'locust eggs', 'powdered eggs of grasshoppers' or 'the fingernail of a man who had been hanged'.

All of which were expensive medicines in those days! Indeed, she had spent all the money she possessed, and Mark doesn't speak very flatteringly of the doctors when he says, 'instead of getting better she grew worse', Mark 5:24-34.
2. That wasn't the only effect of her illness.

According to Jewish Law, this illness rendered her unclean so that she was banned from entering the temple or the synagogue, Leviticus 15:25. She was cut off from her religion and the support it should have given her.
3. And it didn't stop there; there would have been a domestic consequence, maybe she was now divorced, Deuteronomy 24:1.
At some point in those twelve years, she would have lost her husband, and according to Jewish Law, her husband had the right to divorce her and considering the fact that if he had continued to live with her, he would also have contracted uncleanness and the consequences of it, I have no doubt this is what had happened.

4. Think about the social consequences.

She had lost all her friends and relatives, because they also wouldn't dare to associate with her lest they become unclean. According to Leviticus 15, anything with which the woman came into contact was unclean, and anyone who had contact with her also became unclean. Indeed, they wouldn't sit on a chair that she had sat on. Think about this woman for a moment; she's a widow, a woman with an incurable disease.
1. She was unclean.

2. This would give her husband the right to divorce her.

3. She was penniless.

Spent all she had on doctors looking for a cure. Locust eggs were given, powdered eggs of grasshoppers, and the nail of a dead thief was another remedy but these all cost lots of money.

4. Excommunicated from her religion.

5. Excommunicated from society.

Put all this together, and you see the terrible consequences of her sickness; we can understand how desperate she was. There was no one to help her; it seemed no one cared, nobody wanted to know her, she was a 'nobody'.

This is the change that occurs when we come into faith in Jesus. This poor woman had been cut off from the Jewish faith, but she was received into the faith of heaven.

She was rejected by her family but was received into the family of the Son of God. She was excluded from the fellowship of human society but was received into the fellowship of those who believe. She was reconciled back into society and her religion.

And Jesus still changes people, and many of those who have done the most good in the world started out as 'nobodies', but they learned through the Gospel of Christ that they really are a 'somebody' for whom God declares, and they realised that in the eyes of God they are 'everybody', the most important people on earth.

'When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region.' Matthew 9:23-26

It's possible that some of Jairus' fellow rulers of the synagogue had been embarrassed by one of themselves appealing to the humble Prophet of the poor and there seems to be a kind of calloused argument here to the effect that, 'Look, she's already dead, and we all know that this Teacher cannot raise the dead, why bother with him any further?' Luke 8:49 / Mark 5:35.
Whether or not this was exactly what they had in mind, it was certainly the attitude of their class. It's as though they had said, 'we are already proceeding with the funeral,' Matthew 9:23 / Luke 8:52, which, from Mark 5:38, it is plain to see that is what they were actually doing!
When Jesus said, 'don't be afraid', Luke 8:50 / Mark 5:36, He meant, don't fear for your daughter's life, don't fear the scorn of your peers, don't fear that our purpose has been upset by this delay in healing the woman.
Jairus was instructed to retain his faith. When Jesus arrived at the house, He allowed only Peter, James and John to follow Him into Jairus' house, Luke 8:51 / Mark 5:37.
This marked a new milestone in Jesus' ministry, as already the abilities of these three had earned them a closer relationship with the Lord. That relationship, however, wasn't predicated merely upon ability, but upon the role each of these would have in the future spread of Christianity.

James would set the grand example by being the first of the apostles to die for the faith, Acts 12:1-2. Peter would preach the first sermon, Acts 2:4-39. John would be the last witness and write the fourth Gospel.
Other instances in which these three were singled out for greater intimacy with Jesus were in the transfiguration, Luke 9:28-36 / Matthew 17:1-13 / Mark 9:2-12, and the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke 22:39-46 / Matthew 26:36-46 / Mark 14:32-42. The probable task assigned to the other apostles was that of controlling and dispersing the multitude, Matthew 9:25.
We are surprised to find so quickly the presence of the 'hired mourners,' Luke 8:52 / Mark 5:38, who were raising such a tumult in the house of Jairus, which might be explained by supposing some further delay necessitated by the dispersal of the multitude, during which Jairus had returned home and initiated this phase of the funeral himself, but this is denied by the fact that Jairus evidently remained with Jesus.

This leaves open the possibility that advance preparations had been made to become effective on the daughter's death, or the additional possibility suggested under Mark 5:35, namely, that Jairus' peers were proceeding with the customary funeral activities, the latter being the view accepted here, Matthew 9:23-26.

When Jesus says, 'the child is not dead but asleep', Matthew 9:24 / Luke 8:52 / Mark 5:39, He certainly didn't mean these words as a denial that the daughter's death had actually occurred, but it was His customary language regarding death, John 11:11.

In context, it also meant that He intended to raise her to life again. The attitude of the 'professional mourners' and the pipe players, Matthew 9:23 / Jeremiah 9:17 / Jeremiah 16:6 / Ezekiel 24:17 / Amos 5:16, shows conclusively that the girl's death had indeed occurred and had been proven.

The scorners were put out by Jesus, the spiritual implications of this being profound and perpetual. Their conduct here denies any other status to them except that of hired performers at a funeral.

Scornful laughter is never the behaviour of broken-hearted friends and relatives, Matthew 9:24 / Luke 8:53 / Mark 5:40 / John 11:13 / Acts 20:10. Jesus' questioning of the noise they were raising also supports the same conclusion.

Mark recorded the actual syllables that Jesus used in this calling of the little girl back to life, Mark 5:41. The words are Aramaic, supposed to have been the language Jesus used, and from Peter, who was present in that inner room, Mark remembered the very words that Christ used.

The words, 'little girl', Luke 8:54 / Mark 5:41, can also be translated as 'little lamb', which again shows the tenderness of Jesus' voice to the young girl. Jesus actually takes the young girl's hand and tells her to get up, Matthew 9:25 / Luke 8:54 / Mark 5:41. Both Mark and Luke record that Jesus didn't want this miracle to be made known, Luke 8:56 / Mark 5:43.

The reason for this was simply because He didn't want the crowds to get excited, Matthew 4:24 / Matthew 14:1 / Mark 1:28 / Mark 1:45 / Luke 5:15 / Luke 7:17. Nevertheless, news about the event spread throughout that region, Matthew 9:26.

It is a strange coincidence that the age of this child, Mark 5:42, corresponded exactly with the twelve years of suffering endured by the woman, Matthew 9:20 / Luke 8:43 / Mark 5:25, suggesting some connection here that is not apparent to us. All commentators are intrigued by it, but none have a solution.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This miracle of raising Jairus' daughter from the dead is the first resurrection recorded in the New Testament. There were three such wonders, forming a sequence.

1. Jairus' daughter had been dead only a very short time.

2. The son of the widow of Nain had been dead longer and was being carried to the tomb.

3. Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days, Luke 7:12 / John 11. Christ considered raising the dead a part of his ministry, Luke 7:22 / Matthew 11:5, and he delegated the power to the apostles, Matthew 10:8. Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, acting under this commission, Acts 9:40.

Notice the theme that runs through the stories in Mark's Gospel. Jesus can do what is humanly impossible.

1. The storm.

The disciples were desperate, but Jesus calmed it with a mere word, Mark 4:35-41.

2. The demoniac.

Though many had tried, no one had been able to bind or subdue him. Jesus expelled the demons with a word, and the man returned to normal, Mark 5:1-20.

3. The woman.

No physician had been able to heal her, though she had spent all her money in the effort. With one touch, she was completely cured, Mark 5:25-34.

4. The daughter of Jairus.

When one dies, all attempts to cure the sickness end, because everyone knows you can't raise the dead. Jesus did, Mark 5:32-43. Four times in this part of Mark, Jesus entered situations that were humanly impossible and emerged victoriously.

JESUS HEALS THE BLIND AND THE MUTE

'As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith, let it be done to you"; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.' Matthew 9:27-31

After raising Jairus' daughter back to life, two blind men follow Jesus, and they recognised that Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah, Matthew 9:27 / Matthew 9:24 / Matthew 6:7 / Matthew 6:11 / Matthew 6:20 / Matthew 6:28 / Matthew 6:24.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'From various Old Testament passages, it is clear that blindness is a type of sin, Deuteronomy 28:29 / Isaiah 59:10 / Job 12:25 / Zephaniah 1:17 / Isaiah 29:8 / Ephesians 5:8 / Matthew 15:14. Several examples of Jesus' restoring sight to the blind are recorded and were prophetically included as a positive mark of the Messiah's power when he should be revealed. Isaiah said of the Messiah and his times, 'then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,' Isaiah 35:5.'

They followed Jesus and cried out for mercy, Matthew 9:27 / Isaiah 35:5 / Matthew 12:23 / Matthew 15:22 / Matthew 20:31 / Matthew 21:9 / Matthew 21:15 / Matthew 22:44-45. They followed Jesus indoors, which is a demonstration of their faith, and Jesus asks them if they think He is able to heal them, Matthew 9:28.

In other words, Jesus is asking, do they really believe He is who they claimed Him to be? As a result of their faith in Jesus, they were healed, Matthew 9:29-30 / Matthew 9:22 / Matthew 8:13.

Jesus then warns them sternly, not to tell anyone else about this, Matthew 9:30 / Matthew 8:4 / Mark 5:43; however, maybe understandably, they did the opposite, they told everyone what had happened, Matthew 9:31 / Matthew 4:24 / Matthew 14:1.

'While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons." Matthew 9:32-34

After healing the blind men, a man who was demon-possessed and mute was brought to Jesus, Matthew 9:32 / Matthew 11:5 / Mark 7:32 / Luke 7:22, and so, Jesus drove the spirit out of him and the man was able to speak, Matthew 9:33.

The crowd were amazed because they had never seen anything like this before, Matthew 9:33, but the Pharisees, who couldn't deny what had just happened, accredited the miracle to 'the prince of demons', Matthew 9:34.

The prince of demons is the devil, Matthew 12:24-32, and so they were saying that Jesus was working on behalf of the devil, Matthew 12:24 / Mark 3:22 / Luke 11:15 / John 7:20-24 / Acts 5:39.

This is the first time they said Jesus was working for the devil, but later they will accuse Him of this again, Matthew 12:22-32 / Mark 3:20-27 / Luke 11:14-23. Please note the next account of this happening in Matthew is different from the account recorded here.

In this account, we have a man who is demon-possessed and mute, Matthew 9:32 but in the next account, we have a man who is demon-possessed, blind and mute, Matthew 12:22.

Luke mentions that the man was 'mute', Luke 14:14, but Matthew mentions that the man was 'blind and mute', Matthew 12:22. Mark doesn't mention any man at all. It's certainly possible that we have two accounts from two different occasions.

THE WORKERS ARE FEW

'Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:35-38

This records Jesus' own reaction to the extensive tour of Galilee, in which the opposition of the Pharisees had been so evident, with the consequent confusion and distress of the people.

Christ viewed the situation with profound pity for the multitudes and proposed, at once, to correct it by sending out His disciples as missionaries to bear widespread testimony to the truth.

It was always the work of Jesus to go about teaching and preaching, Matthew 9:35. He didn't stay in one village but went to everyone He could physically go to during His ministry.

EVERY KIND OF SICKNESS

The emphasis here is on healing every kind of sickness and disease; there was no physical sickness that was too difficult for Him to heal, Matthew 9:35. Unlike what many people claim today, we obviously can't miraculously heal people today, but we can certainly pray for them and help them where we can.

MOVED WITH COMPASSION

Jesus, as always, was sympathetic to the physical needs of the people, Matthew 9:36. As a church, it is always good to be on the lookout for people in need and try to meet those needs, James 1:27. If we personally can't help someone, find someone who will, Matthew 14:14 / Mark 1:40-41.

The word 'compassion' gives an insight into the benevolent and gracious heart of Christ. It indicated a combination of love, pity, concern, and deep emotional feeling for the 'lost sheep' of the house of Israel, Matthew 9:36.

SHEEP HAVING NO SHEPHERD

The multitudes had no spiritual leader who would guide them unto the truth of God, Matthew 9:36. How sad this is and still true today among many churches. No leadership or weak leadership often leads to a watered-down version of the truth, Numbers 27:16-17 / 1 Kings 22:17 / Ezekiel 34:5 / Mark 6:34.
Those religious leaders who were in their presence were only leading the people away from God through their traditions. Traditions can become a real problem for some congregations, and in some places, the tradition becomes law, Mark 7:1-9.

THE HARVEST

The people were being blindly led by legalistic teachers whose ambition was to maintain their own positions and power over the people. There were a few among the people who were spiritually leading the people according to the grace and love of God.

It's so important not only to recognise a harvest but to be able to lead them to the truth of God's word and not bind on them things which God never asked to be bound, Matthew 9:37 / 1 Corinthians 4:6.
It's always the case that there are too few labourers for the need of harvesting, Matthew 9:37 / Luke 10:2 / John 4:35.
Christians live in a world where much preaching of the Gospel must be done to reach the whole of the world, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16.
The problem is usually that the harvesters are diverted from the harvest to use their talents on things other than preaching the Gospel to the lost. People are busy working and involved in their pastimes and hobbies, but they forget they can still share Jesus with others while they are involved in those things. We must also keep in mind that no one really has a right to hear the Gospel a second time when countless millions have never heard it once.

PRAY

Christ asked His disciples to pray for that which He himself was about to initiate, namely, the sending out of more witnesses to the truth of the kingdom, Matthew 9:37.
The sending out of the twelve was Jesus' own response to the marvellous opportunity for reaping a great harvest of souls, Matthew 10:1-42 / Mark 6:7-13 / Luke 9:1-6. Significantly, Christ asked the disciples to pray about it, and He, Himself, continued all night in prayer before naming the twelve, Luke 6:12-13.
In view of this, should Christians today undertake any project without prayer for guidance and blessing? I believe that some Christians get this the wrong way around sometimes. They want the harvest, but they don't pray first.

They hit the streets with Bibles in hand, proclaim the Gospel to others and 'after' they've finished, they get together to pray! We should pray first, we should pray that the message is presented clearly and present it carefully with love, Colossians 4:2-6. If Jesus leaned so heavily upon prayer, how much more should His disciples ask, and seek, and knock to obtain that providential support? Matthew 7:7-8.
One of the commands Jesus gave concerning prayer was that we express in our prayers a plea for more evangelists to take the good news to the people, Matthew 9:38. It's the duty of every Christian, therefore, to pray for more messengers to proclaim the Gospel to the lost, 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION

‘Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.” Matthew 10:1-4

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE

In this section, Jesus sent His twelve apostles out in pairs on a preaching tour. This marked the fourth stage in their career. Earlier, they had heard Jesus, been called by Him, and been chosen as apostles. This was one of many preaching trips that Jesus commissioned the twelve to do, Matthew 10:1-15 / Luke 9:1-6.

They were given the power to heal as well as to cast out impure spirits, Matthew 10:1 / Luke 9:1 / Mark 6:7. Jesus gives the twelve the authority to work miracles in the lives of anyone they met, Matthew 10:1 / Luke 9:1 / Mark 6:13. Notice that they received this power before the events of Acts 2, when they were baptised with the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:1-5. What Jesus is doing here is giving them this power in order that their preaching could be confirmed as true, John 20:30-31 / Mark 16:20.

Here they were sent out as His representatives to proclaim the message of repentance, Luke 9:2 / Mark 6:12. The purpose of the trips was to accomplish the mission of teaching as many people as possible before the event of the cross and resurrection in Jerusalem, Luke 9:2.

The teaching prepared the minds of the people to accept Jesus’ kingship that would later be proclaimed by the disciples on and after the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The preaching trips also prepared the disciples to face rejection by those to whom they went. Jesus had commissioned them to preach what would be ‘new wine.’ They were going to people of ‘old wineskins,’ Matthew 9:17 / Mark 2:22 / Luke 5:37.

Jesus often sent His disciples out alone, Luke 9:2 / Mark 6:7, but during this trip, they went out in twos. Sending out six pairs of preachers both facilitated the spread of Jesus’ message and gave the apostles valuable practical experience, Mark 6:7.

“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.” Matthew 10:5-8

Notice they weren’t to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, Matthew 10:5 / Matthew 15:24 / John 4:9, they are instructed to go only to Jewish towns and villages, Luke 9:6.

It wasn’t until after Jesus’ ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in Acts 2, that they are instructed to go into all the world, Matthew 28:19 / Mark 16:15.

The preaching trips gave them an opportunity to face the rejection of a misguided religious world into which they would go after Acts 2. While Jesus was still with them, they could return for His counsel concerning problems they encountered on their preaching trips, Mark 6:12-13 / Matthew 11:1.

The message they were given to proclaim, 'the kingdom of heaven has come near', Matthew 10:7 / Luke 10:9 / Matthew 3:2 / Matthew 4:17 / Mark 9:1. The words, 'Come near', mean it's about to be established. As we know, Jesus isn't speaking about an earthly kingdom but a spiritual kingdom.
Through His preaching and the preaching of the twelve, Jesus was preparing Israel for His kingdom reign from heaven that would be the fulfilment of prophecy, Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14.
Jesus tells the twelve, 'Freely you have received, freely give', Matthew 10:8. This should be one of the basic principles of Christian living. In the context of Matthew 10:1-16, Jesus was referring to their freely receiving the power to heal the sick, Mark 6:13. In other words, they weren't to heal for money; they were to use the free gift of healing in a generous manner.
Remember, after they received power from the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4, they would remember this principle. And so, they would freely impart the 'miraculous gifts' to all by the 'laying on of their hands', Acts 8:18.
The miraculous gifts don't exist today because no apostles exist to 'lay their hands' on us, but we do recognise that God has freely given His grace; we should freely proclaim it to others.

'Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep." Matthew 10:9-10

The mission was urgent, so Jesus forbade them to take extra provisions, Matthew 10:9-10 / Mark 6:8-9 / Luke 9:3. This restriction wasn't intended to be permanent, Luke 22:35-36, but was appropriate for this brief mission, Mark 6:30.
Notice also that they were to take no extra possessions that would burden their trip, they were to take only the clothes they wore and no staff, Matthew 10:10 / Mark 6:8-9 / Luke 9:3.
Wait a minute, Mark 6:8, says, 'Take nothing for the journey except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in your belts.' Is this a contradiction? Were they to take a staff or not?
Matthew and Luke seem to agree that Jesus prohibited the disciples from taking a staff on their journeys, while Mark appears to give them permission to take a staff, Mark 6:8.
Furthermore, although Luke doesn't record Jesus' command regarding sandals, some have concluded that Matthew and Mark also contradict each other on this point.

The differences between Matthew and Mark are explained easily when we understand that the writers used different Greek verbs to express different meanings. In Matthew, the word 'provide', NKJV, the root Greek word comes from 'ktaomai', meaning to 'procure for oneself, acquire, get'.

Based upon these definitions, the NASV used the English verb 'acquire' in Matthew 10:9: 'Do not acquire', instead of 'provide' or 'take.' In Matthew, Jesus is saying, 'do not acquire anything in addition to what you already have that may tempt you or stand in your way. Just go as you are.' As Mark indicated, the apostles were to 'take', 'airo', what they had, and go, Mark 6:8-9.
The apostles weren't to waste precious time gathering supplies, extra apparel, staffs, shoes, etc, or making preparations for their trip, but instead were instructed to trust in God's providence for additional needs.

Jesus didn't mean for the apostles to discard the staffs and sandals they already had; rather, they weren't to go and acquire more. It's obvious from a comparison of the verses in Matthew and Luke that they are recording the same truth, that the apostles weren't to spend valuable time gathering extra staffs, only they are using different words to do so.

'Provide 'ktaomi' neither gold nor silver, nor staffs, Matthew 10:9-10

'Take 'airo' nothing for the journey, neither staffs,' Luke 9:3

Luke didn't use the word 'ktaomi' in his account because he nearly always used the word 'ktaomi' in a different sense than Matthew did. In Matthew's account, the word 'ktaomai' is used to mean 'provide' or 'acquire,' whereas in the Books of Luke and Acts, Luke used this word to mean 'purchase, buy, or earn.'

The point is simply this: Jesus wanted them to go as quickly as possible to proclaim the message that the Messiah had arrived, but at the same time, they needed to learn to trust God to take care of their everyday needs, Matthew 6:11 / Matthew 6:25-34.

Please note the word 'worry', in Greek is 'merimnao', in Matthew 6:11, and Matthew 6:25-34. It comes from the Greek root word, 'merimna', which means 'distraction'. In other words, don't let your everyday needs distract you from putting God first.

Jesus tells the twelve, 'the worker is worth his keep,' Matthew 10:10. In other words, those who minister spiritual things are worthy of physical things. Hence why it's Biblical to pay a 'full-time' evangelist. This has always been a principle among God's people, Luke 10:7 / 1 Corinthians 9 / Galatians 6:6 / 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

"Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly, I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. 'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.'
Matthew 10:11-16

Jesus tells the twelve, 'the worker is worth his keep,' Matthew 10:9-11. In other words, those who minister spiritual things are worthy of physical things. Hence why it's Biblical to pay a 'full-time' evangelist. This has always been a principle among God's people, Luke 10:7 / 1 Corinthians 9 / Galatians 6:6 / 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

Why would Jesus tell them to stay in one house? Matthew 10:11 / Luke 9:4 / Mark 6:10. They weren't to live from house to house in the towns and cities because this may have been interpreted as them searching for material blessings. Also, when we think about it today, if we go somewhere on a trip, we don't book several places to stay; we book one place and use that place as a base.

If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages, Luke 10:5-8. Do not move around from house to house.

Notice they were to greet the owner of that household, not the house itself, Matthew 10:12-13 / Luke 10:5-9 / Mark 6:10. If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

The idea behind the greeting and saying peace was based on the thought that the household that received the messengers was in agreement with and wanted to fellowship the message of the messengers.

What does shaking the dust from your feet mean? Matthew 10:14 / Luke 9:5 / Mark 6:11. This was a Jewish custom that demonstrated to the inhospitable their lack of hospitality and acceptance of the messenger and his message, Nehemiah 5:13 / Luke 10:10-11 / Acts 13:49-51.

Jesus is saying that those who would receive the messengers of Jesus were receiving Jesus, Matthew 12:41 / John 15:18-27. If they didn't receive Jesus and what He taught, they would be rejected in the judgment of God.

Why were the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah less inexcusable than the sins of cities and villages that rejected the apostles? Matthew 10:15. Simply because they sinned in ignorance, whereas the cities of Jesus' day sinned against the light, the Messiah, they should have known better. You can read all about Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 and Jude 7.

Their going out was going to be dangerous; they were going out among the wolves, Matthew 10:16. The brutal and vicious dangers to which the apostles would be exposed weren't concealed by the Lord.
Their mission was dangerous and filled with countless perils. The words 'sheep in the midst of wolves' are very appropriate and expressive. Ask any farmer, what would a wolf do to his flock? One wolf in a flock of sheep is a source of incredible slaughter and destruction.

And so, in venturing into the dangers of their journey, the disciples must maintain their innocence in an environment of evil. In order to do so, they must exercise great wisdom on their journey, Philippians 2:14-16.
What does 'shrewd as snakes' mean? Matthew 10:16. It simply means the disciples are to exercise great wisdom in their work for the Master. The serpent was symbolic of carefulness, craftiness, and wisdom. The serpent was considered a symbol of wisdom among the ancients, especially the python.
The girl at Philippi who followed Paul and Silas was said to have had a 'spirit which could predict the future', Acts 16:16, but the Greek word denotes that she had a python! Genesis declares that 'the serpent was more shrewd', Genesis 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 12:16 / Ephesians 5:15 / Colossians 4:5.
What does 'innocent as doves' mean? Matthew 10:16. The dove was symbolic of peace, innocence, and purity. The dove, as a symbol of harmlessness and innocence, derived significance from Noah's use of it as a messenger in the ark, Genesis 8.
We also see the significance of this when the Spirit descended upon Jesus, signifying the start of His ministry, Matthew 3:16. The disciples went out, preached repentance and drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them, Luke 9:6 / Mark 6:12-13.

'Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account, you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.' Matthew 10:17-20

From this point on, Jesus begins to inform His disciples of the upcoming persecution they are likely to receive. They need to be on their guard because they will be handed over to local councils and flogged in the synagogues, Matthew 10:17 / Matthew 23:34 / Acts 5:18 / Acts 5:40 / Acts 9:16 / Acts 12:1 / Acts 22:19 / Acts 26:11.
They will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles, Matthew 10:18 / Acts 5:18 / Acts 12:1. This will happen because they follow Christ and when they get arrested, they aren't to worry about what to say or how to speak because the Holy Spirit Himself will speak through them, Matthew 10:19-20 / Mark 13:11 / Luke 12:11-12 / Luke 21:14-15 / John 14:26 / John 16:13-14 / Acts 4:8 / Acts 13:9.
Hagner, in his commentary, says the following.

'This prediction has caused problems for many interpreters since there is no indication that the disciples appeared before governors and kings during the mission that followed. As mentioned above, Jesus was evidently looking beyond their immediate mission to what His disciples would experience after His death, resurrection, and ascension.'

'Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.' Matthew 10:21-23

Here we read that when times of persecution come, even their own family members will turn against them. Their physical families will even go to the extent of having them put to death, Matthew 10:21 / Matthew 10:34-36 / Micah 7:6 / Luke 21:16.

Jesus tells them that everyone will hate them because they follow Christ, Matthew 10:22 / Matthew 24:9 / Luke 21:17 / John 15:18, but they must stand firm to the end in order to be saved, Matthew 10:22 / Matthew 24:13 / Mark 13:13 / 1 Corinthians 13:7 / Revelation 2:10 / Revelation 3:11.
Jesus tells them when they are persecuted in certain places, they are to move on to another place so that they will save themselves from the persecution, Matthew 10:23.
He tells them that they won't be able to finish their mission before He, the Son of Man returns, Matthew 10:23 / Daniel 7:13-14, which appears to be a reference to the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

'The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! "So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.' Matthew 10:24-26

Jesus reminds them that the teacher must be respected more than the servant, Matthew 10:24 / Luke 6:40 / John 15:20. It's not enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters, Matthew 10:25. In other words, if the teacher is going to suffer and be persecuted, his students shouldn't expect anything less than the same, John 13:16 / John 15:20.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Can any man who pretends to be a scholar or disciple of Jesus Christ expect to be treated well by the world? Will not the world love its own? And them only? Why then so much impatience under suffering, such an excessive sense of injuries, such delicacy? Can you expect anything from the world better than you receive?'

Beelzebul, Matthew 10:25, was the Philistine god who was called the lord of flies, 2 Kings 1:2-3. In the New Testament, he is called the prince of demons, Matthew 12:24-26 / Mark 3:22 / Luke 11:15 / Luke 11:18-19. If Beelzebul is the head of the house, then those who belong to his household will be the ones who persecute the apostles, Matthew 10:25.
Jesus tells them not to be afraid of them, Matthew 10:26 / Luke 12:2-9 / Romans 8:31 / Romans 8:37 / Philippians 4:13, because everything, whether concealed or hidden, will be openly revealed, Matthew 10:26.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This meant that the persecution and opposition of the Pharisees would not succeed in hiding the truth but would result in its being published. Persecution actually provided, then, as always, the following benefits for the thing, doctrine, or person persecuted. 1. It intensifies the zeal of the persecuted party. 2. Arouses sympathy for the underdog. 3. If intense enough, it multiplies centres of dissemination for the hated truth. All these results were clearly observable in the history of the early church.'

'What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 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.' Matthew 10:27-28

Jesus tells them that whatever He had taught His disciples in the dark, Matthew 10:27 / Luke 12:3. that is, privately, they must speak in the daylight, whatever He taught them when He whispered teachings in their ear, that is, quietly, they are to proclaim from the rooftops, that is, openly and boldly, Matthew 10:27 / Luke 12:3 / Acts 5:20 / Romans 1:16 / Romans 16:25.
They are not to be afraid of anyone who can kill the body but can't kill the soul, Matthew 10:28 / Luke 12:4 / 1 Peter 3:14. If they have to fear anyone, it is God Himself, Isaiah 8:13 / Luke 12:5 / Hebrews 10:31, because He is the only one who can destroy both soul and body in hell, Matthew 10:28 / Luke 12:5 / Matthew 25:41 / 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.

‘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.’ Matthew 10:29-31

Here we read that Jesus was the first person to introduce the ‘buy one, get one free’ slogan concerning the sparrows, Matthew 10:29 / Luke 12:6. The point is that even though many people look at sparrows and think they are worthless, God notices them and He cares for them, Matthew 10:29 / Luke 12:6.
Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The mention of the disciples’ heavenly Father, Matthew 10:29, stresses His care that extends to the numbering of his or her hairs. Often, people think that God cares only for the big things in life and is unconcerned about the details. Jesus taught the opposite. God’s concern with details should give us confidence that He controls the larger affairs of life.’
Just as He knows the sparrows, He certainly knows us all on a personal level, even to the point of knowing how much hair we have on our heads, Matthew 10:30 / Luke 12:7.
We shouldn’t worry because mankind is worth far more than the sparrows, Matthew 10:31, that is, God will certainly take care of us if He takes care of the sparrows, Matthew 6:25-30 / Romans 8:31-39.

‘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.’ Matthew 10:32-33

These statements are made when Jesus was advising the twelve before sending them to preach throughout the land of Israel, where they would experience some hostility, but He predicts much greater hostility, which came after the ascension, Matthew 10:5-42.
Jesus plainly tells us that we must acknowledge Jesus before others, and by doing so, He will acknowledge us before the Father, Matthew 10:32 / Luke 12:8 / Matthew 16:17-18 / Romans 10:9-10 / Revelation 20:15 / Revelation 21:27. There is also a warning involved if we disown Jesus, He will disown us before the Father, Matthew 10:33 / Luke 12:9 / Luke 9:26 / John 12:42 / 2 Timothy 2:12. Peter denied Christ three times but repented and became a great apostle, Luke 22:54-62.

NOT PEACE BUT DIVISION

‘Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.’ Matthew 10:34-37

Jesus says He has come to bring fire on earth, Luke 12:49. Many commentators have different views as to what the ‘fire’ refers to. Some suggest judgment, some suggest discord, some suggest Christian love, and some suggest the Holy Spirit. It’s also possible that the ‘fire’ refers to the Word of God, Jeremiah 23:29.
The preaching of the Gospel certainly brought a lot of joy to some people, but it also caused a lot of turmoil among people because many would reject the Gospel message, Acts 8:1-4 / 2 Corinthians 2:15-16. Notice that Jesus says He has a baptism to undergo, Luke 12:50, which is a clear reference to His upcoming suffering.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The path laid out for Jesus was extremely narrow and difficult. On the one hand, his was the task of convincing all men that he is King of kings and Lord of lords; and, on the other hand, this had to be done in such a manner as to

frustrate Satan's purpose of getting our Lord killed as a seditionist. The skill and genius by which Jesus negotiated this narrow path have ever been the marvel of all who contemplated them.'

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'How do I earnestly desire that it was passed! Since these sufferings 'must' be endured, how anxious am I that the time should come! Such were the feelings of the Redeemer in view of his approaching dying hour.'

Jesus isn't bringing peace but division, Luke 12:51. Matthew tells us that Jesus is bringing a sword, and it seems out of place to think that the Prince of Peace was bringing a sword, Matthew 10:34 / Isaiah 9:6 / Ephesians 2:14.
This sword, that is, the Gospel message, would have a devastating effect on our close relationships with our family members; it will divide, Matthew 10:34-37 / Luke 12:52-53. A sword should be identified with Christ in any sense as a warning of the severity, which is one characteristic of His glorious nature, Romans 11:22.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The sword of Christ is, 1. a sword of separation, 2. the word of God, Ephesians 6:17 / Hebrews 4:12, 3. the sword of civil authority, Romans 13:1-8, 4. the sword of judgment, Genesis 3:24, 5. the sword of correction, Revelation 2:16, and 6. the sword of victory, Revelation 19:13. Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, was acquainted with that sword. 'Yea, and a sword shall pierce thine own soul,' Luke 2:55.'
In Matthew 10:36, Jesus quotes Micah 7:6, which refers to the rebellion that happened during King Ahaz's reign. It pointed to a greater division in Jesus' day. In both cases, the root of the conflict involved righteousness and unrighteousness.
It appears that even our own family members would struggle with us loving Jesus more than them, and if we give in to them and love them more, we won't be counted worthy of Jesus, Matthew 10:34-37 / Luke 12:52-53 / Genesis 29:31.
One who obeys Christ despite family or parental opposition feels the edge of that sword. A young woman who maintains her ideals and purity in an office where low standards prevail soon feels that sword in her heart. All who live for Christ and bleed inwardly when His name is profaned or His word denied have felt it.

These verses show us that lines of cleavage between Christ's followers and the world cut sharply through the dearest and most intimate relationships on earth, Matthew 10:35-37 / Luke 12:52-53.
In every church, almost in every household, there are scars caused by this sword. Jesus is talking about the indirect result of His work and that of His followers. Anyone who promotes good and denounces bad will gain enemies and have problems. Sometimes this happens even within families.

The Gospel produces inner peace, peace with God, but the believer will experience resentment from the enemies of the Gospel, even though the Gospel is good, because they prefer evil.

So, the indirect result of the Lord's good work is trouble from enemies of the Gospel, even when they are members of one's own family; the alternative is to not accept the truth. In such situations, the choice will be to follow Jesus or give in to the family.

'Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.' Matthew 10:38-39

Jesus plainly explained what was required to become His disciple. He said that you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, Matthew 10:38 / Matthew 16:24 / Mark 8:34-9:1 / Luke 9:23 / Luke 14:27. These requirements are demanding; a person doesn't naturally deny himself, rather, he usually does what he wants.
Death to self is painful, but that is exactly the meaning of taking up one's cross. The cross was an instrument of death, and to take it up would be to die to oneself and one's own desires in order to serve Christ.

There is no profit in gaining the entire world, only to lose one's soul in the transaction, Matthew 10:39 / Matthew 16:26. It's worth everything to submit to God's stringent requirements for discipleship.
Jesus highlighted the requirements for being a disciple because it's so easy to imagine that you are a follower of Jesus when, in fact, you aren't. Discipleship isn't mere church membership or moral living; it's total devotion to Jesus Christ. It's to die to self and live 100% for the Lord.

The confession that Jesus demands isn't a simple statement in our mouths that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. It's a confession that we make with our whole life that is totally committed to Him, Galatians 2:20.
Everyone who would seek to be a disciple of Jesus must commit himself to follow Jesus above all things of this world, Matthew 6:24 / Matthew 10:32-33 / Romans 1:16. The reward of doing so will certainly be worth it, Matthew 16:25 / Luke 9:24 / Luke 17:33 / John 12:25 / Revelation 2:10.

'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." Matthew 10:40-42

Jesus tells the disciples that whoever welcomes them, welcomes Jesus, Matthew 10:40, that is, anyone who welcomes the disciples and accepts their teaching, is really welcoming Jesus and His teaching, John 13:20 / Acts 16:15 / Galatians 4:14 / 2 John 9.
The word 'prophet', Matthew 10:41, isn't used in reference to foretelling the future but in terms of teaching God's Word, Matthew 5:20 / John 13:20. The one who received the disciple would receive a reward from God suitable to one who had entertained one of God's representatives.
Gill, in his commentary, says the following.

'By 'a prophet' is meant, not one that foretells things to come, but a preacher of the Gospel, for as prophesying sometimes signifies preaching, so a prophet designs a minister of the word, and to 'receive' him, is not only to embrace his doctrine, but to entertain him in a kind, and generous manner, and he that does this, 'in the name of a prophet', not as coming in the name of another prophet, but upon this account, and for this consideration, because he himself is a prophet.'

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The disciples were righteous men who represented another righteous man, Jesus. God would give those who received the disciples as righteous men a reward in keeping with what a righteous man deserves, Matthew 5:20 / John 13:20.'
To give a cup of cold water in His Name, Matthew 10:39 / Mark 9:41 Colossians 3:17, even just a drink, to one of the least of Jesus' followers, is to be blessed, to receive a reward, Matthew 10:42.
He is telling them how rewarding giving can be. Even that which we take completely for granted, when given in love, is a blessing to both giver and receiver.

The 'little ones' is a reference to the disciples of Christ, those who would suffer for Him. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to them, will certainly not lose their reward in heaven, Matthew 10:42 / Matthew 25:40 / Mark 9:41 / Hebrews 6:10.
Anyone who assists one of them by giving him or her even a cup of refreshing cold water in His Name will receive a reward from God. The point is that no act of kindness for one of Jesus' suffering disciples will pass without God's reward.

Bell, in his commentary, says the following.

'Note the descending climax, a prophet, a righteous man, a little one; signifying that however low we come down in our services to those that are Christ's, all that is done for His sake, and that bears the stamp of love to His awesome name, shall be divinely appreciated and owned and rewarded.'

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION

'After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Matthew 11:1-3

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

While the disciples went off on their own to preach, Mark 6:12-13 / Luke 9:6, Jesus went on to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee, Matthew 11:1 / Luke 7:18-35.
Whilst Jesus was preaching in this area, John the Baptiser, who was still in prison, Matthew 4:12, and put there by Herod, Luke 3:19-20 / Mark 6:17-18, heard about what Jesus was doing, John 3:2, and wanted to confirm that He indeed was the Messiah, Matthew 11:2-3.
We get the full story of John's imprisonment later in Matthew 14:3-12. Earlier in John's ministry, he had no doubts whatsoever that Jesus was the Messiah, John 1:29-36 / John 3:27-36, but here, it's difficult to tell if John was lacking any faith or if, because he was in prison, he just wanted some assurance that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, Genesis 49:10 / Daniel 9:24 / John 6:14.

'Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." Matthew 11:4-6

Notice how Jesus responds to John's question concerning His Messiahship; He doesn't outright say yes or no. He simply tells John's disciples to go back and tell them what they have heard and seen, Matthew 11:4.
The miracles which Jesus was performing, such as the blind receiving their sight, the lame are now walking, the lepers have been cleansed, the deaf can now hear, the dead being raised to life and the good news is now being preached to the poor, Matthew 11:5 / Isaiah 29:18-19 / Isaiah 35:4-6 / Isaiah 61:1, are all signs that Jesus is the Messiah, John 20:30-31 / Acts 2:22.
Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'By a reference to Isaiah 61:1, he declared plainly enough, and yet not too plainly, that he was the Messiah. He worked several miracles in their presence in proof of his Messianic claims, Luke 7:21, and finally sent them back to John with a message in which he expressly mentioned his miracles, and promised a blessing to those who should attach themselves to him. The spectacle of Christ's miracles must have been particularly impressive to the disciples of John, who performed no miracles, John 10:41.'
Jesus says blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of Him, Matthew 11:6.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'This verse might be rendered, 'Happy is he to whom I shall not prove a stumbling block.' That is, happy is he who shall not take offence at my poverty and lowliness of life, so as to reject me and my doctrine. Happy is the one who can, notwithstanding that poverty and obscurity, see the evidence that I am the Messiah and follow me. It is not improbable that John wished Jesus publicly to proclaim himself as the Christ, instead of seeking retirement. Jesus replied that he gave sufficient evidence of that by his works; that a man might discover it if he chose; and that he was blessed or happy who should appreciate that evidence and embrace him as the Christ, despite his humble manner of life.'

'As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: " 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Matthew 11:7-10

As John's messengers go back to tell John what they heard and saw Jesus doing, He turns His attention to the crowd and begins to speak to them about John the Baptiser, Matthew 11:7. He asks a series of questions, concerning the character of John.

Jesus declares that John wasn't an unstable man in his beliefs, like a reed being swayed by the wind, Matthew 11:7 / Ephesians 4:14. John wasn't a rich man dressed in fine clothes which were fit for a king to wear, Matthew 11:8.

John wasn't just a prophet, he was more than a prophet, Matthew 11:9 / Matthew 14:5 / Matthew 21:26 / Luke 1:76 / Luke 20:6. He was the very prophet which Malachi prophesied was to come, Matthew 11:10 / Malachi 3:1 / Isaiah 40:3.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

John was the last and greatest of the prophets, foretelling.

1. The near approach of the kingdom of God.

2. That Jesus would take away the sin of the world.

3. That the Jewish nation would be destroyed for rejecting him, Matthew 3:10.

He was more than a prophet in that he did not merely foretell the Messiah but presented him to the people and identified him. He was also greatest in his proximity to Christ, which is the final, ultimate test of greatness.

'Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. Whoever has ears, let them hear.' Matthew 11:11-15

Jesus declares that there 'has never' been a greater 'man' than John the Baptist, Matthew 11:11 / Job 14:1 / Job 15:14 / Job 25:4.

Grey, in his commentary, says the following, concerning 'the least in the kingdom'.

'Matthew 11:11 has reference to John's relation to the Kingdom. The least in the Kingdom of heaven when it shall be set up upon earth, shall be greater than John could be before that time. The words do not speak of John in the moral sense, in which he was as great as any man born of woman, but in this dispensational sense.'

Jesus says from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it, Matthew 11:12.

Kercheville, in his commentary, says the following concerning Matthew 11:12.

'The vast majority of people did not realise who he was and what great work had been assigned to him by the Lord. If the people had understood who John was, they would have listened to him. But since the beginning of John's ministry, Jesus says that the kingdom has suffered violence and the violent are trying to take it by force, Matthew 11:12. Rather than submitting to the kingdom, they are violently trying to take the kingdom for themselves. This is why John is in prison. Instead of submitting to the message, they are rejecting the message and killing the messengers. They are practising violence instead of obedience. John, the greatest person to walk the earth except Jesus, was in their midst and they violently rejected him.'

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following concerning Matthew 11:12.

'Jesus here pictures the kingdom of heaven as a besieged city. The city is shut up, but the enemies which surround it storm its walls and try to force an entrance. The gates of Christ's kingdom were not opened until the day of Pentecost, Acts 2, but men, hearing it was about to be opened, sought to enter it prematurely, not by the gates which God would open, but by such breaches as they sought to make in its walls.'

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'Instances of such violence are: One. Some tried to make him king by force, John 6:15. Two. The mother of James and John sought to obtain secular appointments for her sons in the kingdom, Matthew 20:21. Three. Some supposed the kingdom would appear immediately, Luke 19:11. Four. The apostles quarrelled over who should be the greatest, Luke 22:24-30. Five. The apostles themselves seemed anxious for it to be done 'at this time', Acts 1:6. Furthermore, they envisioned a restoration of rule to Israel!'

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

'The people were full of preconceived ideas with regard to the kingdom, and each one sought to hasten and enjoy its pleasures as one who impatiently seizes upon a bud and seeks with his fingers to force it to bloom. The context shows that even John the Baptist was then seeking to force the kingdom.'

The prophets and the law both told the Jews that John would come, Matthew 11:13 / Malachi 4:4-6. Jesus tells the crowd that if they are willing to accept it, they will understand that Elijah was to come, Matthew 11:14 / Matthew 17:10-13 / Mark 9:11-13.

John wasn't Elijah, despite some claiming he was raised from the dead, John 1:21, John would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, Luke 1:17. Jesus encouraged the crowd to listen very closely to what He had just told them, Matthew 11:15 / Matthew 13:9 / Mark 4:9 / Luke 8:8 / Revelation 2:7.

'To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: "'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."
Matthew 11:16-19

There's no doubt that Jesus loved children, and later He will tell us we must become like them to enter the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 18:1-6, because God's kingdom belongs to the children, Matthew 19:14. It's interesting here because Jesus now compares that generation to unruly children, who are misbehaving in the marketplace, Matthew 11:16.

It appears that this generation was playing games, while some wanted to play happy wedding songs, but they were considered too happy, others wanted to play sad funeral songs, but they were considered too unhappy and mournful, Matthew 11:17.

Gill, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The allusion is to Jewish children, who having seen their parents and friends at their festivals and weddings, some play upon the pipe, and others dance to them, mimicked the same in their diversions; and also having observed, at funerals, the mourning women, making their doleful ditties, and others answering to them, acted the part of these persons, expecting their fellows would make their responses but did not.’

John’s life was one of self-denial, and yet the people said he had a demon; he was a madman, Matthew 11:18. In contrast to John, Jesus tells the crowd what the people are thinking about Him. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and yet they called Him a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners, Matthew 11:19. Coffman, in his commentary, says the following

‘The following criticisms were directed against Christ.

1. He was called a glutton.

2. He was called a winebibber.

3. They said he cast out demons by the prince of demons, Matthew 9:34.
4. They called him Beelzebul, Matthew 10:25.
5. They called him a sinner, John 9:24.
6. They said he had a demon, John 7:20.
7. They said he was a Samaritan, John 8:48.
8. They charged him with violating the sabbath, Matthew 12:2.
9. They referred to him as a ‘deceiver’, Matthew 27:63.
10. They accused him of friendship with publicans and sinners, Luke 15:2. In that last calumny, they overreached themselves, because what they intended as slander is, in fact, the glory of our Lord, namely, that he is a friend of publicans and sinners.’

Notice that wisdom is personified as a she, Matthew 11:19 / Proverbs 1:20–33 / Proverbs 8:1-9:12. Wisdom would tell people that both John and Jesus were carrying out the will of God and teaching God’s will to the people.

WOE ON UNREPENTANT TOWNS

‘Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.’ Matthew 11:20-22

It’s a heartbreaking thought that Jesus preached and taught in these cities and even performed many miracles, Luke 4:23 / John 20:30-31 / John 21:25, but still they refused to repent, Matthew 11:20, hence why Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith. Jesus demonstrated His miraculous powers in Chorazin and Bethsaida, Matthew 11:21, although we have no records of that happening, John 21:25.

Jesus says they had more of an opportunity to repent than the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, Matthew 11:21 / Isaiah 23:7-18 / Ezekiel 26:14 / Ezekiel 27:1-11 / Ezekiel 28:1-10. Sackcloth and ashes were worn when a person was repenting, they were a sign of submission to God, Isaiah 58:5 / John 3:5.

Jesus appears to imply that some people’s punishment will not be as bad as others, Matthew 11:22. Whatever, we understand Him to mean here, it’s clear that all who end up being punished, will feel it and know they are being punished, Matthew 11:22. An eternity in hell is surely punishment enough, despite the sin a person may have committed.

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

'When the time came for evangelising the Gentiles, Tyre and Sidon accepted the gospel, and verified the words of the text, Acts 21:3-6 / Acts 27:3.'
Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

'The greater understanding and light that a man receives, the greater will be the judgment of that individual. And so when God does judge, it will be according to the understanding of the knowledge that God has given. According to the grace they have been exposed to, will be the degree of judgement by which they will be judged.'

'And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.' Matthew 11:23-24

Jesus lived in Capernaum and performed many miracles whilst preaching and teaching, Matthew 4:13. It was a favoured city because Jesus lived there, but Jesus tells them they will go down to Hades, Matthew 11:23.
Once again, we read Jesus saying that it will be more bearable for the city which was destroyed by God, Sodom, Genesis 19:24-25 / Genesis 19:34 / Ezekiel 16:48-49, on Judgment Day, than it will be for Capernaum, Matthew 11:24.
Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'In themselves the words might simply mean that Capernaum shall cease to be a city and become desolate, as it is at present; but the context suggests that the condemnation of its unbelieving inhabitants in the Day of Judgment is also alluded to.'

Hagner, in his commentary, says the following.

'This passage vividly illustrates the simple truth that the greater the revelation, the greater the accountability, Romans 2:12-16.'

THE FATHER REVEALED IN THE SON

'At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Matthew 11:25-27

Henry, in his commentary, says the following.

'In these verses, we have Christ looking up to heaven, with thanksgiving to his Father for the sovereignty and security of the covenant of redemption and looking around him upon this earth, with an offer to all the children of men, to whom these presents shall come, of the privileges and benefits of the covenant of grace.'

Jesus praises God that the 'hidden things', Matthew 11:25, that is, the Gospel message which the apostles have preached has been understood and gladly received by the simple and unlearned people, that is, the little children, Matthew 11:25.
The so-called wise and learned are the scribes and Pharisees who thought they were wise and learned but they were the ones who actually rejected Jesus' message, 1 Corinthians 1:19 / 1 Corinthians 1:21-25 / 1 Corinthians 2:8 / 2 Corinthians 3:14.

The Father was pleased that the simple and unlearned had the Gospel revealed to them, Matthew 11:26. Jesus was given authority by the Father, and He declares the only way to know the Father, John 1:18 / John 6:46 / John 10:15, is through Christ, His Son, Matthew 11:27 / John 14:6 / John 7:29 / John 10:15 / John 17:25 / 1 Timothy 2:5. Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'Having just called the Father 'Lord of heaven and earth,' Matthew 11:25, He now declares that the same authority belongs to Himself because all created things have been committed to Him by God. This supreme authority over the universe, which was committed to Him at the creation, was exercised by Him to some degree even during the humiliation of His life on earth, John 3:35 / John 13:3 / John 17:2, and was fully restored at His resurrection, Matthew 28:18, with all the glory pertaining to it.'

'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." Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus' invitation to the crowd was simply to come to Him, Matthew 11:28 / John 6:35-51 / John 7:37, all who were weary and burdened, and He will give them rest, Jeremiah 6:16.
The invitation goes out to everyone who is tired of the stresses and worries of this world. The invitation goes out to all who are in need of some real rest, Matthew 11:28 / Matthew 5:3 / Matthew 23:4 / Acts 15:10 / Galatians 5:1 / 1 Peter 5:6-7.
Notice that in order to receive this blessing, a person must 'come', Matthew 11:28, and then they must 'take', Matthew 11:29. This implies that these promises don't just happen; a person must make the first move in order to receive them.
Notice also that they must 'learn' from him, Matthew 12:29. Jesus is the supreme example for our lives, and if we want to be free from stress and anxiety, we must follow His example.
If we want to have a heart of gentleness and humility, we must learn from Him in order for us to have rest for our souls, Matthew 12:29 / Jeremiah 6:16 / Psalms 46:10.
Jesus' yoke wasn't like the yoke which was a heavy burden for the oxen to carry when they were ploughing the fields, Matthew 11:30. The teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees was like this, Acts 13:39 / Acts 15:10 / Romans 3:28 / Romans 8:4 / Hebrews 7:19.
Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'My yoke does not consist of a multitude of burdensome ordinances like that of the Law and the Pharisees. It can hardly be called a yoke at all; it is so light. True, there are certain ordinances which every Christian must observe, but they are few and simple. The essence of My religion is that men should be humble, and meek and loving and tender-hearted as I am, not hard and proud like the Pharisees. Practise these things, and you will find your lives easy, your religion a joy, and your souls at rest.'

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

‘At that time, Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, ‘Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.’ Matthew 12:1-2

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH

At that time, it was the time after the second Passover of Jesus’ ministry. Luke 6:1. It’s important to remember that the legalistic Pharisees weren’t accusing the disciples of stealing the grain, Matthew 12:1-2 / Luke 6:1-11 / Mark 2:23-3:6.

Under the Old Testament law, a person had a right to pluck the grain from someone else’s field when travelling, though they couldn’t put a sickle to the crop, Deuteronomy 23:25.

They were accusing them of breaking their traditions of the Sabbath by doing the minor work of plucking out the grain on the Sabbath, Matthew 12:2 / Luke 6:2 / Mark 2:24.

Jesus and the disciples were violating one of the numerous laws the Pharisees had bound as a result of the traditions of the fathers in order that the Sabbath be kept. Exodus 20:10 / Exodus 36:2-3 / Numbers 15:32-36.

‘He answered, ‘Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Matthew 12:3-8

WHAT DID DAVID DO EXACTLY?

What David did was actually against lesser legalities of the law, Matthew 12:3-4 / Luke 6:3-4 / Mark 2:25-26 / 1 Samuel 21:1-7, for only the priests were to eat of the showbread, Exodus 25:30 / Leviticus 24:5-9 / Numbers 28:9-10 / 1 Samuel 21:6.

Though David’s actions were technically unlawful according to the law that forbade anyone eating the showbread other than the priests, there was a higher law of God that superseded the original law. That higher law was the preservation of David, God’s anointed. The Pharisees recognised this.

However, they justified David’s actions while at the same time complaining that Jesus and the disciples were breaking the law of the Sabbath. Jesus pointed out their inconsistent application of the law, though in this context, Jesus and the disciples didn’t violate any Old Testament law. They violated the Pharisees’ interpretation of the Sabbath law.

The priests had to work in violation of Sabbath laws in order to prepare sacrifices because they had to work on the Sabbath in preparation for the sacrifices, Numbers 28:9-10. However, they were blameless because their God-ordained work to prepare sacrifices for the people superseded the law to rest on the Sabbath.

Someone greater than the temple is here, Matthew 12:6, is a clear reference to Christ, Isaiah 66:1-2 / Matthew 12:41-42. Jesus was more glorious than the temple that the Jews honoured above all things on earth, Haggai 2:7-9 / 2 Chronicles 6:18 / Malachi 3:1 / Hebrews 3:3.

Sacrifice was a law of God, Matthew 12:7; however, mercy was a higher law of God. The Pharisees, in their legal understanding and application of the law, could not understand this principle concerning the laws of God, Hosea 6:6 / Micah 6:6-8.

Jesus here attacks the judgmental attitudes of the Pharisees that motivated them to criticise the plucking of the grain. The One who was in their midst was the One who had authority over the Sabbath. Jesus was of the triune God who instituted the Sabbath. Mark records that Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, Mark 2:27.

He explained that God had intended for the Sabbath command to provide relief for man, not be an additional burden. The Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, for on the Sabbath men were to rest from their labours, Exodus 20:11.

The Pharisees thought that man was made for the Sabbath. In other words, they believed that God made the Sabbath a holy day of worship in order that men renew their spiritual life and worship God on this day. However, God intended it to be a day of rest for man, Exodus 20:10-11. It was thus a law that was established for the physical well-being of man.

Jesus proclaimed His authority over the Sabbath, saying that He Himself was Lord of the Sabbath, Luke 6:5 / Mark 2:27-28. If Jesus created the Sabbath, surely, He knew what activities violated it.

The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of blessings and relaxation, free from work, but the Jews had turned it into a bunch of rules which consisted of dos and don'ts, and with over six hundred and thirteen laws, they always found a way around them.

In reference to the nation of Israel, the Sabbath was given to the nation of Israel as a sign between God and the nation of Israel. When the Old Testament law was abolished, the Sabbath law was also taken away, Colossians 2:16.

JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH A SHRIVELLED HAND

'Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out, and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. ' Matthew 12:9-14

The events recorded here and in Luke 6:6-11 took place on another Sabbath than the one in the previous verses, Matthew 12:1-8 / Luke 6:1-5 / Mark 3:1-5 / John 5:10 / John 7:23.

The legalistic Pharisees are here more concerned over the violation of their Sabbath laws than the healing of this man. Such manifests the hypocrisy of religion that is based on an outward manifestation of a legal presentation of religiosity without concentration on the heart for spiritual change.

The Pharisees here seek another opportunity to accuse Jesus of violating their laws of the Sabbath, Matthew 12:9-13 / Luke 6:6-11 / / Mark 7:6-9. They do so in order to accuse Him before the people that He violates the law. Mark records that at this time, Jesus was angered by their hardened hearts, Mark 3:5.

It seems that they didn't doubt that Jesus could miraculously heal the withered hand, Luke 6:7 / Mark 3:2. They wanted to see if He would do such on the Sabbath. If He did such work on the Sabbath, then they could accuse Him of working against their laws of the Sabbath, Luke 6:7 / Mark 3:2.

Notice Jesus asks the man 'to stand up in front of everyone', Luke 6:8 / Mark 3:3. Jesus wanted to make a point to these teachers of the Law; He didn't hide what He was doing.

By asking, 'Is it lawful?' Matthew 12:10 / Luke 6:9, Jesus was saying that it was always right to do good, Galatians 6:10. It was simply right to do good on the Sabbath in reference to human interests because men are more important than sheep, Matthew 12:11-12.
The real conflict here is between the legal and earthly interests of the Pharisees as opposed to the human interests of Jesus. Jesus pointed out that if the Pharisees' material interests were in danger on the Sabbath, they would do what was necessary to rescue a sheep. However, they were here critical of Jesus because of His human interest in healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus then told him to stretch his hand out, Matthew 13:13 / Luke 6:10 / Mark 3:5. Apparently, He neither touched him nor did any other physical thing; He merely asked the man to reach his hand out. When he did, it was healed, Matthew 12:13 / Luke 6:10 / Mark 3:5. Jesus' critics were furious and began plotting to assassinate Him, Luke 6:11.

TO SAVE A LIFE OR TO KILL!

In Luke 6:9, Jesus asks if it is lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? In Mark 3:4, Jesus asked His opponents, 'Should one save a life or kill on the Sabbath?' They chose not to reply, which showed that they were not interested in truth but only wanted to discredit Him.
It is always easy to find fault, but it's much harder to give a positive recommendation. Normally, Christ healed men by laying His hands on them or performing some other physical sign.

If He had accompanied the healing by physical action, in this case, they would have attacked Him for doing medical work on the Sabbath, something contrary to their tradition.

This time, however, Jesus did nothing. He merely told the man to reach his hand out, Luke 6:10 / Mark 3:5. Even Jesus' enemies didn't believe it wrong to stretch out their hand on the Sabbath. Thus, He outsmarted His opponents, and they were furious, Luke 6:11.
When a man in an argument begins to get angry, it is a sure sign that he is losing. As it turned out, Jesus' enemies are the ones who plotted to kill on the Sabbath, because He had done good. The Pharisees and the Herodians, who actually were enemies of each other, joined forces to get rid of Jesus.

The Pharisee's actions show the hardness of heart of those who profess a legal-oriented religion. The Pharisees cared nothing for the man with the withered hand.

Their concern was for their doctrinal strictness in keeping their traditions in reference to the keeping of the Sabbath. By upholding their legal practices in reference to the Sabbath, they were maintaining their arrogant positions of leadership among the people.

At this time in the controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders, the tension begins to grow. The Pharisees at this time in the ministry of Jesus schemed to remove Jesus, Matthew 12:14 / Luke 6:11 / Mark 3:6. He was in competition with their positions of leadership, their hypocritical lives and inconsistent beliefs.
They were infuriated because He manifested the inconsistencies of their theology and the callousness of their hearts. Because these religious leaders couldn't consistently argue with Jesus through correct reasoning from the Old Testament Scriptures, they were frustrated to the point of killing Him.

Religions that are developed with an emphasis on outward appearances and ceremonial worship are often hypocritical in the sense that people can be members of such religions without changed hearts.

The religious leaders in this context manifested the hypocrisy of such religions by planning evil when professing a form of righteousness, Matthew 12:14 / Luke 6:11 / Mark 3:6 / John 5:18 / John 10:39 / John 11:53.

SAD FACT

We can only imagine the joy in the heart of the heart whose hand was healed. We can only imagine how Jesus changed this man's life forever. We can only imagine the awe that everyone must have felt when Jesus healed him.

It's a sad fact that the miracle which just took place often gets overlooked because of the attitude of these religious leaders who couldn't and didn't deny the miracle but chose to focus on their traditions, rather than celebrating with the man who was now healed.

GOD'S CHOSEN SERVANT

'Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope." Matthew 12:15-21

Being aware that the Pharisees and the Herodians were plotting to kill Him, Mark 3:6, Jesus withdrew from that place, Matthew 12:15, and went to Galilee, Mark 3:7. Once again, a large crowd followed Him and He healed all who were ill, Matthew 12:15 / Mark 3:7-12.

Jesus again, to avoid being swarmed by other people, warned them not to tell others about what he had done for them, Matthew 12:16 / Matthew 8:4 / Matthew 9:30 / Matthew 17:9.

The New Testament finds the fulfilment of this prophecy written by Isaiah, Isaiah 42:1-4, in Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:17-21. Isaiah speaks of how the Messiah comes to the Gentiles, Matthew 12:18 / Romans 1:17 / Galatians 3:11 / Hebrews 10:38, God's right judgement in a peaceful way, Luke 4:18-21, for the New Testament fulfilment.

Jesus certainly had the Spirit upon Him, Matthew 12:18 / John 3:34.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning 'my Spirit'.

'The Lord Jesus was divine, yet as Mediator he is everywhere represented as 'the anointed' of God, or as endowed with the influences of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah 11:2. Also, Isaiah 61:1, where the Messiah says of himself, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because be hath anointed me', Luke 4:18. Before he entered upon his public ministry, the Spirit of God descended on him at his baptism, Matthew 3:17, and in all his work he showed that he was endowed abundantly with that Spirit.'

Isaiah tells how the Messiah will manifest Himself in the world as a quiet, gentle, and humble individual, Matthew 12:19, the opposite of self-seeking, Matthew 6:1-7 / Matthew 11:29.

He will draw all men to Himself, John 8:28 / John 12:32, and He will bring justice to the downtrodden. His mission is not to destroy but to seek and to save, Luke 19:10.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the 'bruised reed', Matthew 12:20.

'The bruised reed is a symbol of the soul, broken and contrite on account of sin, weeping and mourning for transgression. He will not break it. That is, he will not be severe, unforgiving, and cruel. He will heal it, pardon it, and give it strength.'

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the 'smouldering wick', Matthew 12:20.
'The metaphor of the smoking flax referred to the string-like fabric, or wick, one end of which was contained in the bowl of ancient lamps, and the other end lighted. Flax was the material of which such wicks were made. 'Smoking flax' indicated a lamp, nearly out of fuel, and almost ready to go out.'

The Messiah will not be broken nor His strength diminished until He brings the redemption, Matthew 12:21. In other words, He will accomplish His mission, Ephesians 2:12. Jesus was the fulfilment of all that Israel was supposed to be, Isaiah 36:6 / Ezekiel 29:6. In the New Testament, Matthew quotes this whole passage, stating that the prophet Isaiah had written this, and applying every word of it to Jesus Christ.

JESUS AND BEELZEBUB

'Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." Matthew 12:22-24

Matthew and Mark both speak about the seriousness of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and Jesus warning against committing it, Matthew 12:21-32 / Mark 3:28, but Luke doesn't mention blasphemy or Jesus' warning against it.
In Matthew 12:22-24, we find the religious leaders accusing Jesus of working for the devil for the second time, Matthew 9:32-34, being the first. Please note in Matthew 12:22-24, we have a man who is 'demon-possessed, blind and mute', but in the previous account, we have a man who is 'demon-possessed and mute', Matthew 9:32-34. Luke mentions that the man was 'mute', Luke 14:14, but Matthew mentions that the man was 'blind and mute', Matthew 12:22. Mark doesn't mention any man at all. It's certainly possible that we have two accounts from two different occasions.
Matthew 9:32-34 appears to go parallel with Luke 11:14. This man, who was demon-possessed and mute, was delivered by Jesus, who drove the spirit out of him, and the man was able to speak, Matthew 9:33 / Luke 11:14. The crowd were amazed because they had never seen anything like this before, Matthew 9:33 / Luke 11:14, but others, who couldn't deny what had just happened, accredited the miracle to 'Beelzebul, the prince of demons', Matthew 9:34 / Luke 11:15.
Beelzebul was the Philistine god who was called the lord of flies, 2 Kings 1:2-3, 'Beelzebub' was a combination of two ancient words, 'Baal', the name of the old god of the Canaanites, and 'zebul', meaning 'dunghill', 2 Kings 1:2 / 2 Kings 1:16.
In the New Testament, the prince of demons is the devil, Luke 11:15 / Matthew 9:34 / Matthew 12:24-32, and so they were saying that Jesus was working on behalf of the devil, Luke 11:15 / Matthew 12:24 / Matthew 9:34 / Mark 3:22 / John 7:20-24 / Acts 5:39. How shameful it was that they linked the name of the Saviour with that false god. Other tested Jesus and asked Him for a sign from heaven, Luke 11:16 / Matthew 16:1 / Mark 8:11 / John 2:18. After everything which Jesus has said and all the evidence of the miracles He has already perform up to this point should have been sign enough that He is the Christ, Luke 11:16 / John 2:18 / John 3:2 / John 4:6 / Mark 8:11 / John 2:18 / John 6:30.

‘Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. “Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.’ Matthew 12:25-30

Once again we read that Jesus knows the thoughts and hearts of people, Luke 11:17 / Matthew 9:4 / John 2:25 / Revelation 2:23. Jesus responded to the accusation by telling them if Satan was really driving out Satan, then Satan’s kingdom was being destroyed, Luke 17:17. In other words, Satan can’t work against himself by driving out his own demons.

1. He said that it would be unreasonable and even disastrous for the devil to begin attacking himself, Luke 11:18-19. Civil wars don’t produce strong kingdoms.

Josephus says the following.

‘I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazer, releasing people that were demoniacal, in the presence of Vespasian and his sons and captains. He put a ring to the nostrils of the demoniac, and drew the demon out through his nostrils, making mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed.’

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Christ was not satisfied by showing them the intrinsic absurdity of their argument. He showed them that it might as well be applied to them as to him. Your disciples, taught by you and encouraged by you, pretend to cast out devils. If your argument be true that a man who casts out devils must be in league with the devil, then ‘your disciples’ have made a covenant with him also. You must therefore either give up this argument, or admit that the working of miracles is proof of the assistance of God.’

Luke records that Jesus did this by ‘the finger of God’, Luke 11:20. Because Jesus was demonstrating God’s power, Exodus 8:19 / Psalms 8:3, they should recognise that the kingdom of God has come upon them, Matthew 3:2, that is, the King has arrived and about to establish His kingdom, Luke 11:20 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:24 / Luke 1:22 / Luke 17:20-21.

2. Christ explained that He had come to rob the strong man, the devil, taking from him the souls that had been under his control, Luke 11:21-22.

Logically, He would need to disarm Satan to accomplish this goal, so expelling demons was a predictable facet of His strategy.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘A man could not break into the house of a strong man and take his property unless he had rendered the man himself helpless. If he had taken his goods, it would therefore be sufficient proof that he had bound the man. So I, says he, have taken this ‘property, this possessed person’, from the dominion of Satan. It is clear proof that I have subdued ‘Satan himself’, the ‘strong’ being that had him in possession. The words ‘or else’ mean ‘or how’, ‘how, or in what way, can one, etc.’

Jesus tells the people it’s time to decide for themselves; they are either with Him or against Him, they either gather or scatter, Luke 11:23. They are either with God or with Satan. They couldn’t sit on the fence with this, Matthew 12:30 / Matthew 6:24 / Matthew 16:24-26 / Mark 9:40; they had to decide one or the other.

BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

‘And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.’ Matthew 12:31-32

3. He warned of the serious consequences of hardening one’s heart to the point of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, Matthew 12:31-32.

These scribes were demonstrating a malicious and possibly fatal attitude toward the work of God. Mark 3:19 tells us that Jesus and His followers returned to the town, and when this was known, the crowds came together again, and the situation was as bad as ever. Furthermore, the Scribes had arrived from Jerusalem, bent on discrediting Him, because He was becoming far too popular and influential for their liking!

They had come, no doubt, because the local Pharisees had reported the growing popularity and influence of Jesus and urged that something should be done about it. In fact, the Pharisees in Capernaum had formed an alliance with the Herodians and were planning to kill Jesus, Mark 3:6.

That in itself shows how much they hated him. An alliance of Pharisees and Herodians was as unlikely and incredible as an alliance of Conservatives and Socialists today, considering the depth of the hatred the Pharisees and Herodians had for each other.

The very fact that these two parties had even spoken to each other was amazing because the Pharisees were the ones who kept strictly to the Law of Moses, whilst the Herodians were supporters of the Romans.

They had to be considering the fact that the Romans had made Herod, their family head, King of the Jews and given him authority over Galilee. The line of attack adopted by the Jerusalem scribes is stated in Mark 3:22.

He is under the control of Beelzebub, and he casts out demons because He is in league with the Devil, Matthew 12:27. The name, ‘Beelzebub’ is one of the many names given to Satan and it is the Greek form of the name ‘Baal-Zebub,’ meaning ‘The Lord of Flies’.

Although Mark does not record the account in detail, both Matthew and Luke do! They tell us in Matthew 12, and Luke 11, of their Gospels, that Jesus had healed a man who was blind and dumb, but, instead of accepting the miracle for what it was and intended to be, namely, proof of identity, proof that He was their long-awaited Messiah, they deliberately tried to discredit Him by accusing Him of being in league with the Devil.

First of all, Jesus reasons with them, Mark 3:23-26. He is aware of the fact that the Scribes have been moving among the people, trying to turn them against Him, seeking to discredit Him and undermine His influence.

Jesus basically says, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? Matthew 12:25-27 / Mark 3:26. You accept that the man was under the influence of Satan, so why would Satan want to heal him? Wouldn’t that mean that Satan is working against himself? Is it not true that a house divided against itself cannot stand?’ Mark 3:24-25.

He says, ‘It is not possible to take anything out of the house of a strong man unless you first disable the strong man! You must first bind the strong men, and then you can take his possessions!’ Mark 3:27.

He basically says, ‘You know very well that your argument is false!’ Furthermore, ‘if I cast out demons with the help of Satan, by whose help do your sons claim to cast them out?’

But then, Jesus changes His tone, He issues a warning, Mark 3:28-29. Taking note of what Matthew and Luke also say about this incident, Jesus says to the Scribes, ‘You may blaspheme, say what you like, speak injuriously, or critically about Me. You may misrepresent Me, and you can be forgiven, but you are in danger of eternal condemnation when you blaspheme the Holy Spirit by Whom this man has been made well! Matthew 12:31-21.

These religious leaders were sinning against the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, by whose power the man had been healed, when they deliberately refused to recognise that by means of this and all the other miracles performed by Jesus, the Holy Spirit testified that Jesus is the Son of God, 1 John 5:7.

In effect, these men were committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by declaring that the Spirit of Truth is a liar. He had not performed the miracle, but Satan had! And the miracle did not prove that Jesus is the Christ. The Holy Spirit was lying about that also, Matthew 12:31-32.

I don't need to tell you that these are some of the most serious words that ever came from the lips of Jesus Christ. In fact, the more you study this passage, the more terrible it reveals itself to be. It seems that Jesus is indicating a position in which if a man enters his case, it has become hopeless.

He says, 'It is possible for us to adopt an attitude that makes it impossible for even God to forgive us,' Matthew 12:31-32 / Mark 3:29. And for that very reason, whenever we read this passage, either in the Gospel of Matthew or in the other Gospels, we ought to be very careful how we treat it. There are two possibilities with this passage. There are two ways of dealing with it.

1. There is the possibility of reading into the words, something that isn't really there, and making it say something that even Jesus never meant them to say.

2. It is possible to water it down so much that you deprive them entirely of its meaning and its terribleness.

I think this subject is an interesting one. And I think it is interesting because some people may think that they have committed the 'unforgivable sin'. And even if you don't think that, at least it's a curious subject. It's mysterious and it's strange and terrible, and it's fascinating. It's also a subject which has caused a great deal of confusion.

Consequently, a great many speculative theories have been put forward about it. Some of the theories have been so confused and so involved that they haven't helped anybody; they have only created further uncertainty and difficulty.

Surely it has to be possible to know what Jesus meant. I can't believe God has allowed this passage to be put into His Word by the inspiration of the Spirit, and He wants to keep us in the dark about it. Especially with such a serious matter as 'the unforgivable sin' is involved.

To understand the meaning of Jesus, we've got to go back to the original setting. Here is a demon-possessed man, and consequently, because of that, he is blind and dumb, Matthew 12:22. And he is brought to Jesus and the man is miraculously cured by Jesus.

Now the people standing around are amazed at this demonstration of divine power, and they say, 'Could this be the Son of David?' Matthew 12:23. They believe, like Nicodemus, that no man could do these miracles except if God is with him, John 3:2. But the Pharisees, as usual, tried to discredit Him.

They say something that even before the words left their lips, they must have known was not true. They say, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons,' Matthew 12:24.

In other words, they deliberately turned their back on the miracle, a miracle that ought to have convinced them that Jesus was the Son of God. Remember that is what the miracles were designed to do, John 20:30-31.

And they say, 'Now this man's not the Son of God, and the power that He manifests isn't God's power either, He works miracles only because He is in league with the devil, the one who really performed that miracle was the devil himself,' Matthew 12:24.

This means they not only spoke against Jesus but they spoke against the Holy Spirit by whose power the miracle was performed. Remember that Jesus said in Matthew 12:28, 'If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God.'

So, Jesus claims that this was a demonstration of the Spirit's power through Him. But they blind themselves to that, and they not only insult Jesus, Mark 3:22, but by doing that, they speak wicked and insulting words against the Holy Spirit Himself, Matthew 12:31.

We can now see the sin by which these men were guilty. Jesus describes it in Matthew 12:31-32 in two different ways. He calls it, first of all, 'Blasphemy against the Spirit' in Matthew 12:31. Then in Matthew 12:32, He calls it, 'Speaking against the Spirit,' Mark 3:29.
Notice that Jesus didn't regard this as an attack against Himself. Of course, they were making an attack on Jesus; obviously, that was the whole idea in their minds. They spoke against Him when they made this wicked charge.

Jesus interprets what they say as directly against the Holy Spirit, and for once in His life, Jesus regarded the attitude of these men to be so terrible that He lowered Himself to reply to them. Very often when Jesus was attacked by these people, He just ignored the attack and didn't retaliate, 1 Peter 2:23.
Jesus wasn't concerned on the whole about defending Himself against an attack. But on this occasion, when the Holy Spirit was under attack, He certainly did, Matthew 12:32.
Notice it is 'A sin' against the Holy Spirit, Matthew 12:32. Notice I said, 'A sin' against the Holy Spirit, not 'THE sin' against the Holy Spirit. Because it is one sin, of many possible sins against the Spirit.
And there is something else to notice, too. Matthew 12:32 doesn't say that 'any sin or all sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable.' And it doesn't teach us that there is only one sin against the Spirit.
After all, the New Testament tells us that there are several sins against the Holy Spirit; there are several ways in which we may sin against the Spirit of God. In Hebrews 10:29, we read of the sin of, 'despising the Spirit of grace'. That's the sin that the Hebrew Christians were in danger of committing.
Remember that the Hebrew letter was written to Jews who had been converted to Christianity but seemed to want to go back to the old Law. They seemed to have the idea that in becoming Christians, they had perhaps sacrificed more than they had accepted.

They had a longing for some of the outdated, superseded ceremonies of the Law of Moses, which really meant that they were looking back when the author had been looking forward.

And the writer tells them, if you keep on looking back, there is only one end to that, you're going to end up going back. And if that happens, if you go back after confessing Jesus, you are committing sin because you're treating the Holy Spirit with disgrace, you're affronting the Holy Spirit.

After all, He is the Spirit of grace. He brought you to the light. He led you to the blessings of Christ, and to go back now, will be to insult Him. And every time a Christian turns their back on Jesus Christ and goes back into the world, that person is committing the sin of 'despising the Spirit of grace.'

Again, in Acts 5, you have the sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira. In Acts 5:3 / Acts 5:9, the sin is described in two ways. It's described as 'lying to the Spirit and testing the Spirit'.
1. All these people did was try to deceive the apostles, particularly Peter, by pretending that a part of the price they received from the sale of a piece of land was all of the price.

And Peter points out to them that their sin has really not been a sin against man at all. They have tested or tempted or tried the Holy Spirit by lying to Him. This sin of lying at this particular moment was certainly for these people, 'a sin that leads to death', to use the expression John uses in 1 John 5:16. But that's not necessarily the unforgivable sin. It's not even described as the unforgivable sin.
Again, in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, we discover that certain sins of impurity, certain sins of immorality in Christians are sins against the Holy Spirit. He says, 'Do you not know that your body'.
He's not talking about the church, the body of Christ. He's talking about your physical body. And as a Christian, therefore, he says, 'The Holy Spirit dwells in you'.

You receive the indwelling presence of the Spirit at your baptism. God's given the Spirit to all them that obey Him, Acts 5:32. His presence in your body marks you out as holy, sanctified, set apart for God.
And therefore, as Christians, we should be on our guard against any kind of conduct. Any habit of personal life that is unclean or harmful or unhealthy to our moral, our mental, or our physical health is what he's talking about.

The particular sin that is described in the passage, of course, is the sin of immorality. And such a sin, says Paul, is a sin against the Holy Spirit who lives within you and makes your body the temple of God because He detests impurity.

Again, in Ephesians 4:30, there is another sin against the Holy Spirit mentioned. 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.' Now, in this passage, when you read the context, you will discover that Paul is talking about the things that people say. The things that Christians can say are the way we use our tongue.
He is saying, 'Look, you have received the Holy Spirit as a token that God intends to redeem you outright one day, therefore watch your tongue, watch your language, watch the things you say, do not cause pain or sorrow, but let your words give grace and not offence.' And again, it relates to purity. Purity of speech and thought.

And then finally, there are others, but I am trying to demonstrate the various sins against the Holy Spirit that can be committed. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Paul says, 'Do not put out the Spirit's fire.' Or 'Do not quench the Spirit.' The Holy Spirit is in your life as a Christian. He's there to prompt you to zeal and enthusiasm.
He's there to show you how best to serve God. But when you refuse to act on the promptings of the Holy Spirit in your life. When you refuse to be led to greater service for Him.

When you know what to do and you don't do it. When you know how to be a greater use to God, and you refuse to act, then you suffocate the voice of the Holy Spirit in your life. To an extent that He loses His influence on you. And just as a fire can be put out by water, so you can restrain and dampen down and quench the Spirit of God.

And ultimately, if you treat the Holy Spirit like this, He will leave your life. He won't constantly try to struggle in your life at all, but He will leave you to yourself. And so the latter end of you is worse than the beginning, Matthew 12:45 / 2 Peter 2:20.
All of these are sins that can be committed against the Holy Spirit. And something else to notice, they are all sins that are committed by Christians. There's not one of these that applies to the Non-Christian. They all relate to the believer's attitude and relationship to the Spirit of God. But you're not told that any one of these is the 'unforgivable sin'.

Let's be honest, if any one of these sins was an unforgivable sin, how many of us would be saved? How many of us as Christians have not at one time or another committed one of the offences that I have just talked about? So, these aren't the unforgivable sins.

Let's look at the way that Jesus describes this particular sin. He calls it in Matthew 12:31-32, 'Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit'. Now, blasphemy is 'evil speaking'.
In that sense, you can blaspheme anyone with evil words against them. But in the Biblical sense, blasphemy means, 'evil speaking against deity'. It's a very old sin, and in Leviticus 24, we find possibly the earliest mention of 'blasphemy' in the Bible.
And that's the time when Moses received the Law from God, and there was a man there. The son of an Israelite woman who has married an Egyptian, who is said to have blasphemed the name with a curse, Leviticus 24:10-11. Blaspheming the name is the name of God. And even it seems at that moment that this was such a terrible thing that even Moses was at a loss to know what to do.

Nobody had ever behaved like this before, certainly not among the people of God. And so, Moses goes to God and lays the matter before God, and he asks God what to do, Leviticus 24:12. There is no misunderstanding of the penalty of the sin.

And throughout the Old Testament, whenever this particular sin of blasphemy against God was committed either by word of mouth or by attitude, this particular sentence was carried out; people were stoned to death for blasphemy, Leviticus 24:16.

They even did it during the time of Jesus. Jesus heals a paralysed man, and He said, 'Son, your sins have been forgiven,' Luke 5:20. And His enemies said in Luke 5:21, 'This man speaks blasphemy.'

Another time, Jesus said, 'I and my father are one,' John 10:30. And they picked up stones to stone Him. And they said, 'For blasphemy, because you being a man, are making yourself equal with God,' John 10:33. And they were perfectly logical because there are many people today who don't believe that Jesus Christ is God or that He is equal with God.

They are much more stupid than the Jews at the time of Jesus because of all the hatred and opposition they raised against Him; they certainly understood the significance of His words. They recognised that Jesus was indeed claiming to be God. And in their eyes, that was blasphemy, and they were ready to carry out the sentence of the Law.

We must remember that not all blasphemy is unforgivable. Jesus said it, He said in Matthew 12:31, 'Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, men.' And again, He says in Matthew 12:32, 'Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.' And he's talking about blasphemy. We have an example of that, haven't we?

The apostle Paul himself was once a blasphemer, 1 Timothy 1:13. Why? Because his blasphemy was against the name of Christ and not against the Holy Spirit. It is true that when he attacked the Lord Jesus, he attacked the Holy Spirit too, but in his heart.

Even when his heart was full of hatred for the Christians, even when he opposed the name of Christ, Paul, in a misguided way, thought he was serving God. He loved God, and he respected the Spirit of God, so he was not in his heart blaspheming the Holy Spirit but the name of Jesus, and he received forgiveness.

Now there is a theory that says that the unforgivable sin is the sin of 'refusing to believe the Gospel and dying in sin'. And that's the explanation that is often given as 'the unforgivable sin'.

They say that through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is pleading with people to accept Jesus as their Saviour, and when they refuse to accept that testimony, they are just like the Pharisees committing the sin of blasphemy, the unforgivable sin.

If that were the case, if the unforgivable sin were the sin of refusing the Gospel of Christ and dying in sin, it couldn't be committed before the Day of Pentecost, when the Gospel was first preached. And yet Jesus says to these Pharisees in Matthew 12:32, 'Anyone who commits this sin will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.' Jesus isn't saying that 'This sin has no forgiveness in this life and the life that is yet to come.' Everyone knows that when we get to the Day of Judgment, forgiveness for any sin is passed. So Jesus isn't talking foolishness.

He's saying to the Pharisees, 'Look, anybody that commits this particular sin has no forgiveness, here and now, in the age in which you and I live, or in the age, which is to come, when the Gospel will be preached.'

And again, when you think about it, if the unforgivable sin is the sin of refusing the Gospel invitation, rejecting the Gospel. You only have to do that once to commit that unforgivable sin.

And if we say that to commit this sin, a person must refuse the Gospel and go on refusing it until the day that they die, what's so startlingly new about that idea? And didn't Jesus say much more plainly in John 8:24, 'If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.'

Everyone knows that if people persistently refuse the Gospel time and time again and go on refusing it until they die, their sins won't be forgiven. But this isn't 'the unforgivable sin,' in the sense in which Jesus is talking about it here.

Remember that we are dealing with a sin against the Holy Spirit and not against Jesus. But the failure to obey the Gospel would be no more blasphemy against the Holy Spirit than it would be blasphemy against God or Christ.

Because Romans 1:1 says, 'The gospel is the gospel of God.' Galatians 1:7 says, 'It is the gospel of Christ.' So, to refuse the Gospel is as much a sin against God and Christ as it is a sin against the Holy Spirit.
In Matthew 12:27-32, and again in Mark 3:23-29, the sin that Jesus is talking about is shown to be something directly and particularly against the Holy Spirit. It was by the Holy Spirit that that particular miracle was performed.
And the Pharisees had said, 'He has an unclean Spirit,' Mark 3:22 / Matthew 12:24. That's how they thought about the Holy Spirit, 'The Spirit of God was an evil Spirit'.
You must have noticed that they didn't deny that the miracle had been performed. If they could have disproved the miracle by showing that Jesus had some kind of trick and that He was a conjurer or a magician. They would have discredited Jesus, but they didn't try to do that; they didn't even suggest it.

If they had accused Jesus of fraud, they would have been speaking against Him, which wouldn't have been the unforgivable sin, as Jesus says. These men went beyond Jesus and they made a direct attack on the Holy Spirit and what they actually did was to call the Holy Spirit a wicked spirit, an unclean spirit, the spirit of the devil. In other words, it was a deliberate attack on the Spirit of Holiness, Romans 1:4.
Indeed, the very way that Jesus puts it, shows that we're not dealing with an indifferent rejection of the message of the Spirit like we get in the world today when people refuse to become Christians.

But with something aggressive, something deliberate, something active. And that's what He means when He uses that expression, 'speaking against the Holy Spirit.'

Remember that Stephen was accused of attacking God, Moses and the temple. 'Attacking,' they said in Acts 6:11, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' In other words, they accused Stephen of launching an attack on God.
And that's exactly what these men were doing. They were launching an attack on the Holy Spirit. In fact, Stephen implies that the Jews were always doing that in Acts 7:51. In other words, 'they always fight against the Holy Spirit, they are always in opposition to the Holy Spirit'.
So why is this particular sin unforgivable? And why should a sin be unforgivable? Is it because God will not forgive it? Surely that can't be the answer.

Surely God hasn't marked out one particular sin as being so hideous and wicked, so terrible and grievous that He says, 'No'. 'Murder, I'll forgive that, lying, I'll forgive that, immorality, I'll even forgive that, blasphemy against Jesus, yes, I'll forgive that, I forgave Paul for doing that, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, No, I draw the line there.'

Does God behave like that? Of course, not. That's an impossible theory, to suggest that there is one sin that God will not forgive is utterly out of keeping with all that you know about the character of God.

Because time and time again God has shown us, pleading with men, 'Repent then, why will you die,' Luke 13:3-5.
We are shown a God whose deepest longing is for men to turn to God and be forgiven, Isaiah 1:18 / 2 Peter 3:9. And we could go on.
The next question usually asked concerning this sin is whether or not it is still possible to commit it today. Opinions on this question certainly vary, and scholars seem to be divided in their positions. The evidence, however, seems to point toward the idea that this sin cannot be committed today.

1. The circumstances under which the sin is described cannot prevail today, due to the fact that the age of miracles has ceased, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.
No one today will have the opportunity to witness Jesus performing miracles in person, 2 Corinthians 5:16.
2. There is no other mention of the sin in any Biblical passage written after the resurrection of Christ.

None of the inspired New Testament writers refers to the sin in any epistle or the Book of Acts, and none offers warnings to new converts about avoiding the sin post-Pentecost.

In conclusion, 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' is the only 'unforgivable sin' mentioned in the Bible, and it is mentioned in the context of the Pharisees accusing Jesus of being possessed by the devil.

The context indicates that it was a specific sin, and not a series of forgivable sins, or an attitude of persistent unbelief. As I wrote a moment ago, after the resurrection, no inspired writer mentions the sin, and no warnings against it were recorded.

There is no concrete evidence that it can be committed today. The fact that it's not mentioned after the resurrection lends itself to the idea that it cannot still be committed. In fact, the indication from passages such as 1 John 1:7 / 1 John 1:9 is that 'all unrighteousness' that a person could commit today can be forgiven by the blood of Jesus.

'Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognised by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Matthew 12:33-37

Jesus now asks the Pharisees to use some common sense in their thinking. He says a good fruit tree is proof that the tree itself is good, Matthew 12:33 / Matthew 7:16-20, then surely because Jesus was doing good by driving out demons is proof that it was God who was at work through Jesus, not the devil, Matthew 7:15-20 / John 9:25 / John 9:30 / John 9:33.
Jesus calls them a brood of vipers, Matthew 12:34 / Matthew 3:7 / Matthew 23:33 / John 8:44, and tells them their hearts are not right with God, Proverbs 4:23. If their hearts were right with God then their hearts would produce good things, but because their hearts were filled with evil, then evil words came from their mouths, Matthew 12:34-35 / Matthew 15:18 / Luke 6:45 / Ephesians 4:29 / James 3:2-12 / 3 John 9-10.
Jesus then states that everyone will have to give an account on Judgment Day, Matthew 12:36 / Matthew 12:41, for every 'empty word' they have spoken. In other words, every word they have spoken against God in an evil manner will be held accountable.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'Words' are the indication of the true principles of the heart; by 'words' the heart shall be known, as the tree is by its fruit. If they are true, proper, chaste, instructive, pious, they will prove that the heart is right. If false, envious, malignant, and impious, they will prove that the heart is wrong, and will therefore be among the causes of condemnation. It is not meant that words will be the only thing that will condemn man, but that they will be an important part of the things for which he shall be condemned, James 3:3-12.'
In other words, by our speech, James 2:21-25, we will be judged either to be justified or condemned, Matthew 12:37.

THE SIGN OF JONAH

‘Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” Matthew 12:38

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law now ask Jesus to show them a sign, Matthew 12:38 / Matthew 16:1 / Mark 8:11 / John 2:18. Luke tells us they wanted to see a sign from heaven, Luke 11:16.
After everything which Jesus has said and all the evidence of the miracles He has already performed up to this point should have been sign enough that He is the Christ, John 2:18 / John 3:2 / John 4:6 / Mark 8:11 / Luke 11:16 / John 2:18 / John 6:30.

‘He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’ Matthew 12:39-40

Jesus’ response says it all really, they were a wicked and adulterous generation, Matthew 12:39.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The relation of the Jews to God was represented as a marriage contract with God as the husband and the Jewish people as his wife, Isaiah 57:3 / Hosea 3:1 / Ezekiel 16:15. Hence, their apostasy and idolatry are often represented as adultery.’
The only sign which Jesus would show was the sign of Jonah, Matthew 12:39 / Jonah 1:17, who was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and night, Matthew 12:40, which is a clear reference to Jesus being buried in the tomb for three days and nights, Matthew 16:21 / Ephesians 4:9, and rise from the grave, Psalms 16:10.
Was the body of Jesus really in the grave for three days and nights? Well, if we’re looking for the chronological accuracy of which our modern world is so proud, with its timepieces which, for an age that is virtually controlled by the clock, make it possible to calculate time down to parts of a second, I think we shall be disappointed.

A PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION

Here’s a fact which should always be borne in mind when attempting to determine the meaning of Biblical words and phrases. Words are like tokens or counters; they have no intrinsic value, that is, no value in themselves. They depend on the meaning that is attached to them by the people using them.

We must ask ourselves, what did that word or that expression mean to the people who used it at that time? In the case of the words we’re studying, the Jewish rulers who heard Jesus make this statement revealed what they understood it to mean, when they went to Pilate, the Roman Governor, to request that a guard be placed at the tomb of Jesus.

They said, ‘We remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, ‘After three days I will rise again’. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day,’ Matthew 27:63-64. I suggest that an understanding of this principle of interpretation will help us to understand both Matthew 12:40 and many other puzzling passages.

THE RECKONING OF TIME

In 1988, Professor Stephen Hawking gained worldwide celebrity when he produced his book, ‘A Brief History of Time’, and man’s fascination with time-keeping never diminishes.

But in the New Testament age, the reckoning of time was a relative calculation, and people of that age would probably never even have asked the question which we're now considering, not only because they didn't possess the technology that we now possess, but because they were simply not as concerned as we are today, with measuring life in days and hours, minutes and seconds.

In fact, among the Jews in the days of the Lord Jesus, for legal purposes, it was not necessary for a 'day' to run the full number of hours in order to be considered a 'day'. Any part of a 'day' was calculated as a 'day', even if only one hour had passed!

Commenting on the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:40, where the Lord mentions Jonah's terrifying experience, the highly regarded and scholarly Bishop Lightfoot, in his work, 'Home Hebraicae', mentions a Jewish saying which states that, 'a day and a night make an Onah, and a part of an Onah is as the whole'.
I suppose that, in an age of radio-controlled clocks, quartz and digital watches and chronometers, many would find this old Jewish saying very unsatisfactory. But Lightfoot also comments, 'therefore Christ may truly be said to have been in the grave three Onoth, the consent of the schools and the dialect of the nation agreeing thereunto'.

Do you think this Jewish practice is strange? But Sir Robert Anderson, K.C.B., L.L.D., who, besides being a Biblical scholar, was also a highly-respected legal authority, says, concerning the phrase 'three days and three nights'.

'A prison chaplain would have no difficulty explaining this to his congregation. Our civil day begins at midnight, and the law reckons any part of a day as a day. Therefore, while a sentence of three days means three days of twenty-four hours, equal to seventy-two hours, a prisoner under such a committal is seldom more than forty hours in gaol, and I have known cases where the period was only thirty-three hours. And this mode of reckoning was as familiar to the Jew as it is to our criminal courts.'

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

You will also find this rather imprecise way of expressing time in the Old Testament. Consider the following examples.

1. 1 Samuel 30:11-12 records that David's men found an Egyptian and brought him to their commander.
The man had been left behind by the fleeing Amalekites. We read that David gave him food and water because he hadn't eaten or drunk for 'three days and three nights.' That simply meant, for some time.

In 1 Samuel 30:12, the man says that he became sick 'three days ago'. Commentators claim that the two statements are intended to point out the considerable start the Amalekites had in their flight and to stress that there was no time to lose if David was to catch up with them.
2. In 2 Chronicles 10:1-12, we read that when Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, became Israel's new king, certain of his subjects approached him, pleading that they might be relieved of the heavy burdens which his father, in his later days, had imposed on them in order to support his extravagant lifestyle.
Rehoboam said to them, 'Come again to me after three days' 2 Chronicles 10:5. We then read in 2 Chronicles 10:12, 'So Jeroboam and the people came to Rehoboam on the third day.' 'On' is not 'after'! Yet Rehoboam did not rebuke them or send them away because they had come too soon.
3. In Esther 4:16, when Haman, the enemy of the Jews, plotted their wholesale destruction, Esther, the Queen, issued this command.

'Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day'. The fast was as binding upon Esther herself as upon the people.

But Esther 5:1 then tells us, 'Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther appeared before the king and said to him. If it seems good to the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him'.
It's obvious, then, that in Bible times, the phrase 'three days and nights' didn't mean what we understand it to mean today and that it wasn't, in those days, considered necessary to be as precise in recording time as it is now.

But, the early Christians knew nothing of an annual celebration of the Lord's death, burial and resurrection, because, as Paul told the Corinthian Christians, 'each first day of the week', when they celebrated the Lord's Supper, 1 Corinthians 11.26, they 'proclaimed the Lord's death', and would continue to do so 'until He comes'.
Indeed, the issue of an annual celebration was not even raised until long after the establishment of the New Testament church. It was towards the end of the second century, by which time the predicted 'falling away' from the faith had already begun, that disputes arose concerning the 'time to celebrate Easter.'

The problem arose again in 325 A.D. at the time of the First Council of Nicaea, when the Church of Rome attempted to resolve it, but it was not until more than three hundred years later, in 664 A.D. at the 'Synod of Whitby', that churches in Britain decided to adopt the practices of the Roman Church. This means that the present-day celebration of 'Easter' is the invention of the Church of Rome.

THE NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE

In any case, it is surprising that, when the length of time the Lord's body lay in the grave is discussed, it is just the one sentence in which He uses the illustration involving Jonah which receives attention. What we ought to consider are the following facts.

1. The four Gospels reveal that, repeatedly, the Lord Himself declared in unequivocal terms that He would be put to death and would rise from the dead 'on the third day'.

2. He first predicted His resurrection early as John 2:19, 'destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,' in a statement which John admits His disciples only later understood, but later He began to speak about it openly, after Peter had declared Him to be 'the Christ, the Son of the living God', in Matthew 16:16.
Similar statements are recorded in the Gospels; here are but a few: Matthew 17:23 / Matthew 20:19 / Mark 9:31 / Mark 10:34 / Luke 9:22 / Luke 13:32 / Luke 18:33 / Luke 24:7 / Luke 24:21 / Luke 24:46.
3. What Jesus said was evidently accepted without question by both His apostles and the members of the early church, all of whom subsequently believed that what He had predicted had actually come to pass.

Paul states this in 1 Corinthians 15:4, 'raised on the third day'. The New Testament contains nothing to suggest that the Lord made a prediction that failed.
4. Matthew 27:63-64 tells us that, after the burial of the body of Jesus, the leaders of the Jews came to Pilate with a request.
5. On the morning of the third day, the women came to the tomb, and Luke 24:5-8 records that the heavenly messengers who met them even quoted the Lord's own words, Luke 24:5-8.
Matthew 28:6 says that one of the angels told the women, 'He is not here, for He is risen, even as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.'

Dr John Brown of Haddington, the Scottish minister who produced the Bible version which bears his name, also undertook to prepare a 'Harmony of the Gospels.'

One day, a visitor came to the house asking to see the great man, and Dr Brown's canny old servant informed the visitor, rather scornfully, that his master was busy 'trying to reconcile four men who never disagreed!'

It seems that we ourselves are sometimes inclined to undertake similar pointless tasks. Which is more important, to be able to prove that the Lord's body lay in the grave for precisely three days and three nights? Or to be assured by all who truly knew Him, that He rose from the dead 'on the third day', even as He said?

So, let us first consider what we may learn from the 'three days and three nights' of Jonah, and the problem these words appear to create. This is the problem. The statement declares that, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so also would the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the earth.

This then raises the question, if Jesus was arrested late on Thursday, 'the 14th Nisan', died and was buried the next day, Friday 'the 15th Nisan', and was raised early on the First Day of the Week, 'the 'Lord's Day', how can this be reckoned as three days and three nights?

The problem arises when we fail to understand how the expression 'three days and nights' was understood in Biblical times. Sir Robert Anderson, who was an eminent lawyer, made an interesting point when he observed that words and phrases are just 'counters' which have no value or significance in themselves, and which must be understood in the light of the meaning they would have had to those who originally heard them.

In the Scriptures, there are several places where we find mention of 'three days and nights', and, when we examine these passages, some interesting information emerges.

UNTIL THE THIRD DAY

Let us now look at what the scriptures record. Mark 14:1, 'Now it was the Passover and the 'feast of' unleavened bread after two Days.' Mark 14:12 'And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed 'sacrificed' the Passover'.

Both Mark and Luke are more explicit than Matthew. Mark 14:12 states, 'the first day of unleavened bread when they killed the Passover 'lamb'.' Luke 22:7 states, 'then came the day of unleavened bread when the Passover 'lamb' must be killed'.

We have here references to two events, the Passover meal and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which followed it, and the two must not be confused. See what the Old Testament law said concerning these two events. Numbers 28:16-17 reads, 'On the 14th day of the first month is the Passover of the LORD. And on the 15th day of this month is the feast; seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.'

Leviticus 23:5-6, very clearly states, 'In the 14th day of the first month 'Nisan', at even 'i.e. evening' is the LORD'S Passover. And on the 15th day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD: seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.'

Come over to the New Testament record, and this is what we find. Matthew 26:17. reads, 'Now on the first day of unleavened bread…, the disciples, Where shall we prepare for thee to eat the Passover 'supper'?' Matthew 26:20 'when even was come he sat down with the twelve.' The date was the 14th Nisan, called 'Preparation'. The Passover 'meal' was eaten in the evening.

1. The 14th of Nisan was the day when all leaven had to be put away.

2. It was the day on which the Lord was arrested after he had left the Upper Room with his disciples, and the day before the beginning of the Passover week.

3. It was still the 14th Nisan when the Jewish leaders took Jesus to Pilate.

They wouldn't enter the Roman 'Praetorium', 'lest they become defiled' because they had not yet eaten the Passover meal. John 18:28. In John 13:27, Jesus said to Judas Iscariot, What you do, do quickly". Note that when Judas left the Upper Room.
1. It was already night, John 13:30.
2. The other disciples thought that Judas had left to buy the things needed for the feast of Unleavened Bread, which began the next day, the first day of the Passover Week, Luke 22:1.
If Judas needed to buy anything, it would have to be done on the 14th, because the next day was a 'Sabbath', a rest day, when he couldn't possibly have bought anything. To buy or sell on the 15th Nisan would have been a violation of the Mosaic Law. And, remember, that the day was the very high 'Sabbath' of Passover week.

Jesus had given Judas the opportunity of abandoning his plan, but knowing that he was determined to go through with it, Jesus said, 'what you intend to do, do quickly', thus sending him to the Priests to agree with them the price of betrayal. It is unlikely that Judas knew that Jesus was aware of his intentions, and the Lord's words forced his hand, and in so doing, Jesus took control of events.

Matthew 26:2 records that Jesus said to His disciples, 'After two days is the Passover,' and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.' Matthew 26:5 records that, at a meeting in the palace of the High Priest that same day, when they were planning to kill Jesus, they said, 'not on the feast lest there be an uproar.'

JESUS WAS ALWAYS IN CONTROL

In John 10:18, Jesus said, No man takes my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again'. John 18:2-3 reveals that Judas was able to lead the Jews to where they could find Jesus.
And Jesus knew they were coming to arrest Him, but when he decided! Several mistakes are made in trying to work out just when the Lord was crucified.

1. For instance, the Passover meal, 'at which the Lord instituted His Own Supper', shouldn't be confused with the feast of Unleavened Bread.

This means that commencing on the 15th day, the feast lasted for seven days, and just as the Israelites continued to eat unleavened bread after they had escaped from Egypt when God 'passed over' the land, Exodus 12, so their descendants celebrated seven days of 'the Feast of Unleavened Bread', after eating the 'Passover meal'.
Although they were required to eat unleavened bread during those seven days, it was a 'Feast' because the people were called upon to 'rejoice'.

2. The several references to 'sabbath' are also a source of difficulty for many Bible students.

It is often overlooked that the word 'sabbath' doesn't refer to the weekly seventh-day alone. The word 'sabbath' doesn't mean 'seventh', as some seem to think.

It simply means ‘separation’ or ‘rest’, and any day of the week, which was celebrated as a ‘high day’, was also called a ‘sabbath’, on which the law of the weekly Sabbath also applied. The Sabbath to which these verses refer was especially significant because being Nisan 15th; it was the Sabbath of Passover Week.

JESUS AND JUDAS

In the Upper Room, on the 14th Nisan, the Lord ate the Passover Meal, Matthew 26:19, but, when Judas rose and went out, the rest of the disciples thought he had gone to buy whatever the group would need to celebrate ‘the feast’, which began the next day, the 15th of Nisan, John 13:29.
It is also worth noting that, occurring in the first month of the religious year, ‘the sacred year’, and being the first major Feast of the year, the ‘Passover’ was regarded as an especially important occasion.

So, this is what we have seen so far: the Passover Meal was eaten during the evening of 14th Nisan, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, known as ‘the Passover’, began the next day.

THE SUMMARY

1. Jesus celebrated the Passover Supper on Nisan 14, ‘Thursday’. Matthew 26:19.
2. He was arrested later that night when Nisan 15 had begun, ‘evening to evening’.

3. The priest came together ‘straightway, in the morning.’ Mark 15:1, thus, ‘Friday’.
4. He was crucified and His body taken down from the cross because the next day was the Sabbath, ‘Saturday’. John 19:31.
5. He rose on ‘the first day of the week’. ‘Upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning.’ Luke 24:1
6. The woman came to see the sepulchre, ‘at the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week’. Matthew 28:1.
7. The heavenly messengers at the tomb quoted the Lord’s prediction of His resurrection.

‘The Son of Man must be delivered and be crucified and the third day rise again’. And they remembered his words and told all these things to the eleven,’ Luke 24:5-8. An angel told the women, ‘He is not here, for he is risen. Come see the place where the Lord lay,’ Matthew 28:6.
The Jewish leaders themselves said that Jesus had claimed that He would rise ‘after three days’, and wanted the sepulchre to be guarded ‘until the third day,’ Matthew 27:63-66.

‘The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.’ Matthew 12:41-42

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, Genesis 10:11 / Nehemiah 2:8 / Zephaniah 2:13-15, and the men of Nineveh would stand up at the judgment and condemn this generation because at the time preaching of Jonah, the city repented, Matthew 12:41 / Jonah 3:5, whereas the generation in which Jesus lived refused to repent.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Christ’s being greater than Jonah is seen in the contrast between the messages, one secular, the other spiritual, between the messengers, one true, the other untrue, and between the miracles that certified each, one disgorged by a sea monster, the other raised from the dead, Matthew 8:25.’

The Queen of the South is Sheba, Matthew 12:42, who came from a most distant land, to admire wealth and listen to Solomon’s wisdom, 1 Kings 10:1-13 / 2 Chronicles 9:1. Sheba was probably a city of Arabia, situated to the south of Judea, Isaiah 60:6.

Childress, in his commentary, says the following, someone greater than Solomon.

1. Christ was greater in his birth. 2. His wisdom. 3. His temple. 4. His throne. 5. His prayers. 6. In his mansions, and 7. In the sacrifice Christ offered. As one example, Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple ‘twenty-two thousand oxen, and a hundred twenty thousand sheep’, 2 Chronicles 7:5. Christ offered his own blood within the holiest place of all for the sins of all men, Hebrews 9:14.’

‘When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.” Matthew 12:43-45

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If there had been no reality in demoniacal possessions, our Lord would have scarcely appealed to a case of this kind here, to point out the real state of the Jewish people, and the desolation which was coming upon them. Had this been only a vulgar error, of the nonsense of which the learned scribes and the wise Pharisees must have been convinced, the case not being one in point, because not true, must have been treated by that very people with contempt for whose conviction it was alone designed.’

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The ‘general sentiment’ which our Saviour here teaches is much more easily understood than the illustration which he uses. The Jews had asked a sign from heaven that should decisively prove that he was the Messiah and satisfy their unbelief. He replies that, though he should give them such a sign, a proof conclusive and satisfactory, and though for a time they should profess to believe and apparently reform, yet such was the obstinacy of their unbelief and wickedness, that they would soon return to their former course. and become worse and worse. Infidelity and wickedness, like an evil spirit in a possessed man, were appropriately at ‘home’ in them. If driven out, they would find no other place so comfortable and undisturbed as their bosoms. Everywhere they would be, comparatively, like an evil spirit going through deserts and lonely places, and finding no place of rest. They would return, therefore, and dwell with them.’

The ‘arid places’, Matthew 12:43 / Luke 11:24, appear to be the figurative places where demons lived, Isaiah 13:21 / Isaiah 34:14. The impure spirit decided to go back to its house only to find it unoccupied, swept clean and in order, Matthew 12:44 / Luke 11:24-25.

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Though the evil has been temporarily expelled, nothing good has been put in its place, so that the demon can return. If our Lord had been admitted, the return would have been impossible. The ‘sweeping’ and ’garnishing’ is that empty show of faith and repentance and good works, which only invites a more terrible fall.’

The number seven speaks of completeness. In other words, as many as the house will hold, Matthew 12:45 / Luke 11:26, we see this with Mary Magdalene, who had seven demons, Luke 8:2 / Mark 16:9.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'These words were doubtless spoken in sorrow. They were a firm, dogmatic prophecy of Israel's rejection of Christ, reminding one of 2 Peter 2:20. What state is worse than being unsaved? It is the apostasy from which it is impossible to be renewed, Hebrews 6:4-6.'

JESUS' MOTHER AND BROTHERS

'While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Matthew 12:46-50

Matthew records that Jesus had four brothers, Matthew 13:55-56, and Mark records that Jesus had at least two sisters, Mark 6:3. As there is no mention of Joseph here, this could signify that he had died at this point, Matthew 13:55 / Mark 6:3 / John 2:12 / John 7:3 / John 7:5 / John 7:10.

It's clear that Jesus' physical family had heard a lot about what had been going on, Matthew 12:46, but it's also clear that Jesus' family didn't understand Him. Notice they stood outside, that is, outside someone's house, Matthew 12:47 / Mark 3:20.

They came to try to talk to Him, perhaps to persuade Him to take a break, Matthew 12:46-47 / Mark 3:31-35 / Luke 8:19-21. Mark 3:21 tells us that His family thought He had lost His mind.

He refused to give them a private hearing, explaining that His family no longer had a special claim on His attention, Matthew 12:48-49. Jesus' true family consists of those who hear and do His will, Matthew 12:50 / 1 Timothy 5:1-2. This incident shows that Mary had no special influence or privilege. Jesus treats all of His obedient followers equally, John 1:12-13.

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION

'That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.' Matthew 13:1-2

Jesus' ministry was breaking barriers on all fronts and came in two stages. 1. Preaching. 2. Teaching. The teaching was usually done in the synagogue, not outdoors by the seashore, and so here we see teaching happening in a different place and in a different way, with the use of parables. This was something that was never done in the synagogues.

He taught and spoke in parables in a way that people could understand. This is a lesson all preachers and teachers need to learn: keep them simple. Jesus uses illustrations and leaves those listening to discover the truth. If people were interested, they would come back to ask for more details.

After healing the demon possessed man, Jesus went outside of the house where He performed the miracle, Matthew 13:1 / Mark 3:20. Notice that Jesus got into a boat, Matthew 13:2 / Mark 4:1, as He does often, Mark 3:9.

There would have been a small rowing boat that would take the disciples further out to the main fishing boat which was larger. We see this happening later when he is asleep on the boat, Mark 4:35-41.
The parable Jesus is about to speak about is unusual in the fact that Jesus Himself explains the meaning of it. Can you imagine what a sight that must have been?

What a pulpit that must have been to use, the Master teacher sitting on a boat because His following was so large. Jesus says, 'Listen', Mark 4:1, and then goes on to share the parable with those listening.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

'Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear." The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have, will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; You will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Matthew 13:3-23

Notice how Jesus starts the parable and how He ends the parable. He starts by saying, 'Listen', Mark 4:1, and ends by saying, 'He, who has ears to hear, let him hear,' Matthew 13:18 / Luke 8:8 / Mark 4:9.
It didn't just mean listen to what I've just said, it means to think about it, and paying attention to what I've just said. Although this is called 'the parable of the sower', the key to understanding this parable is understanding that the seed is the Word of God and so maybe it should be called 'the parable of the soil'.

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

The word 'Parable' comes from the Greek word 'Parabole', which literally means a placing beside, a comparison, equivalent to or to compare. Some say that a parable is 'an earthly story with a heavenly meaning', but a parable is more than that.

The dictionary defines a parable as 'a short figurative story, designed to convey some truth or moral lesson.' Or 'a brief story using events or facts of everyday life to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth.'

But parables come in many different styles and forms. In Luke 4:22-23, we have an example of a parable in the form of a 'Proverb'. Again, in Luke 5:36-39, we find Jesus sharing a parable in the form of a 'metaphor' to the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law.
And there are many other forms of parables that Jesus used too. But the point is that Jesus used parables as a form of teaching. It wasn't the only form of teaching He used, but it was certainly a form He liked to use a lot.

Throughout the Gospels, there are over thirty parables of Jesus recorded in some style or another. Most of them are well known to many people, but all of them are classics, and Jesus was the Master teacher when it came to parables.

In this parable, we find the following, which Jesus will explain later. We have a farmer who sows seed, Matthew 13:3 / Luke 8:5 / Mark 4:3, and four different kinds of soil.
1. The first type is like hard-packed soil, Matthew 13:4 / Luke 8:5 / Mark 4:4.
These hard-hearted people do not let the word penetrate their lives; they reject it immediately because they have closed their minds.

2. The second type is like seed sown in rocky places, Matthew 13:5-6 / Luke 8:6 / Mark 4:5-6.
The idea here is of a thin layer of topsoil covering a large rock. When the seed is sown in such a place, it will germinate and grow in the shallow soil, but it will not develop deep roots. When the sun comes out, and it doesn't rain for a few days, the plant will wither and die.

This represents a person who eagerly receives the word, but doesn't develop roots through faith and Bible study. This person will not have the ability to withstand the temptations and persecutions that come along in life.

3. The thorny soil, Matthew 13:7 / Luke 8:7 / Mark 4:7.
In this ground, the plant is overshadowed by taller weeds, which suffocate fruit production. This soil symbolises people who receive the word, and although they allow it to continue in their lives, they permit competing interests to dwarf it. These other influences may not be bad things in themselves, but they dominate the person's life so much that the seed can't bear fruit.

4. The good soil, Matthew 13:8 / Luke 8:8 / Mark 4:8.
This is the good soil in which plants bear abundant fruit. This soil represents Christians who are diligent in the service of God.

The seed fell on three different places, without any lasting success. 1. On the path. 2. On rocky ground. 3. On rocky places. 4. On the thorny ground. However, some of the seed fell on good ground. The seed fell onto different types of ground, and the harvest depended on the kind of soil where the seed fell.

Its clear that His disciples and others didn't understand the parable, Matthew 13:10 / Luke 8:9 / Mark 4:10 / Mark 4:13 / Mark 4:33-34, and so, Jesus said He speaks in parables so that He can reveal secrets about the kingdom of heaven, Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:11.
Why did Jesus speak in parables? Matthew 13:3-8 / Luke 8:4-7 / Mark 4:10-13. His parables were designed to test His hearers, not an intelligence test but rather a spiritual responsiveness test.
Jesus shares the parable with the people and says, 'Do you want to know a secret?' 'I've shared a secret with you about the kingdom of heaven,' Matthew 13:11 / Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:11.
And the parable He shared did exactly what the parable was designed to do. They were designed to get a response, Matthew 13:13-15 / Luke 8:9-10 / Mark 4:10-12. It split the people into two groups: those who were interested in truth and those who weren't, Matthew 13:13-15 / Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:12 / Isaiah 6:9-10.
Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jesus didn't use parables to blind people, but because they were blind. 'Therefore Jesus used the parabolic method, not in order to blind them, but in order to make them look again; not in order to prevent them from coming to forgiveness, but in order to lure them toward a new attention.'

Jesus is saying, 'My people can see and perceive, My people can hear and understand, but they just don't want to,' Matthew 13:13-15 / Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:12 / Isaiah 6:9-10.
He's saying they don't want to turn to God and be forgiven because their hearts are so far away from Me. He says My people have always seen, they've always heard, but My people don't want to listen and understand, because they are too stubborn, Isaiah 29:13.
A couple of chapters later in Mark's Gospel, Jesus says that the religious people were hypocrites who were more interested in the traditions of men rather than the commands of God, Mark 7:6-8.
And it's then that Jesus asks those who are listening, if they can't understand this parable, how will they understand any other parable that He will share, Mark 4:13.
Jesus is saying this secret about the kingdom of heaven is so easy to understand, Matthew 13:13-15 / Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:11. He says it's so plain and obvious and yet none of you can understand it!
He's telling them that they need to be able to understand this parable so that they can go on and understand other parables that He will teach them. It's much the same as what Paul says to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2.
The great call of Scripture is for growth, for us to grow spiritually.
The minute we were born again in the waters of baptism, John 3:3 / Acts 2:38, we should be starting to grow spiritually. And the more we study the Word of God, the more we understand and grow, but we need to grow, 2 Peter 3:18.
A lot of kids in the world today are born with a disease that stops them from growing both physically and mentally. But sadly, the same goes for some Christians, not physically or mentally but spiritually, Hebrews 5:11-14. Notice how the Hebrew writer describes how we become mature, "By constant use and training".
Studying isn't easy sometimes, but it's something that all Christians need to do; they need to train themselves to do it.
The desire for understanding the Bible will drive us forward to understand even more of the Bible. That's what Jesus' disciples did; they wanted to understand more, and so, Jesus gave them even more solid food, Matthew 5:6 / Luke 24:27.
So we find that these few people who were listening to Jesus didn't understand what the parable of the Sower meant, but they had the desire to know, and so Jesus explained it to them.

He says, 'Here's a secret about the kingdom of God', Matthew 13:13-15 / Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:11. Matthew records in Matthew 13:16-17, that the disciples were blessed because they used their eyes to see and their ears to hear, that is, they were open to Jesus' teaching and as a result were blessed, Matthew 16:17 / John 20:29.
Many of the Old Testament prophets and righteous people who lived by faith longed to see what the disciples were now seeing; they longed to hear the teachings Christ was teaching His disciples.

In other words, they longed to hear the wonderful things which Jesus was revealing to His disciples, John 8:56 / Galatians 4:4-5 / Hebrews 11:13 / Hebrews 11:25-26 / Hebrews 11:39-40 / 1 Peter 1:10-12.
Jesus taught and explained the parable using an everyday life event. He uses the illustration of a farmer sowing his seed. Have you ever wondered why some people become Christians, and then a little later, they fall away? Have you ever wondered why some people aren't Christians?

We have people who come into our assemblies, they hear the Gospel of Christ being preached, they know what they need to do to become obedient to the Gospel, and yet, nothing ever seems to happen. How come we don't get people coming to Christ when the Gospel is preached as it was during Biblical times?

Well, maybe the best way to answer that question is by letting Jesus ask the question He was asking. How could the scribes and Pharisees misrepresent God the way they did? Matthew 13:13-15 / Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:12 / Isaiah 6:9-10. How could the disciples and those listening not totally understand what Jesus was teaching? The way the Word is being sown or being preached isn't the problem; the problem is the way people receive it.

In other words, those people who are honestly searching for the truth are those people for whom the truth will become much clearer. We need to remember who the Word of God is being preached to; it's being preached to sinners. People whose hearts have been hardened with sin over the years.

Jesus says that people are like the place where the seed lands, Matthew 13:3-8 / Luke 8:5-8 / Mark 4:3-8. He's talking about four different soils, which represent four different reactions or responses when people hear the Word of God, Luke 8:11 / Matthew 4:19 / Mark 4:14.

1. Jesus said that the birds mentioned in Matthew 13:4 / Luke 8:5 / Mark 4:4 are a picture of the devil himself, who comes down and takes the seed away, Matthew 13:19 / Luke 8:12 / Mark 4:15.

But the reason the devil can so easily take it away is that the Word of God has no impression on these people at all. They're so hardened in sin, they don't even understand the significance of the words being said.

In other words, the path is hard, Matthew 13:4 / Luke 8:5 / Mark 4:4, the seed has nowhere to plant its roots, Jeremiah 4:3 / Hosea 10:12. They hear the Gospel but don't hang around long enough to find out what it means to them. Because when people are hardened with sin, they always think that whatever's being said doesn't apply to them.

2. Jesus goes on to describe another reaction to the Gospel.

People who hear the Word of God accept it with gladness and joy, Matthew 13:5 / Luke 8:6 / Mark 4:5, but they have no root in themselves, Matthew 13:20 / Luke 8:13 / Mark 4:16-17. Jesus says these people are OK for a while, but as soon as any persecution or worry comes along from being a follower of God, they just give up.

So the Word that was planted in them at the start, just springs up very quickly but the soil was lacking, Matthew 13:5 / Luke 8:6 / Mark 4:5. And so when the sun comes out, it's quickly burnt up because it has no root and lacks moisture, Matthew 13:5 / Luke 8:6 / Mark 4:5.

Jesus is saying there are hearts out there that will receive the truth with great readiness and joy, Matthew 13:20 / Luke 8:13 / Mark 4:16. And He says it's not until the heat gets turned up, that these people fall away.

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'Then there are many more, whose religion must be sustained by enthusiastic surroundings. They seem to have been baptised in boiling water, and unless the temperature around them is kept up to that point, they wither away. The religion that is born of mere excitement will die when the excitement is over.'

It worries me when people become Christians without even studying the Word of God first. People need to know and understand who and what they are committing to, Luke 14:26-35. Jesus says whenever the heat of tribulation or persecution comes along because of the Word of God, their delight in the truth just withers away and dries up.

3. Jesus goes on to describe another type of response to the Gospel.

In the case of the seed that fell among the thorns, Matthew 13:7 / Matthew 13:22 / Luke 8:7 / Luke 8:14 / Mark 4:4 / Mark 4:18-19, we must note that there was nothing wrong with the soil. It's not too hard like the seed that fell along the path; there's enough soil for the seed to take root, unlike the seed that fell on a rocky place.

It's not the soil that's the problem; it's what is in the soil around it. It's the environment in which it's living that's the problem. One of the ways that Satan likes to attack God's people is with worry; worry is the greatest joy stealer there is.

Jesus says there are three things that steal our joy as Christians. He says there are three things that can stop us from becoming fruitful followers of the Word.

1. The cares of this world, Matthew 13:22 / Luke 8:14 / Mark 4:19.
People are so caught up in this life that they forget about the next. They worry about their jobs, they worry about their homes, and they worry about having enough money to get by.

Jesus says we shouldn't be getting distracted by anything. He'll take care of all your worries, Matthew 6:25-34 / Matthew 6:33. He says, listen, we're Christians, we don't need to worry about these things, 1 Peter 5:7, just leave the worrying to the unbelievers.
2. The deceitfulness of riches, Matthew 13:22 / Luke 8:14 / Mark 4:19.
The world's biggest con these days is this: 'get rich fast and you'll be happy'. Whether that comes in the form of a new car or a new home, it doesn't matter. I don't know if you have noticed, but over the past few years, the 'National Lottery' has now got even more chances for you to win every day of the week. They now have a daily 'National Lottery' draw.

And that's because they realise that in a world that's so commercial, people are lusting after the quick-fix answer to their problems or a get-me-rich-fast answer to their problems.

But Jesus tells us that that's not the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23. He says that those riches are the fruit of the world. He says people are being deceived into thinking that material goods are the answer to life.
The only answer to this life is Jesus Christ Himself, and if we want answers about this life, then we need to look to Jesus, John 14:6, because He's the only one who has the answers for this life.
3. The pleasures of this life, Matthew 13:22 / Luke 8:14 / Mark 4:19.
Everyone likes to have fun, and there's nothing wrong with that, but the problem comes when the fun becomes more important than godly living. There's nothing wrong with playing cards, but the problem comes when we start gambling, and our gambling habit takes over our lives.

There's nothing wrong with having a drink, but the problem comes when the drink becomes more important than God himself. God has given us the gift of pleasure, which in itself can be innocent. But we need to remember that the world's idea of enjoyment is totally opposite to God's idea of enjoyment.

These three things or these three thorns that we have just mentioned are constantly in the environment that we live in every day. And what they do is smother and choke the Word of God, Matthew 13:22 / Luke 8:14 / Mark 4:18-19.
And Jesus says, the reason that these people don't bear any fruit is because of these thorns.
He says, they look promising, they look like they're going to bear fruit, but they never do, and so they end up choking to death. He says the thorns soak up all the moisture and riches that are in the soil, and so the world ends up with all their attention, and God just gets the dregs of whatever is left, Matthew 22:37. They are starved of the truth, which is found in the word of God.
4. Jesus speaks about the good soil, Matthew 13:8 / Matthew 13:23 / Luke 8:8 / Luke 8:15 / Mark 4:8 / Mark 4:19-20.
Jesus says, 'This is the soil I'm looking for, this is the kind of response to My words that I'm looking for.' This soil is the total opposite of the three other soils mentioned. These are the people whose hearts are soft and tender; they received and cherished the seed when it was planted.

These people soak up the Word of God and gain strength from it and go on to produce a crop of 'thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown,' Matthew 13:23 / Luke 8:15 / Mark 4:20.
These are the people who plant good seed in people's hearts and are rewarded with a good crop, that is a good number of people responding to the Gospel message, 1 Corinthians 3:6.

They can see the world's riches for what they really are; they guard themselves against worldly pleasures, Proverbs 21:17. And they cast all their anxieties onto Him because they know He cares for them, 1 Peter 5:7. They produce much fruit, and it's these people who are the long-distance faith runners, who are faithful to the end.
And it's to those people who Jesus says, 'Do you want to know a secret?' Matthew 13:11 / Luke 8:10 / Mark 4:11.
Don't be surprised when people don't want to hear about Me.
Don't be surprised when people become Christians and only last a short time. Don't be surprised when people look like they're going to be great ambassadors for Christ, but they fall away.

Everyone has a place in the parable of the sower. Jesus wants us to evaluate which type of soil we are.

1. Hopefully, we won't be the hardened, wayside soil.

If we are, we will close our minds to the truth and refuse to allow the Gospel to penetrate our hearts and change our lives.

2. Perhaps we'll be the rocky soil.

On the surface, we appear to be growing and serving the Lord enthusiastically. But we aren't deepening our roots through faith, study and a deeper personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When times become tough, we will fall away, and others will marvel because on the surface, it looked like we were doing so well.

3. If we end up being the thorny soil, we will continue to 'be a Christian,' but our life will be dominated by other activities, and we will never have much time or attention to share with spiritual concerns.

This is probably the most subtle danger because the plant in the thorny soil never completely falls away. As a result, we can soothe our conscience and believe that we are still doing OK when, in fact, we aren't bearing fruit.

4. Ideally, we will be the good soil that bears the fruit of righteousness for the Lord.

God's Word doesn't vary, but man's heart does. The nature of the response is dictated by the nature of the heart that receives it. The secret is this: don't give up planting the seed, but persevere, Galatians 6:9. We never know what kind of response you're going to get.
Jesus explained that the seed represents the word of God, Luke 8:11. There are many lessons that can be learned from the analogy between the seed and the word.
For example, a seed always produces after its kind. That is, rice seed always produces rice plants, corn seed produces corn plants, and pumpkin seed produces pumpkin plants. There are no exceptions.

By the plant results, one can determine what seed was planted. So it is in the spiritual realm. When the pure word of God is planted, the resulting plants are Christians.

It would be theoretically possible to eliminate pumpkin plants from the face of the earth. Yet if pumpkin seeds were preserved, someone many years later could plant them, and again produce pumpkins. So also in Christ. The seed is the word of God, 1 Peter 1:23-25.
Even if there had not been servants of Christ on the earth for a long time, when people returned to following the Bible only, they would become Christians. Our goal should be to reproduce pure disciples of Christ in the twentieth century, just like they were in the first.

The biggest mistake we can make as Christians after studying this is to look around us and say, 'Yes, I know people who fall into one of those categories. I know someone who didn't last long as a Christian,' but that's not the point of the parable. The point of the parable is to get you to look at yourself. Is your heartfelt response to the Gospel described in this parable?

And let me just say that it would be very foolish for anyone to stand and say, 'Yes, when the seed fell on me, it fell on the good soil.' Because you can't answer that question until the day Jesus returns or the day you die, 1 Corinthians 10:12.

Let's not judge each other with this parable. But let's continue to encourage each other to remain faithful to the end and trust in God to help us produce the fruit He requires.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

'Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus explains the meaning of this parable later in this chapter, and so, we'll identify the different characters when we get there. Jesus again is describing the kingdom of heaven to a man who sowed good seed in his field, Matthew 13:24.

However, while he was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away, Matthew 13:25. Instead of keeping watch over the field, the person in charge was asleep, Galatians 6:1.

The weeds were a plant which looked like wheat until they became fully grown, Matthew 13:26. The weeds would hamper the growth of the wheat and the harvest.

The farmer wouldn't know that the weeds had been sown in the field along with the wheat until it was harvest time, when the grain was formed, Matthew 13:27-30.

The farmer couldn't remove the weeds while the wheat was growing; otherwise, the wheat would also be destroyed in the removal process, Matthew 27:29. And so, the farmer would have to wait until harvest time to separate the weeds from the wheat, Matthew 13:30.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

'He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." Matthew 13:31-32

In the 'The Parable Of The Growing Seed', Mark 4:26-29, we see how Jesus explained how the spiritual kingdom of God grows. We see that this kingdom's growth was orderly. Just like our physical growth, we grow through infancy, childhood, youth and manhood. In other words, it takes time, and we need to be patient.

We also see how the kingdom's growth is from God Himself. We plant the seed and water it when we get the chance, but it's God who causes the seed to grow. And we don't know how God does this, but we know He does because we're Christians today.

Jesus is going to teach us another aspect of this kingdom's growth, but from a different point of view, from the viewpoint of a garden or the field, Matthew 13:31-32 / Luke 13:18-19 / Mark 4:30-32.

Everything God created has a purpose, and we can learn many lessons from nature, including the mustard seed. During Biblical times, it was a very common practice to talk about the mustard seed as one of the smallest seeds, Matthew 13:32 / Mark 4:31.

Strictly speaking, it wasn't the smallest seed around at this time, but the tiny mustard seed was used to speak of anything minute. For example, Jesus spoke of faith as a grain of mustard seed, Matthew 17:20 / Luke 17:6.

Let me say a few words about the mustard plant before we go on, because this will help us in our understanding of the parable. The Palestinian mustard plant, because of its size, wasn't usually found in the garden; it was usually found in an open field, and these plants grow to between ten and twelve feet in height.

When it comes to shrubs, this was the giant; its branches were so large they would spread out like a tree. And so, because of its size, it would very often attract many birds, Matthew 31:32 / Luke 13:19 / Mark 4:32. During the time of Jesus, birds would often be seen in the branches of the mustard plant as they fed on the small black seeds of the mustard pods.

And like we know about all of Jesus' parables, He reveals a secret about how the kingdom of God grows from an everyday event. I'm going to share with you three points on this parable.

1. Just because something is little, doesn't mean it's not important.

When we look at the small mustard seed, and we see how microscopic it is, we might be forgiven for thinking it's not worth much. But when we talk to someone who grows these plants, we will find exactly how valuable it really is.

As a spice, mustard is sold in seed or powder form, and even today, we can buy it in paste form. In other words, the little mustard seed by itself doesn't look so important, but our experience teaches us not to minimise it.

I guess what I'm saying is that the little things in life should never be discounted. When we look at the world today, it's obsessed with bigness. The Great Wall of China is seventeen hundred miles long.

The Alaska Pipeline runs for eight hundred miles. The Empire State Building, which was built in New York in 1931, is one-hundred and two stories high. So many of our modern-day skyscrapers dwarf the Tower of Babel. When we think about our farmers, they're termed as successful according to the bigness of their operations.

So to a world obsessed with magnitude, Jesus says, 'Pay attention to the little things.' A cup of cold water, Mark 9:41, a visit to the sick, a welcome to a stranger, a lost sheep, Jesus says, 'these are the little things'.

In Matthew 25:35-36, when Jesus is talking about the great division which will happen on judgement day, notice He doesn't want us to feed the world, He doesn't want us to solve world poverty. It's not big things He wants from us, it's little things.

Give a hungry person someone to eat, give a thirsty person something to drink. Give someone who needs clothes, some clothes, look after and visit the lonely and sick. These aren't big tasks; they're little mission fields that we all can do.

Just because someone has a small task within God's kingdom doesn't mean that it isn't important. Doing a good deed for someone spreads the Gospel faster than one hundred sermons. That's because just like a grain of mustard seed, they increase in size beyond imaginable proportion.

2. However important little things may be, the parable focuses on the consequences of little beginnings.

The Egyptians were famous and still are famous for their pyramid buildings, and one of the greatest pyramids was built at Giza. It contained an inner chamber where the Pharaohs were buried. His followers were usually buried in there too, along with some of his personal artefacts.

The rest of the pyramid complex consisted of a large enclosure, an adjacent mortuary temple, and a walkway leading down to a pavilion. And when we look at these magnificent structures, we can't help but stand in awe. But when we think about it, these structures started with one brick.

Vincent Van Gogh has many famous paintings, but each one started with a single stroke of the brush. The German composer Ludwig Van Beethoven started his great symphonies and concertos with a single note.

In literature, every book ever written, every essay, and every poem all come from the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. In fact, the world's biggest things have generally had small beginnings. Momentous deeds and earth-circling revolutions can be traced back to a speck, like a germ of mustard seed.

When we think about Christianity, the world's greatest movement had its beginnings in a manger in Bethlehem, Luke 2:10-12. The proud and busy Roman world didn't take any notice of the day when Jesus was born.
And it casually took notice of His life, and even when Jesus died, the Roman world didn't care much. Why? Because Jesus was born in a manger, He was a carpenter from Nazareth, and when He died, He was now gone, so much for a great leader!

Certainly, in outward appearances, Jesus looked less than the least of all seeds; His followers were counted by the dozen, not by the thousands.

And yet, from only a handful of disciples, and in spite of their leader's death on a cross. There sprang into existence the universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which you and I are members of today.

Twenty-one centuries have come and gone, and today, He still remains the central figure for much of the human race. We should learn the lesson from the mustard seed.

A thing may be small, almost without hope, but that doesn't mean it's not going to succeed. Jesus is saying that small beginnings can succeed because it's God who is behind it. Do we honestly think that the first-century disciples ever thought that their small faith would have had such an impact on the world today?

Their faith began unnoticed, just like the tiny mustard seed but look at it now, it has gone all around the world, Colossians 1:5. Jesus said with faith like that, 'we can move mountains, we can tell a tree to go and plant itself in the sea,' Mark 11:23. That's faith, that's leaving things in God's hands because we know that God is in control.
3. Don't miss the point of this parable.

Some people like to believe that the branches, which Jesus talks about here, Matthew 13:32 / Luke 13:19 / Mark 4:32, are symbolic of modern-day denominations.
In other words, just as the birds come and sit in the branches of the trees, it's said that people can come and enter the different branches or denominations of the church.

But there are a few problems with this interpretation. They fail to ask the questions we have been asking with every parable we've looked at. Who was Jesus speaking to, and what did it mean to them? Jesus was speaking to His disciples, Matthew 13:10 / Mark 4:10. Was denominationalism around in Jesus' day? No!
Some people try to understand the parable by looking at Christianity today. What they need to do is look at Christianity as we find it in the first century. It's all too easy to make something mean something, which Jesus never meant it to mean.

It's too easy to speak of branches of the church, but in the days of Christ and His apostles, these different so-called branches or divisions of Christianity were unknown.

The Bible nowhere teaches that there are many churches; the Bible always talks about the unity of the church as a singular, Ephesians 4:4-6. Jesus didn't say, 'on this rock, I will build my churches.' He said, 'I will build my church,' singular, Matthew 16:18.
There are other people who like to say that this parable was a prophecy of Jesus. In other words, this parable remained unfulfilled until the recent rise of denominationalism, rubbish!

This takes their interpretation too far; there's no need to make everything in the parable mean something. The branches of the mustard tree aren't the main focus of Jesus' attention any more than the man who sowed the mustard seed or the nests that were made in the tree's branches.

THE POINT

The point of the parable is simply that the microscopic mustard seed grows into a tree large enough for the birds to come and nest in it. The man who sowed the seed, the field or garden, the nests, and the birds themselves are all incidental to the one central truth of the parable.

And that's this, the kingdom of God, Matthew 13:31 / Luke 13:18 / Mark 4:30, even with a small beginning, would prosper and prevail over all other kingdoms. That's what Jesus is getting at; that's what He is teaching His disciples.
Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel 2:31-45, is important because it helps us in our understanding of this parable. Let me give you a quick rundown of what this dream means.
Daniel 2:32 talks about 'the head' as being made of pure gold; this is talking about the Babylonian Empire. Daniel 2:32 also talks about 'the chest and arms' as being made of silver; this is talking about the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel 2:32-33 also mentions 'the belly and thighs, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.' as being made of bronze. This is talking about the Roman Empire. And in Daniel 2:34, he talks about 'this rock', which is not made by human hands.
The stone cut not by human hands, struck the image down and became 'a great mountain and filled the whole earth,' Daniel 2:35. In other words, Daniel prophesied that God's kingdom was destined to conquer all other kingdoms.
Did Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream come true, and was it accurate? Yes, it did. All we have to do is read our history books, and we will see how accurate they were. And we will read about how one kingdom fell after another, all the great historical writers tell us all about it.

What can we learn from this parable? Let me give you a couple of things to think about. Do you realise that you are a part of a kingdom that will never be destroyed and will last forever? But don't take my word for it, take God's word, Daniel 2:44. If you're a Christian today, then you're a part of God's spiritual kingdom right now.
Notice that Paul doesn't say, concerning our citizenship, 'will be in heaven' but 'is in heaven', that's present tense, Philippians 3:17-20. Now you may be thinking to yourself that you would like to become a part of this kingdom, but you haven't got much to offer. Well, just remember what we've learned today.
Jesus says that it's the little things we have got to offer that can make all the difference. We might not be able to preach or teach, but we can certainly write a letter of encouragement to other Christians in Jesus' name. We might not be able to song lead, but we can come to worship and encourage everyone with our friendly smile in Jesus' name.

In a world where people say that size matters, Jesus says, 'Give me what you can, and I will do wonders with it.' Look at what He did with a couple of fish and five loaves of bread, Matthew 14:13-21 / Matthew 15:32-39.

Look at what He did with six stone water jugs after they had been filled with water, John 2:1-11. Imagine what He can do with you if you would only give yourself to Him first.

THE PARABLE OF THE YEAST

'He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." Matthew 13:33

Jesus is still teaching about the kingdom of God, Matthew 13:33 / Luke 13:20, and in this parable, He shares a lesson from something He saw His mother doing time and time again, Matthew 13:33 / Luke 13:21.
We know bread was made at home in Palestine during this time, and everywhere you went, you would see women making bread. Everybody knew about the little piece of dough, which had been kept over from the previous baking, which was called yeast, and the yeast was basically a piece of fermented dough.

Jesus told a parable here, which would have highly offended those who were listening. We might be thinking, well, what's the big deal? He's talking about yeast. Well, to understand why they were offended, we need to enter the mind of the Jews again.

In Jewish thinking, yeast or leaven is almost always connected with an evil influence. The Jews connected fermentation with deterioration and rottenness, and yeast stood for that which was evil, Matthew 16:6 / 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 / Galatians 5:9.
Now we can understand why the Jews would struggle with this parable. They would be thinking, how could the kingdom of God be compared to yeast? How can God's kingdom be compared with evil?

Remember when God spoke to Moses and Aaron about what the Israelites were to do in preparation for the Passover? One of the ceremonies of preparation for the Passover feast was that every scrap of yeast had to be taken out of the house and burned and destroyed, Exodus 12:8-10.
I believe that Jesus chose this illustration of the kingdom deliberately. Imagine if you were a Jew and you were there listening to Jesus, there would be a certain shock in hearing that the kingdom of God is compared to yeast. But that shock would arouse interest and get attention, as an illustration from an unusual and unexpected source always does.

Jesus spoke of yeast in the good sense; He saw how the women use it for a good purpose to make light and wholesome bread. And so when you look at yeast the way Jesus looks at yeast, you can understand that the kingdom of God is like yeast in many ways.

So now that we understand the background to this parable, I would like to share with you three thoughts about this yeast or leaven, as some translations have it.

1. The yeast of Christ works from the inside out.

Those of you who are bakers and make your own bread will know exactly what I'm talking about. When you're making bread, you know that yeast will do nothing to your mixture unless you mix it through, and that's because yeast does its work from within. In other words, yeast can do nothing to the dough unless it's put inside; it has to get right inside the dough to work properly.

Christianity works the same way; the influence that changes a person works within a person's heart. You can change the external things about your life, but your heart will still be the same. A poverty-stricken nation may receive food and clothing and better housing, but that nation will not really be changed until it's given something within.

The task of Christianity is to make new men, not new things. It's not the outward things that are the problem; it's the human heart that's the problem, Mark 7:21-22. In other words, once the new people are created, the new world will follow.

A man isn't converted unless he's converted within; a person isn't converted unless their heart is changed. So Christianity is like yeast, it's not the outside trying to get in, but the inside trying to get out, Proverbs 27:19.

2. There's real quality in the transforming power of yeast.

Did you know that when yeast is put into the baking meal, it changes the ingredients? It does. What happens is that the dough is turned into a bubbling, seething mass.

When Christ and His kingdom are introduced to people, great changes take place. And that's because Christianity is a disturbing thing; it disturbs people, it upsets people, Acts 16:20-21 / Acts 17:5-8.

But why do they get upset? They get upset because God's Word exposes their sin, Hebrews 4:12. And sometimes you don't even have to say a word about God, but because they know you're a Christian, you're exposing their darkness, and people don't like being exposed, John 3:20.

But these are the kind of people that Christ can help because when Christ comes into a person's heart, that person becomes a new man or woman. Paul says when a person lets the yeast of Christ work in them and through them, they have new thoughts, Colossians 3:1-4.

A Christian starts to think differently about themselves and the world they live in. Paul says that a person who comes into contact with Christ starts to live differently, Colossians 3:5-7.

But something else happens to a person when they accept the yeast of Christ. When the disciples were talking about places of honour, Jesus says that when you become a Christian, your idea of work changes, you get new ambitions of work and service, Matthew 20:25-28.

The yeast of Christ is so powerful that it can take a person like the apostle Paul, who said that he was the worst of all sinners. And how does He do that? Christ does that because He loves us, and He has told us that whoever becomes a Christian is a new creation because the old has gone, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17.

When you allow Christ to influence your life with His words, you will be amazed at the results. Jesus Christ can change someone who is willing to allow God to change them, Galatians 5:22-24. The yeast of Christ is powerful, and there's not a person you have ever met or will ever meet who cannot be changed by the Word of God.

3. The yeast of Christ cannot be contained.

Yeast works contagiously, Matthew 13:33 / Luke 13:21. When yeast gets put into the mixture, it doesn't stop until it has spread through the whole mixture. And Jesus says that's exactly what the kingdom of God is like, it spreads like an infection.

When you think about some of Jesus' first disciples, other people brought them to Him. In other words, Andrew found Peter, and Philip found Nathanael, and from then onwards the number of disciples just grew and grew and grew, the early church multiplied by leaps and bounds, John 1:40-45.

When you think about the Lord's church, it's very much in the soul-winning business. We're reps for Jesus Christ, and the only way the church can do its business is for every single member to be a soul winner for Christ, too.

'Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world." Matthew 13:34-35

Those who have searching hearts will hear the message of the parables, Matthew 13:34. Because of their desire for and love of truth, they will not reject the message that is being communicated through the parables, Acts 17:11 / 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

The truth that is given through the means of metaphorical language is understood only by those who have open minds and hearts. Those who have closed minds and hearts with hidden agendas will twist the message of God that has been given in metaphorical language, 2 Peter 3:15-16.
Understanding the kingdom of God as it is explained in the parables, therefore, becomes a test to determine if one has an open mind. If one comes to the parables with an established theology, they will not be able to objectively discover the message of the parables.

It was for this reason that the scribes and Pharisees failed to understand the kingdom of God that was revealed through the parables. Jesus quotes Asaph's words from Psalm 78:2 in Matthew 13:35, which showed that even in the choice of that teaching method, Christ was following exactly the guidelines laid down in prophecy.
The 'things hidden', Matthew 13:35, imply that Jesus' teaching was going to be direct. The kingdom things in this context concern His direct teaching concerning the kingdom of heaven.

'Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." Matthew 13:36

After leaving the crowd, Jesus enters a house, and His disciples ask Him to explain the parable of the weeds to them, Matthew 13:36.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The desire of the disciples for an explanation of that parable is understandable. Even with the Lord's explanation, men do not fully understand it, as evidenced by the most diverse opinions regarding it. It must have appeared dark indeed before the Lord illuminated it.'

JESUS EXPLAINS THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

'He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.' Matthew 13:37-43

In answer to the disciples' request, Jesus identifies each element in the parable. The Sower is Christ Himself, Matthew 13:37, who is proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, Matthew 4:23. The field represents the world, Matthew 13:38. This field is where the Son of Man came to sow the seed, Matthew 28:18.
The good seed, that is, the wheat, are the people of the kingdom, Matthew 13:38. These are those who gladly own Jesus as their Lord and King, submitting to Him freely.
The weeds are the people of the evil one, Matthew 13:38. These weeds are those who offend and practice lawlessness. They are within the Lord's dominion, His realm, but they clearly are not submitting to His authority. Their actions reveal that they are really 'people of the evil one'.
The enemy who sowed them is the devil, Matthew 13:39. This is the one who tried to tempt Christ in the wilderness and failed, Matthew 4:1-11. Now he tries to destroy the efforts of Christ to save souls and enlarge the influence of His kingly rule through his clever yet dastardly deeds.
The harvest is the end of the age, Matthew 13:39. This 'age' is when the Gospel of the kingdom is being preached; it's also when people who receive the Gospel can become the 'people of the kingdom'.

In other words, it is this present age, the Christian age, Colossians 1:13 / Revelation 1:9. This is an 'age' that will end with a great 'harvest'. It is identified elsewhere as the glorious coming and appearance of our Lord, Matthew. 26:31-32 / 1 Timothy 6:14-15.

The reapers are the angels, Matthew 13:39. These are the angels that will accompany Christ when He comes again, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. They will separate the wicked from among the just, Matthew 13:49.

Jesus stresses the main points of the parable.

The problem of the 'weeds' will not be fully addressed until the 'harvest', Matthew 13:40. This is done out of consideration for the 'good seed', Matthew 13:29. It is at the end of the age that the Son of Man will finally resolve this problem, Matthew 13:41.

With His angels, He will 'weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil', i.e. the people of the evil one. Those so gathered out of His kingdom will be properly dealt with! Matthew 13:42.

They will be cast into 'the blazing fire', where there will be 'wailing and gnashing of teeth!' After the harvest, the righteous will 'shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father', Matthew 13:43.

THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.' Matthew 13:44

Unlike the world we live in today, where we have banks and building societies, the people of Jesus' day didn't have these facilities. The safest place to keep your valuables in Biblical times was buried in the ground, Matthew 13:44 / Joshua 7:21 / Matthew 25:25. Many people would bury their treasures under the ground, especially if they knew that war was on its way.

We all know that Palestine is steeped in history, especially when it comes to wars. And as usual, Jesus teaches a parable about something that was very relevant to those who were listening.

It was common practice for people to bury their treasure in the ground until the war was over, and then they would return to find it again when there was peace in the land. In this little parable, there are two main points that Jesus is stressing.

1. The joy of this man's discovery, Matthew 13:44.

This man was going about his daily business, doing his work, when he found the treasure. It wasn't so much by accident, ok, he stumbled across it, but he was working diligently in the field. And I say diligently because this treasure would have been buried deep in the ground.

He wouldn't just be scraping the surface of the ground in his day's work; he would have been digging deep into the ground. And it's while he's digging deep that he discovers the hidden treasure. And it's then that he hides it again and goes on his way.

The treasure is the Gospel, the Word of God itself, and it's called treasure because sometimes it takes a little effort to find it. We're not talking about a physical treasure here that this man found, we're talking about a spiritual treasure, Isaiah 33:6. We're talking about salvation, wisdom and knowledge, we're talking about fearing the Lord Himself.

2. What's the Gospel worth?

This man was willing to give up everything to make the treasure his own. And it wasn't even an effort for him to give up everything; he was happy doing it. This treasure gave him so much joy that he was even willing to sacrifice everything he had to attain it. He wanted salvation so much you couldn't put a price on it.

It's only our salvation that brings lasting joy, Isaiah 12:1-6 / Philippians 3:7-9 / Philippians 4:4. A disciplined life is never easy, Matthew 16:24, but the joy that you receive in return from doing God's will far outweigh the sacrifices you need to make, Matthew 6:21.

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.' Matthew 13:45-46

Historians tell us that in the ancient world, pearls had a very special place in men's hearts. People from all over the world desired to possess a lovely pearl, not only for its monetary value but also because of its beauty.

Unlike many people today, back then, people would take time and find pleasure simply by handling it and thinking about it. They found a certain joy in simply possessing and looking at a pearl.

And the historian writers tell us that the main sources of these pearls were found around the shores of the Red Sea and around the coast of Britain. But they said that these merchants who went looking for these pearls would travel all over the world to find one pearl which was more beautiful than all the others they had seen.

But why would Jesus say that the kingdom of heaven is like a pearl? Matthew 13:45. Just like the man who found the hidden treasure, they both found something that was beyond value. They both found the means to eternal life, and just like the other guy, he too sold everything he had just to get it, Matthew 13:46.
After all, what price can you put on your salvation? How much is your soul worth to God? It cost God the price of His precious One and only Son to make your salvation possible, Romans 5:6-8. That's how much your soul is worth to God. Your soul means everything to God, and your salvation should mean everything to you.
Jesus also tells us that the pearl is like the kingdom of heaven because 'it's the most beautiful thing you could ever possess'. A soul saved is the most precious and beautiful thing we will ever see and witness, Luke 15:8-10 / John 14:21.
It's not enough to know that something is valuable and beautiful. You need to know and then take hold of it and then live your life by it, Matthew 25:23 / James 2:26, and then you will discover how precious your salvation is to you.
We need to understand that there are other pearls we can find in life. There are many other things that people can find, such as a good job and a nice home. People can find pearls in knowledge and art, or even in serving other people.

It can be found in friendships and relationships. These are all lovely and beautiful pearls of life, but the supreme and most precious pearl lies in seeking to do God's will, Matthew 6:33.
Doing God's will doesn't belittle these other pearls, but living your life in accordance with the will of God is the most precious and valuable thing you can possess. The man who found the hidden treasure in a field stumbled upon God's will while he was working.

But these sea merchants would deliberately travel all over the world to find a special pearl. He found him deliberately; he spent his whole life looking and searching for this gem of a pearl. He searched everywhere until he found what he was looking for, and he did that because he knew exactly what he was looking for.

And no doubt he saw many pearls on his travels, and he would have stopped and admired some of them because of their beauty. But how did he know which pearl was the most precious pearl? I'm sure there are some pearls to be found within most religious groups, but how do you know that the pearl you possess is the right pearl?

A good start would be to be like the people that Paul talked to about Christ in Acts 17:21. We should never go to any church and just sit there and accept what the preacher or teacher is telling us is true, 2 Timothy 2:15. Go home with that same great eagerness and examine the Scriptures for yourself to see if what the preacher has told you was true or not.

THE PARABLE OF THE NET

'Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Matthew 13:47-50

Jesus here describes the kingdom of God as the method of fishing used at that time. The net that Jesus mentioned is similar to a 'seine', a large net. This net was placed in the water, and a large circle was made with it.

Whatever was in this circle was trapped in the net. When the circle was completed and the net was full, it was pulled to shore, and after the net was pulled to shore, the separation began. The good fish were gathered into vessels, and anything bad was discarded.

The net, which represents the preaching of the Gospel, is cast out into the lake, Matthew 13:47, which represents the world of the hearts of men. All sorts of fish are caught to represent those who respond to the Gospel.
There are multitudes of people, young and old, good and evil. The net gathers 'all kinds', that is, the Gospel is publicly proclaimed to all, and when this is done, the gospel net draws all kinds.

The meaning of this parable is straightforward. At the end of the world, there will be a separation, the wicked will be separated from the just, Matthew 13:48-49, and note that He doesn't say anything about what will happen to those who are just.
He speaks only about what will happen to the wicked, they will be thrown into 'the blazing fire', and in there, there will be 'weeping and gnashing of teeth', Matthew 13:50. This place is obviously a reference to hell, Matthew 3:11-12 / Matthew 8:12 / Matthew 25:41 / 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 / Revelation 20:15.

"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." Matthew 13:51-52

After sharing all of these parables, Jesus now asks if they have understood them, Matthew 13:51. He wants to know if their minds have been opened to what He has been teaching them.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'Divine truths must not be lightly passed over. Our Lord's question here shows them to be matters of the utmost weight and importance, and that they should be considered again and again, till they are thoroughly understood.'

The disciples tell Jesus they understand, Matthew 13:51. The person who is responsible for the keeping of the family can instruct by using old truths that need new applications, Matthew 13:52. The disciples understood the old truths, and Jesus was in their presence with new teachings and applications of old truths.
Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

'So there are these glorious things that we are constantly discovering in the richness of Christ and ever discovering new experiences in the old troops. And so the faithful householder who keeps bringing forth out of the treasury these glorious things.'

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'The old and the new old truths which God had long made known to the Jews, as well as the new truth declared by Christ.'

A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR

'When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home. And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith." Matthew 13:53-58

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there, Matthew 13:53. This rejection of Jesus in Nazareth took place at the close of Jesus' ministry.
The rejection of Jesus recorded in Mark 6:1-6 took place at the start of His ministry. The residents of Nazareth had two chances to hear Jesus, but they wouldn't listen on either occasion.
Jesus was now under the full power of the Holy Spirit to carry out His ministry, Luke 4:14-30. In His incarnation, He had given up equality with God, Philippians 2:5-11.
It was now the Spirit working through Him to accomplish the miraculous works of His ministry in order to fulfil the purpose of His coming into the world, Matthew 13:54.
The need for the Spirit to work through Him explains the extent of the incarnation. Jesus truly became a man in order to identify with those whom He sought to deliver from the confines of the flesh, Philippians 2:5-11.
As was the custom of the Jews, Jesus went to the synagogue to listen to the reading of the Old Testament law, Matthew 13:54. However, the Sabbath assembly in the synagogue wasn't a part of the Old Testament law. The synagogue came into existence in Palestine after the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity in 536 B.C.
Keep in mind also that not all Jews in a community met in the synagogue simply because the synagogues were not large structures. The synagogue was a Jewish cultural centre where the reading of the law could be heard. The Jews' custom was that the Old Testament law was read only while the reader stood.

Everyone knew who Jesus was. He had grown up in the town of Nazareth, Matthew 13:54. They had heard of the miraculous happenings that surrounded His conception and birth.
They knew of Him as a wise and obedient child of Mary and Joseph, Matthew 13:55. They also knew that He was one who had been very knowledgeable of the Old Testament Scriptures since childhood.
Jesus' brothers are named but not His sisters, Matthew 13:55-56 / Mark 6:3. Notice in Mark 6:3, they don't call Jesus the carpenter's son, but 'the carpenter'. This suggests that by the time of this event, Jesus' father, Joseph, has already died. In Greek, the word 'carpenter' is 'builder.'

He was the 'local boy' whom the village or town fathers couldn't accept to be the Messiah at this time in His ministry, Mark 6:4 / John 4:44. He could do no miracles because the people weren't driven by faith to go to Him, Mark 6:5-6.
No wonder Jesus says, 'a prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home,' Matthew 13:57 / Isaiah 53:3 / Mark 6:4 / Luke 4:16-29 / John 4:44. Rejection usually comes from those who are closest to us, or from those who should know better.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning 'a prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home'.

'Christ quoted this same proverb on his other visit to Nazareth, Luke 4:16-29. The human side of Christ's dual nature was foretold by Isaiah who noted that the Messiah would be 'despised and rejected of men', Isaiah 53:3. Nazareth provided the first in a series of rejections, but it should be remembered that this was precisely what was prophesied, the very unbelief of the people becoming, therefore, a further testimony of his divinity.'
Since they considered Him only a local personality, they didn't accept Him as one who had authority over the supernatural, Genesis 19:22 / Genesis 32:25. This event explains the faith that one needed to have in order to be healed. The faith was in the One through whom God worked to heal.
In this case, it was faith in Jesus to heal, Matthew 13:58 / Mark 6:6. Because those of Jesus' home country wouldn't accept Him, He didn't have the opportunity to heal many people, for few believed in Him, Matthew 13:58 / Mark 6:5. And so, once again, Jesus is being rejected.
The people in Nazareth forfeited an ideal opportunity to have the Lord with them, Matthew 13:58. With intense interest, therefore, they were here expecting something of Him at this time because the age of thirty was the accepted age at which one began any ministry among the Jews.
They possibly expected Him to make some formal announcement of His intentions concerning His life. He did, but what they heard wasn't what they expected. He claimed to be the specific fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies concerning the Messiah.

Those of one's own hometown are slow to accept the greatness of one who is from that town, Matthew 13:57 / John 4:44. Those of Nazareth were surely proud of Jesus as a teacher.
But it was difficult for them to accept Him as the Messiah who had been promised through the prophets. Those who are accustomed to the prophets of God are often those who reject what the prophets say.

In this case, Jesus was saying that those who were accustomed to Him in Nazareth would reject Him, though others throughout the world would receive Him.

These Jews of Jesus' hometown were greatly prejudiced against the Gentiles. When Jesus said that the Gentiles would receive the prophets of God before the Jews would, it greatly angered the Jews.

They couldn't accept the fact that others would be more righteous and privileged than they. Their religious prejudices at this time in Jesus' ministry were stirred to the point of attempted murder of Him, John 8:37 / John 10:31.
He could do no miracles because the people weren't driven by faith to go to Him, Matthew 13:58 / Mark 6:5. And so, once again, Jesus is being rejected. The people in Nazareth forfeited an ideal opportunity to have the Lord with them.
Jesus went around the villages teaching, Matthew 9:35-38 / Mark 6:6. This one statement explains the ministry of Jesus, and thus gives an example to teachers who would function in following the example of Jesus' ministry.
We must keep in mind that though these people didn't respond to Jesus at this time, when they later considered all that Jesus did in fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, they would believe. This event was early in His ministry. It occurred before they had all the facts concerning His fulfilment of prophecy, Acts 6:7.

Some people accept the Gospel and others reject it. We should share the Gospel with everyone who wants to listen, but what can we learn from Jesus about who is more likely to listen to the Gospel message? There are times, especially if someone is getting aggressive, that we just need to walk away.

What else can we learn from Jesus, in terms of who is more likely to listen to the Gospel message? Please read the following passages and see if you can notice the common denominator: Acts 9:20 / Acts 13:5 / Acts 13:13-14 / Acts 14:1 / Acts 17:1 / Acts 17:10 / Acts 17:16-17 / Acts 18:4 / Acts 18:19 / Acts 19:8.
Those who are already 'religious' will be more open to talking about their faith, and we can lead them to the truth if they only know partial truth, and we need to take advantage of those situations. Many people claim to be believers, but they haven't read the Bible or obeyed the Gospel.

GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

It is tragic to see people discarding the fantastic opportunity to be blessed by Jesus. In the country of the Gadarenes, they simply asked Jesus to leave, Mark 5:1-20. Here in Nazareth, they refused to believe and therefore didn't even bring their sick for Jesus to heal.
As a result, they missed out on the opportunities that others, like Jairus and the woman with the bleeding, benefited from. What about us? Do we take advantage of the opportunity to know Jesus and to be blessed by Him?

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION

'At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet. On Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.' Matthew 14:1-12

JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED

At this time in Jesus' ministry, people were trying to determine who He was, Matthew 14:1-12. Because of the miracles, they knew that He was more than a good teacher of Israel, John 3:2.

Perhaps because of the additional groups of preachers being sent out, Herod, the governor, heard about Jesus, Matthew 14:1. This was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, Mark 8:15 / Luke 3:1 / Luke 3:19 / Luke 8:3 / Luke 13:31 / Acts 4:27 / Acts 12:1.
They had at this time speculated that He might be the resurrected Elijah, or the Prophet who was to come in Israel as the Deliverer. They possibly believed that He would be like one of the other Old Testament prophets, Matthew 14:2 / Mark 6:14-16 / Luke 9:7-8 / Matthew 16:13-14.
The supernatural was at work, Matthew 14:2 / Mark 6:14, but it wasn't at work through a resurrected John. It was at work through the One about whom John prophesied and the One in whom all the world must believe, Matthew 3:1-11 / Luke 3:2-16.
Herod's conscience may have been bothering him because he had killed John, Matthew 14:3 / Mark 6:17 / Luke 9:9. He thought Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead, Matthew 14:1 / Mark 6:14 / Luke 3:19.
Herod at least concluded one thing that was right. If John had been raised from the dead, then the power of the supernatural was at work in the resurrected John.

Herod had killed John because John had been preaching against his marriage, telling him that it wasn't right for him to have Herodias, who had been his brother's wife, Matthew 14:3-4 / Mark 6:17-19.
Josephus, in his writings, says the following.

'The two fell in love and made plans to get married while Antipas was visiting with his brother Philip.'

Herod's father was by descent an Edomite, and his ancestors apparently had been forced to become Jews. Herod was raised as a Jew. According to Old Testament law, it was unlawful for Herod to be married to Herodias because Herodias was the wife of Antipas's own brother, Philip! Leviticus 18:14-16 / Leviticus 20:21 / Deuteronomy 25:5-10. As a result, he imprisoned John but didn't wish to kill him, Herodias did, Mark 6:17-22 / Luke 3:19. Herod feared that if he acted against John, then something dreadful would happen to him, Matthew 14:5.
To some extent, therefore, Herod accepted John as a just and holy man of God, Mark 6:20. It seems that his acceptance of John was greater than the self-righteous religious leaders of Jerusalem.
Nevertheless, Herod's pride to maintain face among his peers moved him to overcome his fear and carry out a rash promise he had made in response to the lustful dance of Herodias' daughter, Matthew 14:6-11 / Mark 6:21-28. John's physical death thus manifested Herod's spiritual death because he loved his position in this world more than the power of God.
One day, he had a birthday party with many important guests, and his stepdaughter provided 'live entertainment,' Matthew 14:6 / Mark 6:21. Because of her provocative dance, Herod rashly vowed to give her anything she asked, up to half of his kingdom, Matthew 14:6-7 / Mark 6:22-23.
Upon receiving instructions from her mother, the girl requested that John's head be served to her on a platter, Matthew 14:8 / Mark 6:24-25. Herod hated to do it, Mark 6:22, but he didn't want to lose face in front of his dinner guests, so he obliged the girl's request, and John was murdered, Matthew 14:9-11 / Mark 6:26-28.
The disciples went for John's body and buried him in a tomb, and then told Jesus about it, Matthew 14:12 / Mark 6:29-30. Jesus was obviously deeply moved as He went away by boat privately to a solitary place, Matthew 14:13.

SINS THAT BEHEADED JOHN THE BAPTIST

John was a righteous preacher who was murdered because of several sins.

1. An unlawful marriage.

2. Resentment and bitterness on the part of Herodias.

3. A lustful dance.

4. A rash promise.

5. Herod's lack of courage in not breaking the sinful vow.

Actions that produced such bitter fruit should be carefully avoided by Christians today.

1. Despite the frequency of divorce and remarriage in our society, Christians must not act against the Lord's instructions, Mark 10:2-10 / Matthew 19:9.
2. All disciples must rid their lives of resentment and bitterness because they build up and lead to hatred, harsh words and revengeful actions, Ephesians 4:26 / Ephesians 4:31-34 / Hebrews 12:15.
3. Lustful behaviour provokes every form of sexual sin in our society.

Followers of Christ should avoid activities that encourage sensual feelings, Job 31:1 / Matthew 5:28 / Romans 13:14.
4. No one should make any promise without careful thought, Leviticus 5:4 / Matthew 5:33-37 / James 5:12.
5. All should have the courage to do what is right regardless of the presence of others, Galatians 6:9 / Colossians 3:17 / 1 Peter 3:14.

'When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.' Matthew 14:13-14

We don't know the time that transpired between the sending of the twelve in Mark 6:12 / Luke 9:1 and their reporting back to Jesus, Mark 6:29 / Luke 9:10. It seems the disciples came to tell Jesus all that had happened to John, Matthew 14:1-12 / Mark 6:14-30.
When the disciples returned from their preaching trip, Jesus sought to leave the multitude in order to spend time with them privately. They had been so busy they hadn't even had time for meals, Mark 6:31. A large crowd had followed Jesus because of the signs He performed by healing the sick, Matthew 14:13-14 / Mark 6:33-34 / John 6:1-2.
Mark lists at least eleven instances when Jesus went to a place of rest. This is a good example for any evangelist who has given himself to periods of intensive evangelistic efforts. Because these worthy evangelists worked hard, they needed the rest.

They needed time to talk among themselves and with God about the great things God had done through them. This was a retreat for prayer, thanksgiving and discussion.

Everyone needs some time out from their busy life schedule, and Jesus knew that the disciples needed some time out, for many of them had first believed because of John's preaching. They withdrew across the sea of Galilee to a quiet place for meditation and prayer, Matthew 14:13 / Mark 6:31.
As the Passover was near, John 6:4, it must have been spring. This was one of the three major feasts that the Jews were obliged to attend.
It seems that Jesus is now at the height of His popularity. Soon, after this bread of life discourse, many of His followers were to turn back, John 6:66. The people saw that Jesus entered a boat to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, Matthew 14:13-21. When Jesus arrived at the other side, the multitudes had already arrived there on foot, Matthew 14:14.
Therefore, when He saw their zeal to follow Him, He was moved with compassion, Matthew 14:14 / Mark 6:34. They were a nation of people who hadn't been spiritually led for years, and thus, they sought someone to give them guidance. They flocked to the godliness of John.

Now they were coming to Jesus. They were looking for spiritual leadership. This was the leadership that the religious leaders of the day weren't giving. It was in the context of their searching for someone to lead them that Jesus worked this miracle of creation.

We see Jesus' love and understanding of people. He wasn't only a leader but a leader with compassion for the multitudes. On this occasion, His healing of the sick and the feeding of the multitudes was motivated by His compassion, Matthew 14:14 / Matthew 15:32 / Matthew 20:34 / Mark 6:34.

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

'As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.' Matthew 14:15-21

The feeding of the five thousand is the fourth sign recorded by John, and it is recorded in all four Gospels: Matthew 14:13-15 / Luke 9:10-17 / Mark 6:32-44 / John 6:1-15.

There are only two miracles of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels, the feeding of the five thousand and His resurrection, Matthew 28:1-10 / Luke 24:1-12 / Mark 16:1-15 / John 20:1-20.

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It seems that Jesus is now at the height of His popularity. Soon, after this bread of life discourse, many of His followers were to turn back, John 6:66. Now they were coming to Jesus, and they were looking for spiritual leadership.

They were like sheep without a shepherd, Mark 6:34. This was the leadership that the religious leaders of the day weren't giving. It was in the context of their searching for someone to lead them that Jesus worked this miracle of creation.

We see Jesus' love and understanding of people. He wasn't only a leader but a leader with compassion for the multitudes. On this occasion, His healing of the sick and the feeding the multitudes was motivated by His compassion, Matthew 15:32 / Matthew 20:34.

Therefore, when He saw their zeal to follow Him, He was moved with compassion, Matthew 14:14 / Mark 6:34. They were a nation of people who hadn't been spiritually led for years, and thus, they sought someone to give them guidance.

The disciples want to send the people away, Matthew 14:15 / Luke 9:12 / Mark 6:36, but Jesus had other plans. Notice how Jesus allowed the apostles time to search for food to feed the people, Matthew 14:16. The disciples suggested that someone go into the city and buy food, Mark 6:36.

Jesus asked Philip where they were going to get food in order to feed so many people, but the question was really a test of Philip's faith, John 6:5-6. Jesus tests Philip, John 6:5-6. This is particularly relevant if the apostles have been out performing miracles, healing, preaching, etc.

He already knew what was to happen, but it was appropriate for His plans to test, 'peirazo', Philip at this time to see if he understood that his Lord can supply every need and handle every situation.

Philip fails the test miserably as he looks only to himself and the common purse for a solution, Mark 6:37 / John 6:7. He ignores the role Jesus could play by employing His power and fails to understand, John 14:8.

Two-hundred denarii equal around four quarts of barley, sixteen-hundred quarts of wheat which was the purchasing power of the day, an awful lot of money, Mark 6:37 / John 6:7. One denarius was a working man's wage for the day and so this equalled eight months' wages.

In John 6:8-9, we see Andrew attempting to get something organised, and he finds a 'paidarion,' a little boy with some food and presents this to Jesus. He passes the test that Philip failed, and he gives Jesus the chance to perform a miracle.

He uses a little initiative and gets the job done. Jesus asked the question in order to stimulate a faith response from Philip and the others. Among the disciples, or among the multitude, they came up with only five loaves of bread and two fish, Matthew 14:17 / Luke 9:13 / Mark 6:38.

The loaves, Matthew 14:17 / Luke 9:13 / Mark 6:38 / John 6:9, would have been small, almost like rolls, 'artos', round flat cakes made with wheat flour, or black barley bread, it was the common daily bread of the people. The fish were probably dried or pickled, as was the norm at the time.

Mark reports that the people sat down on the green grass, and the number given is five thousand men, Mark 6:44, as does Luke 9:14, and John, John 6:10. Matthew 14:21 says 'five-thousand plus women and children'.

This could have been the total number present, or another five thousand women, and it's possible children could have been there. The total present was immaterial; if Jesus could feed five thousand, He could just as easily feed ten thousand, Psalm 23:1-2.

Luke's accounts tell us that Jesus split the people into groups of fifty, Luke 9:14. Mark tells us they were split into groups of one hundred and groups of fifty, Mark 6:40.

Jesus always gave thanks before eating. Some Bibles say, 'blessing', but this wasn't blessing the crowd, but thanks to God for the bread, Matthew 14:19 / Luke 9:16 / Mark 6:41 / John 6:11.

In other words, Jesus thanked the Father for the food. This is what He did for the bread and the wine when He instituted the Lord's Supper: He didn't bless the bread and the wine; He thanked God for providing it, Matthew 26:26-27 / Luke 22:19-20 / Mark 14:22-23. Jesus left a good example for the disciples in the years to come to do likewise concerning the blessing of food, 1 Timothy 4:4-5.

‘BLESSED THE BREAD!’

Imagine you’re sitting around the dinner table preparing to enjoy a sumptuous meal, and someone is asked to ‘bless the food’ before you eat. The person praying says something like this, ‘Heavenly Father, bless this food, to the nourishment of our bodies, may it strengthen us to do your work, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.’

I’m sure we’ve all heard this prayer at some point in our lives, maybe you’ve even prayed something similar before you ate your food. I was speaking with a brother just recently and asked him why he blessed ‘the food’ before eating. Jokingly, he said, the food might be poisoned, and we need God to make it safe to eat!

Now he may have been joking, but there’s some truth in what he said. Some Christians sadly believe, although they won’t openly say it, that they can’t or won’t eat any food unless God has somehow miraculously made it safe to eat first.

It’s as though there’s something wrong with the food in the first place, and so by blessing the food before eating, it somehow becomes ‘kosher’ enough to eat. I can understand this kind of thinking, especially when you’re about to eat some food from certain fast food outlets: ‘Dear God, this food doesn’t look or smell great, so please bless it and make it edible for me to eat!’

WHERE DOES OUR FOOD COME FROM?

When we ask the question, where does our food come from? You may be forgiven for saying the local supermarket or the local farmers. As Christians, we know this isn’t true; they are simply the suppliers of the food, but it’s God Himself who is the real provider of food, Genesis 1:29-30 / Genesis 9:3 / Psalm 104:14.
Since it’s God who is the ultimate provider, He’s the one who provides the sun and the rain for our food to grow, it’s Him we should be thanking for our food. James tells us that ‘every good and perfect gift is from above’, James 1:17, and this would include our food. And when we pray, ‘Give us our daily bread’, Matthew 6:11, we’re acknowledging that our food is an answer to our prayers for that food.
The problem with ‘blessing the food’ is that it doesn’t acknowledge where the real source of the food comes from. When we pray before eating, should we bless the food or give thanks to God for providing that food?

Paul taught that believers should receive their food with thanksgiving when he spoke of ‘Certain foods, which GOD CREATED to be received with THANKSGIVING by those who believe and who know the truth,’ 1 Timothy 4:3.

GIVING THANKS FOR THE FOOD

Before miraculously multiplying the loaves and fishes and providing a meal for the five thousand, Jesus asked the Father’s blessing upon the food. Notice, He didn’t bless the food, but blessed God or thanked God for providing it, Matthew 14:19 / Luke 9:16 / Mark 6:41 / John 6:11.
Before miraculously multiplying the loaves and fishes and providing a meal for the four thousand, Jesus asked the Father’s blessing upon the food. Notice again, He didn’t bless the food, but blessed God or thanked God for providing it, Matthew 15:36 / Mark 8:7.

Later in the Book of Acts, we read about the Apostle Paul, publicly and in the presence of many people, some of whom were probably not Christians, who thanked God for the food before eating. Notice again, Paul didn't bless the actual food; he thanked God for it, Acts 27:35.

BEFORE AND AFTER A MEAL

Let me share with you another interesting thought concerning giving thanks to God for our food. In the Old Testament, we see that God's people not only gave thanks BEFORE they ate the food God provided for them, but they also gave thanks to God for the food AFTER they had eaten it, Deuteronomy 8:7-10.
Remember, we're to thank God or bless God for the food, and that's because we acknowledge that the food itself is already a blessing. Now notice Deuteronomy 8:10, which tells us that God's people were to praise or bless God AFTER they had eaten. I think it's right that we give thanks to God BEFORE we eat, but maybe it wouldn't be a bad practice to give thanks to God AFTER we've eaten.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

So here we are gathered together on the Lord's Day as a church to remember the Lord's death, burial and resurrection at 'The Lord's Supper'. The presiding brother says a few words and shares a few thoughts to help us focus on Christ's death, burial and resurrection and then the prayers come.

The prayer for the bread usually goes something like this, 'Dear God, as we're about to partake of this bread, which represents your Son's body, please bless it to us as we partake of it.'

Then follows the prayer for the wine, which usually goes something like this: 'Dear God, as we're about to partake of this wine, which represents your Son's blood, please bless it to us as we partake of it.'

If you've been attending worship for a few years and participating in the Lord's Supper, the chances are you've probably heard these prayers or something similar many times in your Christian life.

Maybe you've prayed something similar yourself if you were presiding over the Supper. I'm sure you've noticed the link between asking God to 'bless the food' before eating the food and asking God to bless 'the bread and the wine' before partaking of it.

The Catholic church believes the Eucharist, the bread and the wine, actually becomes the body and blood of Christ; this is called 'Transubstantiation'. Now, I know most Christians don't believe in that teaching, but again, we ask the question, why would anyone want God to bless the bread and the wine?

Is there something wrong with the bread and the wine? Do they really believe that something miraculous is going to happen when they ask God to bless them both?

Notice what Jesus actually did when He instituted His Supper, and notice especially that He never once blessed the actual bread and wine, Matthew 26:26-27 / Luke 22:19-20 / Mark 14:22 / Luke 24:30 / 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. As I mentioned earlier, you will notice what Jesus actually did: He 'Gave Thanks' for the bread and wine, He never blessed the actual bread and wine.

WHO DID HE GIVE THANKS TO?

Obviously, it was the Father who provided the bread and the wine. He gave thanks to the Father, or blessed the Father; the word 'bless' is another way of expressing thanks to God.

The Jews, even to this day, still declare with the entrance of the Sabbath on Friday evenings as members sip wine from a cup, 'Blessed are you, O Lord, Our God, King of the Universe who creates the fruit of the vine.'

Another blessing as members break bread is, 'Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe who brings forth bread from the earth.' Notice again that in these 'blessings', God the Creator is being thanked for giving food, not the bread and wine. These would probably have been similar to the prayers that Jesus would have uttered during His 'Last Passover Supper.' Luke 22:17-18.

WHAT ABOUT MATTHEW 26:26?

When we read the King James Version, at first glance, it reads as Jesus 'blessed it' i.e. 'blessed the bread', however, when you read a Greek lexicon, you'll discover that the word 'IT' isn't in the original text. It reads as follows,

'(as) they were eating moreover of them, having taken Jesus bread and having blessed, broke and having given to the disciples, he said eat: this is the body of me.' Matthew 26:26

The word 'IT' is kind of misleading in the KJV and so we always have to remember that the Bible doesn't contradict itself, if any text appears to say the opposite of all the other related texts, it's usually because the translators haven't done a good job of translating it.

When Christians pray, I believe it's good practice to think about what we're actually saying in our prayers, especially when it comes to giving thanks to God for our food or giving thanks to God for providing the bread and the wine at the Supper.

Our children and any visitors often learn how to pray by listening to others, and all too often, they will simply repeat what they have heard time and time again until they are mature enough to share their own thoughts.

Here we are, getting ready to enjoy a sumptuous meal, and someone asks you to 'bless the food', why not simply say, 'The food is already a blessing from God, and so, if you don't mind, I'll give thanks to Him for providing it.'

Here we are gathered together on the Lord's Day to participate in the Lord's Supper. Someone asked you to bless the bread and the wine. Why not simply say, 'the bread and the wine are already a blessing from God, and so, if you don't mind, I'll give thanks to Him for providing them.'

WHY TWELVE BASKETS?

There are so many ideas out there about the significance of the twelve baskets, Matthew 14:20 / Luke 9:17 / Mark 6:43 / John 6:13. The number twelve is such a common recurring number throughout the Scriptures.

The number twelve is mentioned forty-eight times, and the word twelve is mentioned one-hundred and thirty-three times. Jacob had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel; Abraham's son Ishmael had twelve sons, and Jesus had twelve Apostles.

There's always a danger of reading a text and making it mean something which it wasn't meant to mean. I personally believe that the twelve baskets of food were left so that each one of those disciples who participated could take one. This miracle was unique.

Jesus asked them to take up the leftovers in order to impress on the minds of the disciples that this was a miracle of creation. They knew how much bread and fish they started with and how much was left over, and the only conclusion they could come to was that bread and fish had been created by God, who was in their midst.

Later in His ministry, when He wanted to confirm who He was in the minds of the disciples, Jesus asked them to recall this miracle and the second feeding of four thousand in Matthew 15:32-38, where Jesus discussed the 'bread of life,' which discussion resulted from this miracle, Matthew 16:8-19 / John 6:27-59.
In John 6:14-15, we see that this was a visible sign because all present saw it and benefited from it. There were two results: first, they wanted to make Jesus king by force and second, they deduced that Jesus must be the prophet that was foretold, the prophet mentioned is a reference to the one predicted in Deuteronomy 18:18 / John 1:21.
The people have obviously wanted a political Messiah, and now here is one who can feed them without any effort on their part. He could provide a physical utopia for them. The Jews wanted a political and military leader like David, who would re-establish David's throne and the physical kingdom of Israel.

Jesus wasn't the kind of king they wanted Him to be. This was the high time in His popularity, and from this time on, they began to leave in disappointment, as He wasn't what they expected, and also, they were disturbed by his teaching, John 6:60-66.
Jesus withdrew alone for a time of reflection, Matthew 14:25 / John 6:15. He wanted the people to receive Him after a sincere, well-thought-out decision, but He didn't want them to take Him in the emotional state they were now in. Christ is the king of individual hearts by faith and obedience, true and sincere, not by force, which is no example of kingship. Jesus is looking for unconditional surrender of the heart, Luke 9:23 / Proverbs 3:5-6 / Romans 12:1-2.
This multitude of seekers came looking for one who would lead them. They found the Chief Shepherd and the Son of God who would lead them to victory through the cross.

The proof of the miracle was magnified in the baskets of leftovers they took up. The power of the One who was in their midst was measured by the leftovers. He was truly the Son of God who had the power of creation, John 1:1-2.
Jesus set the stage for the miracle to prove His power over the physical laws of nature. He sent the disciples on by themselves by boat on the sea, knowing that a storm would develop that would engulf them, Matthew 14:22-23.

'Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.' Matthew 14:22-24

After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus urged the disciples to leave Him so that He might go into a mountain and pray, Matthew 14:22-23 / John 6:15 / Luke 9:28. Jesus always needed some time alone to pray to the Father, John 6:16.
The Sea of Galilee was infamous for its storms, as they were sudden and violent in this area, causing common disruption of the fishing. The wind is offset by the mountains of the region and funnelled through the Jordan River valley, causing strong winds on the Sea of Galilee. This is common even today.

The disciples were rowing against the wind in the late evening, Matthew 14:24. The disciples were now in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and about three miles from the shore, John 6:19. They didn't think that their lives were in danger; they were simply struggling against the wind.

JESUS WALKS ON THE WATER

'Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Matthew 14:25-33

Jesus withdrew alone for a time of reflection, Matthew 14:25 / John 6:15. He wanted the people to receive Him after a sincere, well-thought-out decision, but He didn't want them to take Him in the emotional state they were now in. Jesus set the stage for the miracle to prove His power over the physical laws of nature. He sent the disciples on by themselves by boat on the sea, knowing that a storm would develop that would engulf them, Matthew 14:22-23.

The account of Jesus walking on the water is recorded in Matthew 14:22-36 / Mark 6:45-56 / John 6:16-21. In the early morning from 3:00 am to 6:00 am, the fourth watch, Jesus, walked by them on the Sea of Galilee, Matthew 14:25.

The disciples left about 6 pm, but were still rowing when Jesus came to them in the fourth watch of the night, 3-4 am, and they had rowed only three or four miles, John 6:19.

The disciples were rowing against the wind in the late evening, Matthew 14:23-24. As I mentioned earlier, they didn't think that their lives were in danger; they were simply struggling against the wind. The sea became so rough that some of the disciples were becoming seasick!

Jesus was passing by them, Mark 6:48, not in the sense of leaving them in their predicament, but in order to present the situation that would truly manifest His deity. It's also possible that Jesus may have been exercising a sense of humour.

They were struggling against the wind, and He, with ease, was simply walking by on the water. They looked out at the sea and guess who they saw? They are frightened when they see Jesus; they think it is a ghost, Matthew 14:26 / Mark 6:49-50 / John 6:19.

They would think this again after His resurrection, Luke 24:37. They saw Jesus walking toward them on the water! This was a Divine display of His power over the natural laws.

Now let's just pause and think about this for a moment. Jesus is walking on water, and I don't know about you, but this is nothing less than a miracle, isn't it?

You might be thinking, I don't really believe that Jesus actually did walk on the water, but if you believe Genesis 1:1, where the Bible says, 'God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them', then you shouldn't have any problem believing this miracle.

If God can create the whole world and everything out of nothing, then why can't the One who created the water in the first place be able to walk on what He created? Colossians 1:16-17.

Why can't the One who created the sun stop the sun from going down, as we read about in Joshua 10? Why can't the One who created life bring Lazarus back to life after he had been dead for four days, like we read about in John 11?

My point is, Jesus walked on water, so that means that Jesus is definitely afloat. Now seeing anyone walking on water would be enough to frighten me, and it frightened the disciples too, Matthew 14:26 / Mark 6:49-50 / John 6:19. And so knowing their fear, Jesus reassures them and says, 'Don't be afraid, it is I,' Matthew 14:27 / John 6:20.
When Jesus says, 'it is I', Matthew 14:27 / John 6:20, this could be translated, 'EGO EIMI,' 'I am', Exodus 3:14 / John 8:24 / John 8:28 / John 8:58. Their superstitious nature led them to think that they were seeing a ghost, but Jesus reassured them that it was He.
Note that only Matthew records Peter walking on the water, Matthew 14:29-32. It teaches us that the unexpected should be expected when we spend time with Jesus.
And so Jesus is walking on the water, and the storm is still raging, and according to Matthew, when Peter saw Jesus, he asked, 'Lord, if it is you', which could be translated, 'Since it is You,' Matthew 14:28.
Peter became excited, and he said to him, 'Lord, if that's really you, let me walk to you on the water', Matthew 14:28. Then Jesus answered Peter and said, 'Come', Matthew 14:29. Peter climbed over the side of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus, Matthew 14:29.
This is a big lesson we all need to learn from time to time. When was the last time we stepped out in faith as Peter did? It's easy to stay in the boat where everything is nice and safe. But when was the last time we got out of the boat and started to trust God as Peter did?

This is amazing, isn't it? Peter didn't create the water, so how did he manage to walk on the water? He had a little of what we all need as Christians; he had one of those things we can't see, he had faith. There would come a time, however, when the disciples would have the faith to move mountains, Matthew 17:14-20.
And Peter's faith was great until he began to look around. He felt the strong winds and saw the waves, and he became afraid and started to sink, Matthew 14:30. He had great faith until he took his eyes off Jesus, and it was then that he cried out to Jesus for help.
I want to raise an important point right here. Sometimes in life, we find ourselves drowning in all sorts of things. Adults drown in the waters of bereavement, sorrow and worries.

Adults drown in the waters of debt, family pressures and broken relationships. Children drown in the waters of peer-pressure, unloving parents, and having no good role models in their lives. Children drown in the waters of neglect, abuse and lack of support.

Now, all these things can drown anyone, and sometimes they do.
Although Peter started off with great faith, and even though his faith achieved a great thing like walking on water, he took his eye off the Creator of the water and began to drown.
The point is this, Jesus didn't just leave him to drown, He reached out and saved him, Matthew 14:31. There are times when life is great, and we feel like we are walking on water. But there are other times when life isn't so great, and we begin to drown in the waters of life.
But there is hope; you don't have to drown. Why? Simply because Jesus has His arm outstretched and He is trying to save you. But you need to take hold of His hand.

As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was walking on the water, but when he took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink, Matthew 14:30. We face many storms in our daily life, but if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we can weather the storm, Hebrews 12:2.
When Jesus says to Peter, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' Matthew 14:31. I don't think we're to believe that Jesus was rebuking Peter; He probably had a smile on His face.
The point is, we should do what Peter did; we need to reach out to God in times of need, Matthew 6:30 / Matthew 8:26 / Matthew 16:9. Notice also that Peter must have walked on the water a second time to get back into the boat, and it was then that the wind died down, Matthew 14:32.

The disciple's reaction indicates a growing faith, Matthew 14:33, and the result, they worshipped Him, saying 'Truly you are the Son of God', Matthew 14:33 / Mark 6:51-52.
They worshipped Him, Matthew 14:33, which tells us they recognised that Jesus was indeed God, John 1:1 / John 1:14. They proclaimed that Jesus truly is the Son of God, Matthew 16:16 / Matthew 26:63 / Mark 1:1 / Luke 4:41 / John 1:49 / John 6:69 / John 11:27 / Acts 8:37 / Romans 1:4.
Mark adds the statement in Mark 6:52 to associate these two miraculous wonders of Jesus. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water proved that Jesus was Deity, John 1:1-3. He had the power to create, Colossians 1:16-17. He also had the power to control that which He had created, Hebrews 1:3.
It was at this time in the ministry of Jesus that the disciples were beginning to realise who He was. At the time of the feeding of the five thousand, they were slow to understand who He was, Mark 3:5 / Mark 16:14.
They hadn't understood from the miracle that He was God. They were astounded, for like Philip, their hearts were hardened, for they didn't fully understand the implications of the signs of the loaves and fishes, Mark 6:52.
Therefore, the statement that their hearts were hardened, Mark 6:52, must be understood in the context of what Jesus wanted them to understand concerning who He really was.
They had accepted Him as a good teacher who could work miracles as Elijah or one of the prophets, but Jesus was more than a prophet; He was the Son of God who had the power of creation, Matthew 16:18-19. Jesus wanted them to realise that He was the Son of God.
He could feed the hungry, He who could heal the sick, He could calm and control the tempest, He can and will take care of you. Anyone who follows Jesus for physical gain has missed the point and will not gain the spiritual benefits of salvation.

Many arguments have been built up around this miracle. Today, some people think that Jesus walked on a sandbank, while others say that the Greek indicates that He was still on the shore.

However, as the boat was three miles into the sea and Jesus got into the boat, it seems that the Biblical version holds more water! The boat then enjoyed some miraculous transportation to the shore. This miracle built up the faith of the disciples, also proving Jesus' power over natural laws.

'When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognised Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.' Matthew 14:34-36

After walking on water, Jesus and His disciples now end up in a place called Gennesaret, which was on the west side of the Sea of Galilee and south of Capernaum, Matthew 14:34 / Mark 6:53. At this time in Jesus' ministry, many of the people were coming primarily for healing, Matthew 14:34-36 / Mark 6:54-56.
Though the works of healing provided a teaching opportunity, it seems that the masses were more concerned with their physical problems than their spiritual problems.

And so, it is in a world where men have allowed the physical and temporal to distract them from the spiritual that will extend far beyond the destruction of this physical environment.

Though the disciples had seen Jesus do many amazing things, every new incident seemed to surprise them. When they landed on the shore, many recognised Jesus and began to bring sick people for Him to heal, Matthew 14:35.
In Mark 6:56, it is stated that they first begged Jesus that He might heal them. However, it seems that the number of those who were seeking healing was so great that Jesus simply allowed them to touch Him in order to be healed, Matthew 14:36.
Those who touched His cloak were completely healed, Matthew 14:36 / Mark 5:24-34 / Luke 6:19. On this occasion, Jesus at least manifested a small glimpse of what heaven will be.

It would certainly have been an amazing experience just to have been there. It would have been exciting to see the reaction of the multitudes to the presence of the Son of God among so many who sought healing.

The redeemed will be in the presence of God, and thus, there can be no sickness there. They will be in an environment of continual well-being, Revelation 21:4. The redeemed will be in an environment where the power of the supernatural will not allow sickness and pain to exist.
It's difficult for us to understand such an environment in this world of pain and suffering. However, since God is above this physical world, we must conclude that He will provide an environment of perfect well-being above and beyond this present world. This is the hope of the Christian. It's in this environment that we continually long to dwell.

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

"Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Matthew 15:1-2

Before we get into the text, I think it would be useful to define what we mean when we speak about 'tradition' and 'God's Word'. Simply put, a command is a law of God and is sometimes described as the Word of God, Matthew 15:6 / Mark 7:13 / Luke 23:56 / 1 John 3:4.
A tradition doesn't come from God but is something which has been passed down by men from generation to generation, Matthew 15:3 / Colossians 2:8. We must also note that traditions can be used in a positive sense, 1 Corinthians 11:2 / 2 Thessalonians 2:15 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6. The problem comes when traditions become as important or more important than God's Word, Matthew 23:4.
Jesus continually referred to the oral law as the 'tradition of the elders' or the 'tradition of men', Matthew 15:1-9 / Mark 7:1-23. Some examples in the New Testament alluding to the scrupulous concern of the Pharisees with the fine detail of their legalism are.
The tithing of herbs, Matthew 23:23-24 / Luke 11:42. The wearing of conspicuous phylacteries and tassels, Matthew 23:5. The careful observance of ritual purity, Mark 7:10-23. Frequent fasting, Matthew 9:14. Distinctions in oaths, Matthew 23:16-21.

TRADITIONS

The big question is, how authoritative is the oral law? The Pharisees accepted the oral law along with the Torah, and it was believed to be equally inspired and authoritative, and all of the explanatory and supplementary material produced by and contained within was the oral tradition.

This material began to emerge during the Babylonian Captivity that was brought upon the Jewish people. The Captivity was explained as divine punishment for the neglect of the law, and many during this period earnestly turned to the law.

During the Captivity or Exile, detailed commentaries on the law appeared in the form of innumerable and highly specific restrictions that were designed to 'build a hedge' around the written Torah and thus guard against any possible violation of the Torah by ignorance or accident.

During the time of Zerubbabel and Ezra, there was a clear call to separation from foreigners and anything unclean. Some verses that clearly indicate separation during this time period are Ezra 6:21 / Nehemiah 9:2.

THE PHARISEES

The word 'Pharisee', Matthew 15:1, is from a Greek word 'pharisaios' taken from the Hebrew, Aramaic 'Perisha', meaning 'Separated one.' In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were one of the three chief Jewish sects, the others were the Sadducees and the Essenes.
Of the three, the Pharisees were the most separated from the ways of the foreign influences that were invading Judaism, and from the ways of the common Jewish people in the land.

The sect of Pharisees is thought to have originated in the 3rd century B.C., in the days preceding the Maccabean wars, when under Greek domination and the Greek effort to Hellenize the Jews, there was a strong tendency among the Jews to accept Greek culture with its pagan religious customs.

The rise of the Pharisees was a reaction and protest against this tendency among their fellow kinsmen. Their aim was to preserve their national integrity and strict conformity to Mosaic law. They later developed into self-righteous and hypocritical formalists. Later, they were among those who had condemned Jesus to death.

TEACHERS OF THE LAW

For the Jews, the Law was made up of the Ten Commandments and the Pentateuch. Now it's true that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, contains a certain number of detailed regulations and instructions.

But in the matter of moral questions, what is laid down is a series of great moral principles, which a man must interpret and apply for himself, and for a while, the Jews were content with that.

But around the 4th or 5th centuries before Christ came along, there was a group of people who got together who were classed as legal experts, now we know them as the Scribes, Matthew 15:1. These guys weren't content with great moral principles. These guys had what can only be described as a passion for definition and detail.
In other words, they wanted these great moral principles amplified, expanded, and broken down. But they did it to the extent that they issued thousands upon thousands of little rules and regulations, which oversaw every possible action and every possible situation in life.

In Matthew 15, Jesus said something that truly offended the Jewish leaders, Matthew 15:12. So, why were they offended? What did Jesus say that really upset the Pharisees?
Well, the argument between Jesus and the Pharisees and the experts in the Law, which this chapter deals with, is of tremendous importance. Because of what it does, it shows the Jewish religion at its core, and Jesus is exposing the very heart of the Jewish religion in this chapter.

So, what was this tradition, and what was the spirit behind it? The Scribes and the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of eating with 'unclean hands', Matthew 15:2 / Mark 7:5.
In other words, they had ceremonially unclean hands, hands that weren't fit for the service and worship of God. This was the heart of their religious thinking; this was an offence and a breach of God's Law in the Jewish mind.

They had a handwashing tradition, and we know that the priests had to wash their hands and feet prior to entering the Tabernacle, Exodus 30:19 / Exodus 40:12, and it appears it was from this command that the widespread practice of ritual washings was practised, Mark 7:3-4.
They added to this the washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles, which they suspected had been made use of by anyone unclean. It was regarding these earthenware items, Mark 7:4, that the oral law said, 'a hollow container made of pottery could contract uncleanness inside but not on the outside'.
In other words, it doesn't matter who or what touched the outside, but it does become a problem when the inside is involved. 'If it became unclean, it must be broken, and no unbroken piece must remain in your house, which was big enough to hold enough oil to anoint the little toe.'

It was these ceremonial washings which were commanded by tradition, not by Scripture. The religious leaders knew this, but still, they criticised the disciples for not obeying these traditions.

HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS

Before every meal, and between every course of the meal, the hands had to be washed. To begin with, your hands had to be free from any sand or dirt, gravel, or any kind of substance.

The water for washing had to be kept in a special, large stone jar so that the water itself was clean in the ceremonial sense and to make sure that it wasn't used for anything else and that nothing else had fallen into it or had been mixed in it.

So, to start with, your hands were held with your fingertips pointing upwards, and then the water was poured over them. But the water must run at least down to your wrist. Now, while your hands were still wet, each hand had to be cleaned with the fist of the other.

Now this meant that at this stage your hands were wet with water, but that water was now itself unclean because it touched unclean hands. Next, your hands had to be held with your fingertips pointing downwards, and the water had to be poured over them in such a way that it began at the wrists and ran off the fingertips.

And after all that had been done, your hands were now classed as being clean. And remember, you had to do that between every course of every meal. Now, if you failed to do this, in Jewish eyes, you wouldn't be guilty of bad manners. You wouldn't be guilty of being dirty in the hygiene sense, but you were seen as unclean in the sight of God.

If you were to eat bread with unclean hands, pardon the expression, that was no better than excrement. If the Romans put a Jewish rabbi in jail, he would use the water given to him for handwashing purposes rather than for drinking, and there have been reports of some of these Jews almost dying of thirst. Mark tells the extent of how zealous they were with their traditions, Mark 7:1-5.
To the Pharisees and the Sadducees, that was their religion. It was ritual, ceremonial, rules, and regulations like that which they considered the essence of their service to God. Jesus says that their religion consisted of a mass of taboos, rules and regulations, Matthew 23:23.

HONOURING YOUR PARENTS' TRADITION

"And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honour your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honour his father' with it. Thus, you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.' Matthew 15:3-6

It appears that the Jews found a way to get around the law of honouring your father and mother, Matthew 15:3 / Mark 7:9-13 / Exodus 20:12 / Deuteronomy 5:16, with a tradition.
Their tradition commanded that if they declared that all their possessions or savings were a gift to God, which was especially dedicated to Him, they could then say that their resources were unavailable to help their parents, Mark 7:11.
Honouring your father and mother didn't just apply to children who still lived with their parents; it carried on as long as their parents were alive, Matthew 15:45. Even when a child grows and gets married and has children of their own, they still have the responsibility of taking care of their parents' needs in their old age.
He cited the case of 'Corban,' Matthew 15:5 / Mark 7:11. This was a Jewish tradition that prohibited a person from using his resources to provide for his ageing parents if he had previously declared those resources 'dedicated' to God. This was the way they got around honouring their parents, and so, Jesus tells them that they have 'nullified the word of God' because of their tradition, Matthew 15:6.
The Pharisees had developed elaborate cleansing procedures that they believed were a part of God's will. The truth is, God had never commanded these washings; they originated with the doctrines and traditions of men.

Jesus answered His critics by pointing out the difference between God-given commandments and human traditions. He showed that their insistence on following rules established by men caused them to actually break God's law, Matthew 5:6. Their obedience to men's doctrines led them to disregard God's will.

'You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' Matthew 15:7-9

Notice that Jesus calls them 'hypocrites', Matthew 15:7-9 / Mark 7:6-7, before quoting Isaiah's words, Isaiah 29:13.
Several different things might pop to mind when we hear the word 'hypocrite.'
Maybe it's a politician caught in a scandal, maybe it's a religious leader doing something counter to their creed, maybe it's a scheming and conniving character featured in soap operas. But the one thing that doesn't come to mind is likely the theatre.

The word 'hypocrite' ultimately came into English from the Greek word 'hypokrites', which means 'an actor' or 'a stage player.' The Greek word itself is a compound noun; it's made up of two Greek words that literally translate as 'an interpreter from underneath.'

That bizarre compound makes more sense when you know that the actors in ancient Greek theatre wore large masks to mark which character they were playing, and so they interpreted the story from underneath their masks.

The Greek word took on an extended meaning to refer to any person who was wearing a figurative mask and pretending to be someone or something they were not.

This sense was taken into medieval French and then into English, where it showed up with its earlier spelling, 'ypocrite', in 13th-centuryth century religious texts to refer to someone who pretends to be morally good or pious in order to deceive others. Hypocrite gained its initial 'h' by the 16th century.

It took a surprisingly long time for the word hypocrite to gain its more general meaning that we use today: ‘a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.’ Our first citations for this use are from the early 1700s, nearly five hundred years after the hypocrite first stepped onto the English stage.

MEN’S DOCTRINES VS. GOD’S COMMANDS

Men continue to follow their own traditions and doctrines rather than God’s Word. Just like the scribes and Pharisees, people today believe that their doctrines actually are God’s will.

They haven’t learned how to distinguish between unnecessary rules and binding commands. Jesus showed how easy it is to tell the difference; look at their source!

Any religious practise or teaching that comes from man is wrong; those which come from God are right. We should examine everything we do to see whether it comes from God or man. Everything from God is in the Bible. So, if what I believe isn’t taught by Scripture, I can know it must be from man.

JESUS’ RESPONSE TO THEIR TRADITION

“Listen and understand. What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’” Matthew 15:10-11

Jesus here, addressing the crowd and shares a very important lesson which is that eating with ‘unclean hands’ or any other such thing that we put into us isn’t defiling, rather, what comes out, is what defiles and reveals if we have unclean hearts, Matthew 15:10-11 / Mark 7:14-15.
Jesus spoke about ceremonial cleanliness regarding food, and He anticipated that under the New Covenant, all food would be declared clean, Acts 10:15. A thing might in the ordinary sense be completely clean and yet in the legal sense be unclean. This idea comes from Leviticus 11-15 and Numbers 19. For example, certain animals were classed as unclean.
A woman, after giving birth to a child, was classed as unclean. A dead body was classed as unclean. And so, anybody who had become unclean and touched something else made whatever they touched unclean.

A Gentile was unclean, the food touched by a Gentile was unclean, and any container touched by a Gentile was unclean. In fact, if a strict Jew came back from the marketplace, he would go home and immerse his whole body in clean water to take away the contamination that he might have caught when he was out.

To the Scribes and the Pharisees, these rules and regulations were the essence of their religion. To observe them was to please God, and to break them was to sin; this was their idea of goodness and service to God.

‘Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?” He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” Matthew 15:12-14

Why were the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law so offended? Matthew 15:12. They were offended because the very ground of their religion was being cut from underneath them.
They identified religion and pleasing God with the observing of rules and regulations, which had to do with cleanness. With what a man ate, with how he washed his hands before he ate it.

After being informed by his disciples that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were offended by Jesus' words, Jesus says that the Father didn't plant either the scribes or Pharisees with their religion, and both will be rooted out of His people when the truth of the Gospel is preached, Matthew 15:13 / Galatians 4:30 / Galatians 5:12.
Jesus says that the Pharisees were nothing but blind guides who had no idea of the ways of God, Matthew 23:16 / Matthew 23:24 / Isaiah 9:16 / Malachi 2:8 / Luke 6:39 / John 9:40. And that if people followed them, then all they could expect was to stray off the road and fall into a ditch, 2 Peter 1:9.
Jesus identified religion with the state of a person's heart and said quite bluntly that these Pharisees and Scribal regulations had nothing to do with religion. That's why He goes on to explain the parable to Peter and the others.

THAT WHICH DEFILES

"Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'" Matthew 15:15-20

The disciples didn't understand, Matthew 15:15 / Mark 7:17-22, and so, Jesus expands on the point he made back in Matthew 15:11. We are defiled from the inside out rather than from the outside in, and this is particularly true of ceremonial things like foods, Matthew 15:16-20 / 1 Corinthians 6:13 / Matthew 7:20 / Matthew 13:34.
The heart is the source of man's true character, James 1:14-15, and therefore of his purity or impurity; it isn't merely the seat of emotion, but the true person as he really is, not just as he appears outwardly.

WE NEED A HEART CHECK-UP

Jesus' words should motivate us to carefully examine our own hearts. Heart disease is a warning symptom, and if not detected and cured, it will result in all manner of sin. Jesus warned about greed, envy, pride, and lust, Matthew 15:19-20. These attitudes are wrong and must be checked at their onset. We must care for our hearts by feeding on the pure Word of God and constantly seeking the Lord.

THE FAITH OF A CANAANITE WOMAN

'Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes, it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.' Matthew 15:21-28

There are only two, possibly three people who were ever commended for their faith by Jesus, which incidentally were two, possibly three Gentiles, one or two Roman Centurions, Matthew 8:5-13 / Luke 7:1-10, and a Syrophoenician woman, Mark 7:24-30.

In this chapter, probably a chapter more difficult to understand than anything else, we see Jesus 'escaping' from the vast crowds who literally pursued Him wherever He went in Galilee. This wasn't the only occasion when He sought to get away for a time of quietness and recuperation.

Tyre and Sidon, Sidon isn't mentioned in Mark's account, but it is mentioned in some manuscripts, were the two most important cities, north of Galilee, Matthew 15:21 / Mark 7:24, in what was earlier known as the 'Phoenician Empire', Mark 7:26. The Lord had entered territory, which was formerly Canaan and Gentile territory, today we know it as Syria.

WHY DID HE GO THERE?

Why did He go there, when, as He actually said, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel', Matthew 15:24, and, when He sent out His disciples, He expressly told them, 'Do not go to the Gentiles', Matthew 19:5? He certainly didn't want it to be known that He was there, and, just as certainly, He wouldn't be 'mobbed', as He was in Jewish territory.

The house into which He entered was a Gentile house, Mark 7:24, because no Jew would have lived in that region. Whatever his reason for visiting that region, he was recognised by one woman, with the result that 'He could not keep his presence secret', Mark 7:24.

Matthew 15:22 tells us she, 'came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Matthew 1:1 / Matthew 20:30-31 / Matthew 22:41-42. This is a confession that Jesus is the Son of Man, the Messiah of Israel and the fact that this woman in the area of Tyre and Sidon came making this confession is evidence that the knowledge of who Jesus was had spread even to Gentile regions.

Matthew tells us that when the woman came to Jesus, He didn't answer her, Matthew 15:23. Why didn't He answer her? Jesus didn't answer her in order to teach the disciples a lesson; it was their Jewish prejudice that made them unwilling to heal her.

Jesus' earthly mission was mainly to the Jews, for it was to them that God had prophesied the Messiah, Matthew 10:5-6. The lesson Jesus was trying to teach was that all must be reached regardless of their nationality, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15.

Jesus' refusal to answer the woman gave His disciples the opportunity to demonstrate their inward feelings. The woman's cries annoyed them because they were prejudiced against the Gentiles, Matthew 15:23.

It's clear that the persistence and clamour of this woman, who demanded His attention, brought Him to the attention of the people! In response to her worshipful petition, He quoted Isaiah 29:13 from the Septuagint version, Matthew 15:24. This was virtually the Authorised Version of the Old Testament widely used in Judea at that time.

Although she probably wasn't familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, and she's unlikely to have spoken Aramaic, she certainly understood the Greek that Jesus used. Jesus was bilingual. Remember that Galilee was the region known as the Decapolis, where the inhabitants had used Greek as a second language since the time of Alexander.

Matthew tells us without any argument that the woman simply poured out her worship of Jesus, Matthew 15:25 / Matthew 8:2. We can't help but believe that Jesus knew her heart, and so, He knew that she would behave in this manner toward Him. She thus presented herself in a manner that would break down the prejudice of the disciples. I can imagine the twelve were waiting for Jesus to get rid of this woman, but the truth was, He wasn't going to get rid of her; He was about to get rid of an ugly attitude in them.

Although at first glance, it seems that He treated the woman coldly, and used the word 'dogs', Matthew 15:26 / Mark 7:27, to refer to Gentiles in the usual Jewish manner, He softened the word by using the little form, speaking of 'the little dogs', or 'puppies'.
F. F. Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jesus may have had a twinkle in His eyes, as He used the word! Perhaps he was testing her, and, in any case, we mustn't suppose that by using that expression, he was approving the disgraceful attitude that the Jews displayed towards other races. She would be perfectly aware of what the Jews would think of her!'

Whatever may have been the reason for the Lord's use of the expression, the woman quickly took up the Scripture quotation in her reply. 'Yes! But even the little dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall from the table!' Matthew 15:27 / Mark 7:28.
We encounter an expression something similar to this in the story of the Rich man and Lazarus, in Luke's record of the sayings of Jesus. In Luke 16, it's used to describe the pieces of bread on which the diners wiped their hands and threw to the 'unclean' dogs that waited for them, Luke 16:21.
Remember that the Jews didn't keep dogs as house pets in those days! The word, which in this chapter has been translated as 'crumbs', probably would be better rendered 'scraps', because there was no Greek word that could be accurately translated as 'crumbs' in our sense of the word.

At first, Jesus refused. He said that it 'wasn't good to take bread from the children and feed it to the dogs', Matthew 15:26. What He meant was that according to God's plan, it wasn't time yet to heal and teach the Gentiles.
The Jews, 'the children,' were the ones God intended to be the recipients of the bread. The 'Healings and blessings in general,' would come to the Jews first. God planned that later on, through the Jewish people, the Gospel would be introduced to the Gentiles.

This woman showed great faith, Matthew 8:10 / Matthew 9:22, humility and quickness because she responded, 'Yes, but even the dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs', Matthew 15:27 / Mark 7:28.
One commentator suggests that the woman was saying the following.

'Yes, Lord, I am indeed a dog, but not a very big one, only a tiny one; and since the little dogs stay under the master's table and eat the crumbs the children drop, surely you must be able to help me. It is only a crumb that I ask.'

She implies that just a mere crumb of Jesus' miraculous power would be sufficient to heal her daughter. She also recognised that this didn't signal the beginning of a major Gentile campaign.

As a result, Jesus healed her demon-possessed daughter, Matthew 10:28 / Mark 7:29 / Matthew 4:24. The conversation had made it clear that she wouldn't misinterpret the healing as a sign that the time for the Gentiles had come.

HER FAITH

Matthew tells that Jesus gave in to her pleas by proclaiming to the disciples the great faith of the woman, Matthew 15:28 / Mark 7:29 / Matthew 8:10 / Matthew 9:22. Remember this woman presented herself to Jesus and clung to Him for hope, despite the attitude of the disciples.
I would imagine that the disciples were left a little embarrassed with themselves as they saw their own hardness of heart melt into compassion for this Gentile woman and her beloved daughter.

Didn't Peter remember the time when Jesus healed his mother-in-law? Luke 4:38-40. Can you imagine the anticipation this woman must have had as she was going home? Mark 7:30. Imagine the joy she must have had when she got home and saw that her daughter was healed? Hebrews 11:6.

'Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.' Matthew 15:29-31

In avoiding the region that was governed by Herod Antipas, Jesus returned to the area of Galilee, Matthew 15:29 / Mark 7:31.
Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

'This story begins by describing what is on the face of it an amazing journey. Jesus was going from Tyre to the territory around the Sea of Galilee. He was going from Tyre in the north to Galilee in the south, and he started by going to Sidon. That is to say, he started going due south by going due north! As one scholar has put it, it would be like going from London to Cornwall via Manchester, or like going from Glasgow to Edinburgh via Perth.'

Jesus now moves along the Sea of Galilee and up to a mountainside, Matthew 15:29. Once again, great crowds come to Him to bring people who were suffering all kinds of ailments, Matthew 15:30 / Mark 7:32. Obviously, news that Jesus can heal these people has spread, Isaiah 35:5-6.
Jesus heals the lame, that is, those who have deformed limbs; He heals the mute, that is, those who can't speak. He heals the blind, that is, those who can't see, and He heals the crippled, that is, those who have suffered some injury to their bodies, Matthew 15:30-31.
It's not surprising that the people were amazed, Mark 7:37, when they say all of these people were healed, Matthew 15:31, and it's not surprising that they went on to praise God, the God of Israel, Matthew 15:31 / Luke 5:25-26.

THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN

Mark points to one man in particular who was deaf and dumb, Mark 7:31-37. Notice that this man was also from the region of the Decapolis, Mark 7:31, which is Gentile territory. It's certainly possible the man was deaf from birth, hence why he could hardly speak, Mark 7:32.
We can only imagine how difficult life must have been for this man who was deaf and could hardly speak. There were no remedies or medicine available back in Jesus day, and there were certainly no support groups.

I'm sure, just like sadly happens today, people would have made fun of him because of his disabilities. People would probably treat him like some kind of outcast.

Even more concerning, the Jews may have thought that he was deaf and dumb because God was judging him for some sin that he or his parents committed, John 9:1-2.
The word 'hardly talk', Mark 7:32, in Greek is 'mogilalos', which could mean a speech impediment or someone who is dumb. The word 'speak plainly', Mark 7:35, in Greek is the word 'orthos' which means in an upright manner. Although a few commentators suggest that the correct translation is the word 'dumb', this isn't clear from the text. If we compare the words 'hardly speak' with 'speak plainly', I believe this implies a speech impediment, the same disability is described for Moses, Exodus 4:10.

It's clear that those who brought the man to Jesus had great faith in Jesus being able to help him, Mark 7:32 / Psalm 37:23. Jesus' compassion for man is seen in Him taking the man away from the crowd, Mark 7:33, probably to ensure the man wasn't embarrassed, Isaiah 53:3.

You undoubtedly noticed that Jesus used an unusual procedure to heal this man. Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears and touched the man's tongue with His own saliva, Mark 7:33.

Apparently, Jesus was using 'sign language' to communicate with him and to let him know who was about to heal him. Had Jesus not done this, the man would have suddenly begun to hear, but wouldn't have understood why.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'Why this was done, it has been found exceedingly difficult to explain. Jesus had power at once to open his ears and loose his tongue, but for some cause, he chose to accompany it with a sign. This was intended, probably, simply to denote that the power of healing came from him; to satisfy the man by the touch that he had this power, and that it could come from no other quarter. Our Saviour often used signs in this way to denote his power to heal. See Mark 8:23 / John 9:6.'

After taking him away from the crowd, Jesus looked up to heaven to show that it was from God that help was to come, Mark 7:34. The 'deep sigh', Mark 7:34, may mean a silent prayer, Romans 8:26. Then He spoke the word and the man was healed, Mark 7:34-35 / Exodus 4:11.

This man couldn't speak clearly because he was deaf. In private, Jesus signalled to the man by touching his ears and tongue because the man couldn't hear. The word, 'Ephphatha', Mark 7:34, was an Aramaic expression that means 'to be opened.' Aramaic was possibly the language Jesus and the disciples spoke as their common language.

Notice that there was no prolonged healing indicated here. A true miracle is defined by the instantaneous result of its effect. A miracle was defined as being openly perceived by others who couldn't deny it. This was the case with this miracle, Acts 4:14-16 / Acts 7:36-37.

Jesus commands them not to tell anyone, Mark 7:36, because He simply wanted to discourage people from coming to Him only for healing, Mark 5:43. Miracles were for the primary purpose of confirming God's messengers and message, Mark 16:17-20 / John 20:30-31.

This miracle once again proves the Messiahship of Jesus, Isaiah 35:5-6. As a result of this healing, they were utterly astonished, and the extent of their astonishment measured the undeniable evidence of the miracle, Mark 7:37.

A true miracle is so definite and obvious that it affects one intellectually and emotionally. It was an occurrence that changed the lives of sincere people. The multitude's affirmation was absolutely correct, 'He has done everything well!' Mark 7:37 / Genesis 1:31.

THE CHANGE IN THIS MAN'S LIFE

We can only imagine how this man's life changed, and I'm sure he wasn't only thankful to Jesus for healing him but also thankful to those who had the faith to take him to Jesus in the first place, Mark 7:32. We can only imagine what his first words were when he spoke plainly.

Imagine him listening to music for the first time. No longer would he be made fun of; no longer would he be treated like some kind of outcast. Imagine the excitement as he returns home, possibly to meet his friends and family.

I'm sure he would just speak and speak and speak as well as listen clearly to others speaking to him. This man would have never met Jesus if no one had taken the time to take him to Jesus. Friends will go to any lengths to bring others to Jesus, Mark 2:4 / John 1:40-42 / John 1:46. When was the last time you brought someone to Jesus?

JESUS FEEDS THE FOUR THOUSAND

'Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way." His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish." Matthew 15:32-34

The miracle of feeding the four thousand we read about here, Matthew 15:32-38, does have a few similarities with the feeding of the five thousand, Matthew 14:13-21 / Mark 6:30-44 / Luke 9:10-17 / John 6:1-15. They are similar in terms of Jesus multiplying loaves and fish, a multitude is fed, the disciples are sceptical, and they collect leftovers. However, there are some differences: the crowds are of different sizes, the disciples speak first in the first miracle, but Jesus does in the second, they occur in discrete locations, they follow different events, the numbers of loaves and fish differ.

Huge crowds were constantly following Jesus, and notice that it was Jesus who saw the needs of the people, not the disciples, Matthew 15:32 / Mark 8:1. Notice here that Jesus didn't just take care of their physical ailments, Matthew 9:36, He also cares about their physical necessities.
It appears that everyone was so amazed about all those being healed, Mark 7:31-32, that they forgot to eat for three days, Matthew 15:32 / Mark 8:2. Jesus really showed compassion for the people and was obviously concerned about their physical welfare and didn't want to send them away, Matthew 15:32.
Jesus didn't want to send them home hungry for fear they would faint during the trip, Matthew 15:32 / Mark 8:3. On this occasion, they were in a remote place, a wilderness area, Matthew 15:29 / Mark 8:4.
The disciples then state the obvious, as far as they were concerned, they are in the middle of nowhere with no way of getting enough food to feed all these people, Matthew 15:33 / Mark 8:4.
The 'remote place' or 'wilderness' doesn't mean barren land, it simply means the place where wild animals roam.
The disciples recognised this, and so Jesus asked for a food inventory; there were seven loaves and a few small fish, Matthew 15:34 / Mark 8:5.
The reason Jesus asked them this question was simply to prepare their minds for what was about to happen miraculously. The One who created all things, Colossians 1:16 / Matthew 14:15-20 / Matthew 16:8-13, is certainly more than capable of feeding thousands of people.
The number of baskets differs, the baskets themselves are different, and finally, Jesus spends one day with the five thousand, but three days with the four thousand. Jesus Himself removes any doubt by referring to them as two different miracles.

'He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.' Matthew 15:35-39

Jesus directed the multitude to sit down, Matthew 15:35 / Mark 8:6, and then he took the bread and fish and gave thanks to God for them, Matthew 15:36 / Mark 8:7. He gave them to His disciples, who then served the people, Matthew 15:36 / Mark 8:7.
Miraculously, the supply didn't dwindle, the people were all fed and satisfied, Matthew 15:37 / Mark 8:8. Each loaf generated a large basketful of leftovers, Matthew 15:37 / Mark 8:8.
The word 'basket' here is a different word from the word used earlier in Mark 6:43, for the feeding of the five-thousand in Mark 6, it's the word 'kophinos' which means small basket.

But here the word for basket is 'spuris', which means a hamper, a larger basket. This is the same word used in Acts 9:25 to describe the basket in which Paul was lowered from the city.
Besides feeding four thousand men, not counting the women and children, Matthew 15:38 / Mark 8:9, the food just kept on coming out of nowhere. Jesus' power couldn't be disputed.
Can we imagine the amount of food this took to feed four thousand men, not counting the women and children? Only the Bread of Life could do such a thing, John 6:35. Once everyone had their fill of food, Jesus sent them away and went to the vicinity of Magadan Dalmanutha, Matthew 15:39 / Mark 8:10, by boat.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'As for the sceptic's contention that Mark and Matthew's accounts are contradictory, the explanation is simple.'

1. Christ might easily have gone to both places.

The only possibility of finding a contradiction would have to lie in the discovery that one of the gospels had said he did NOT go to one or the other of the two places, and, of course, no such statement exists.

2. It is far more likely that the village, so small as to have been lost to history, actually had two names, Dalmanutha and Magadan!

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION

'The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.' Matthew 16:1

THE DEMAND FOR A SIGN

Although the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed with one another in their beliefs, that is, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, or the afterlife, Matthew 22:23 / Acts 23:8, they came together to test Jesus, Matthew 16:1.
Despite much evidence of Jesus' power and authority, the Pharisees and the Sadducees challenged Him to show a sign from heaven, Matthew 16:1. Mark only mentions the Pharisees, Mark 8:11. Jesus refused their request.
They were simply blind to all evidence, and no sign would ever be enough to convince them. Notice Jesus 'sighed deeply', Mark 8:12, this means He was dismayed at the attitude of the Pharisees. They were simply blind to all the evidence, and no sign would ever be enough to convince them, Mark 8:12.

'He replied, "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. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.' Matthew 16:2-4

In Matthew 16:2-4, we see that Jesus tries to reason with both groups by speaking about the well-known fact that they had the ability to give a forecast of weather conditions based upon the appearance of the skies and clouds, Matthew

16:2-3. Both groups could easily look to the heavens and see the signs in the sky and make a determination as to what would happen with the weather.

Jesus challenged them to do the same thing in relation to the spiritual nature of the miracles He had performed and the preaching He had taught. If they can determine the outcome of the weather by the signs they see, then why can't they discern that Jesus is the Lord by the signs that He has performed? John 20:30-31.

The point is that these men know that obvious signs have been given; however, due to the hardness of their hearts, they close their eyes to them, Matthew 12:9-14 / Mark 3:5. They don't close their eyes to the signs in the heavens regarding the weather, yet they ignore the clear signs Jesus has performed.

As their minds were closed to who Jesus was, they had become a 'wicked and adulterous generation', Matthew 16:4. They had separated themselves from God and His will, Jeremiah 3:8-9, and they had committed spiritual adultery, Matthew 15:8-9 / Mark 7:6-9.

Jesus says the only sign which will be given is the sign of Jonah, Matthew 16:4 / Matthew 12:39-41. Just as Jonah came up from the depths of the sea after being in the fish for three days, so Jesus will rise from the depths of the dead in a resurrected state.

Those who refuse repentance and His kingdom after this have nothing to look forward to but the judgment of the inhabitants of Nineveh.

1. The four Gospels reveal that, repeatedly, the Lord Himself declared in unequivocal terms that He would be put to death and would rise from the dead 'on the third day'.

2. He first predicted His resurrection early as John 2:19, 'destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,' in a statement which John admits His disciples only later understood, but later He began to speak about it openly, after Peter had declared Him to be 'the Christ, the Son of the living God', in Matthew 16:16.

Similar statements are recorded in the Gospels; here are but a few: Matthew 17:23 / Matthew 20:19 / Mark 9:31 / Mark 10:34 / Luke 9:22 / Luke 13:32 / Luke 18:33 / Luke 24:7 / Luke 24:21 / Luke 24:46.

3. What Jesus said was evidently accepted without question by both His apostles and the members of the early church, all of whom subsequently believed that what He had predicted had actually come to pass.

Paul states this in 1 Corinthians 15:4, 'raised on the third day'. The New Testament contains nothing to suggest that the Lord made a prediction that failed.

4. Matthew 27:63-64 tells us that, after the burial of the body of Jesus, the leaders of the Jews came to Pilate with a request.

5. On the morning of the third day, the women came to the tomb, and Luke 24:5-8 records that the heavenly messengers who met them even quoted the Lord's own words, Luke 24:5-8.

Matthew 28:6 says that one of the angels told the women, 'He is not here, for He is risen, even as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.'

Jesus then left the Pharisees and the Sadducees and went away, Matthew 16:4, because there was simply no point in casting pearls before pigs, Matthew 7:6. There was no point in trying to teach those whose hearts had become so hard.

THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

'When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread." Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking

among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Matthew 16:5-12

Then Jesus and His disciples began to cross the sea by boat, Matthew 16:5 / Mark 8:13. The disciples were worried because they had forgotten to take enough bread with them for the trip, Mark 8:14.
Matthew tells us they didn't bring any bread because they forgot, Matthew 16:5, Mark tells us they had one loaf of bread with them, Mark 8:14. What appears like a contradiction is quickly cleared up with The Literal Translation, which reads as follows.

'And the disciples forgot to take loaves. And they did not have any with them, except one loaf in the boat.'

Immediately, the disciples imagined that He was criticising them for having forgotten the bread, Matthew 16:7 / Mark 8:16. Jesus, in this small section, asked eight questions to help them remember, Matthew 16:8-11 / Mark 8:17-21.
Jesus knew what they were saying to each other and rebuked their hard-heartedness, Matthew 16:8 / Mark 8:17. They forgot what Jesus did earlier, Matthew 16:9-10 / Mark 8:19-20.
He had twice produced enough food to feed thousands with abundant leftovers, Matthew 14:13-21 / Mark 6:30-44 / Luke 9:10-17 / John 6:1-15 / Matthew 15:32-39 / Mark 8:1-13.
Jesus warned them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Matthew 16:11, Mark adds Herod, Mark 8:15.
They should have known that He could handle problems with insufficient food.
His warning wasn't about the yeast of bread, but about the false teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and Herod, Matthew 15:1-9 / Mark 7:1-9 / Luke 12:1.
It is the nature of yeast to spread throughout the bread, and so, it would be with the teachings and influence of the Pharisees whose hearts were far from God, Matthew 15:1-9 / Mark 7:1-9.
Bad attitudes spread like yeast, and He was worried that the disciples might be contaminated by them. Yeast breaks things up; it doesn't unite anything, Acts 15:10.
Bell, in his commentary, says the following concerning the yeast of the Pharisees, Herod and the Sadducees.

'The Pharisees' teachings to watch for? Legalism. Today, we can fall into the same trap of legalism, that is, trying to live the Christian life by obeying a set of rules. Christianity isn't being inhibited by rules, but by being inhabited by a Ruler. The legalistic church is a sad church, no joy, no thrill, no excitement, no victory. Herod's teachings were all about worldliness. This is the church where there is no difference in the lifestyles of its members and those of the lost world. The Sadducees' teachings were all about liberalism. They didn't believe in the supernatural, in the power of God, in miracles. The spiritual liberals don't understand God's power. Today, Jesus still warns us, 'Beware of the leaven of legalism, the leaven of worldliness, and the leaven of liberalism.'

PETER DECLARES THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

'When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.' Matthew 16:13-20

CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Situated twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee and at the base of Mount Hermon, Caesarea Philippi is the location of one of the largest springs feeding the Jordan River, Matthew 16:13 / Mark 8:27. This abundant water supply has made the area very fertile and attractive for religious worship.
Numerous temples were built in this city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Known as Baal Hermon and Baal Gad in the Old Testament period, this site was later named Panias after the Greek god Pan, who was worshipped here.

There is no record of Jesus entering the city, but the great confession and the transfiguration both occurred in the vicinity of the city, Matthew 17:1-8 / Luke 9:28-36 / Mark 9:2-8, then known as Caesarea Philippi.
But it was no accident that Jesus took His disciples to a place called Caesarea Philippi. Jesus deliberately chose to take them to Caesarea Philippi because He knew he would get that much-needed quality time alone with His disciples.

But Jesus took them to Caesarea Philippi for another reason. When you went up the hills of Caesarea Philippi, there were not only beautiful views, but there were also the ancient Syrian temples, which were used to worship Baal.

Not only were the Syrian gods worshipped there, but there was also a cavern nearby that was said to have been the birthplace of the Greek god Pan, the god of nature.

But that's not all that Jesus and the disciples could see up on the hills. Another huge temple would have stood there in Jesus' day, built out of white marble by Herod the Great and dedicated to the worship of Augustus Caesar. In other words, Caesarea Philippi was like a one-stop shopping supermarket for religion. It was a cross-section of the religious claims of Jesus' day.

Jesus stood in this place, which was literally crowded with temples dedicated to the worship of Syrian, Greek, and Roman gods, and He asked His disciples who they believed Him to be.

I believe Jesus deliberately set Himself against the background of the world's religions in all their history and splendour and demanded to be compared with them and to have the verdict given in His favour.

In other words, with this setting as a backdrop, Jesus forced His disciples to wrestle with vital questions like, 'Who is the real God?' 'Who is worthy of adoration and worship?'

I can imagine Jesus saying, 'Listen, look around at the magnificence of all these temples, to all these 'gods' and then look at Me. Who is right? Who is the truth, me or the 'gods' of one of these temples?

Do you see the importance of this moment? Coming here helped force the disciples to deal with this issue, an issue they needed to deal with. All the things Jesus had said and done over the past two and a half years had been in preparation for this moment.

We could say that this question Jesus posed at Caesarea Philippi was, in effect, the disciples' final exam, an exam that consisted of only one question, 'Who do you say I am?' which we will get to in a moment.

Jesus asked what the public thought about Him, Matthew 16:13 / Luke 9:18 / Mark 8:27, but He's not asking this question because He doesn't know the answer.
Jesus knew the answer to this question; He knew what people were saying about Him. But he wanted the twelve to think carefully about those popular perceptions as a way of building a foundation for their own conclusions.

When Jesus asked this first question, He didn't ask it to find out how He stood in the public opinion polls. No, it was a probing question designed to determine the extent to which His students had discovered the true nature of His ministry and His message.

I believe there would have been a moment of pause when Jesus asked them, 'who do the people say I am?' Matthew 16:13 / Luke 9:18 / Mark 8:27. I can imagine the disciples thinking to themselves, 'Well, we all know what the people are thinking, and it's not all good.'
Remember, Jesus had been called a wine-drunkard, a glutton, a blasphemer, a false prophet and even a madman working for the devil. So, I can imagine them thinking very carefully before they answer this question.

The disciples didn't share any of these negative reviews with Jesus, and so they exercised some sensitivity and only told Him the compliments which people were paying Him.

The disciples reported varying opinions, including John the Baptist, Elijah, etc, Matthew 16:14 / Luke 9:19 / Mark 8:28. One disciple pointed out that many believed Jesus was John the Baptist reincarnated, Matthew 16:14 / Luke 9:19 / Mark 8:27-30.
They believed that John had come back from the grave to continue his ministry of announcing the Messiah, while criticising the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 14:1-3.
Another disciple shared the fact that many people believed Jesus was Elijah, Matthew 16:14 / Luke 9:19 / Mark 8:28, considered by some Jews to be the supreme Old Testament prophet, Matthew 17:10 / 2 Kings 1:1-12 / Mark 6:15.
The Book of Malachi, Malachi 4:5, says, 'See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.' And so, some thought this Jesus was Elijah, fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi.
And even today, in modern Jewish Passover celebrations, there is an empty chair reserved at the table for Elijah, in the hope of his one day coming to announce the Messiah's arrival.

Another disciple shared that some people said Jesus was Jeremiah, but why would they think He was Jeremiah? Matthew 16:14. They held this opinion because, according to the 2 Maccabees legend, Jeremiah had taken the Ark of the covenant and the altar of incense out of the temple and hidden them both somewhere on Mount Nebo in order to preserve them from desecration and destruction by the Babylonians.
Some Jews thought that before the Messiah returned to establish His kingdom, Jeremiah would return to earth and restore the Ark and the altar to their proper places in the temple.

So, the people who said these things were paying Jesus wonderful compliments by comparing Him to some of the greatest prophets and teachers God had ever sent. They were giving Jesus high praise, but not enough high praise because in their minds, none of these three prophets was the Messiah.

Nothing has changed today concerning who Jesus is. A lot of people still speak highly of Jesus, but they don't recognise His Deity and His Lordship. Most people in our day will admit that Jesus was a great teacher, but they won't concede that He was the Christ, the Son of God, the only Way to Heaven.

Some admit He was a prophet and an 'admirable Jew' but not as the Son of God. So, the opinion of the multitudes of Jesus' day isn't that different from the opinion of many people today.

In Jesus' day, the people thought that John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah were just a few of the Messiahs' forerunners who had come back to life with God-given miraculous powers. They thought that Jesus was great, but not great enough.

At first glance, it looks like the disciples hadn't realised who Jesus was. Maybe when they mentioned John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah, they thought that Jesus was going to say, 'yes' to one of those suggestions, and say, 'you're right.'

But Jesus must have answered without saying a word, and I can imagine there would have been an uncomfortable silence before Jesus spoke again. This isn't about the multitude's opinion anymore; this is a personal question.

These twelve men were more qualified than anyone else to answer the question. Unlike the multitudes, they had been with Jesus twenty-four seven for two and a half years.

They had heard Him teach, they had seen all His miracles, and they were the star witnesses of Jesus' life up until that point. Over the past two and a half years, at times He had shocked them, at times He thrilled them, at other times, He filled them with awe and wonder.

The time had come for them to confess their opinion as to what kind of man He was. It was time for them to take a personal stand. Jesus looked each of His students in the eye and asked this all-important final-exam question. And I think that when He did, while the other disciples were still processing the question like scared schoolboys, Peter spoke up and answered the question.

Peter boldly responded, 'You are the Messiah,' Matthew 16:15-16 / Luke 9:20 / Mark 8:29. Matthew adds the words, 'the Son of the living God', Matthew 16:16. It was a brilliant insight. And when He said this, I imagine a glow of pride would have shown on Jesus' face. I can imagine Jesus saying, 'Yes! correct! You got it right, Peter!'
Peter moved to the head of the class and got it right that day; he said the right thing, at the right time! He gave the correct answer because he confidently expressed two foundational Christian truths.

1. He identified Jesus as the Messiah, Matthew 16:15-16 / Luke 9:20 / Mark 8:29, the One Who was to reign forever on the throne of His great ancestor David.
2. And even more important, Peter identified Jesus as divine, the 'Son of the living God!' Matthew 16:16.
Literally, his words can be translated like this, 'You are THE Christ, THE Son of THE God, THE living One!' When Jesus calmed the stormy seas of Galilee in Matthew 8, the disciples proclaimed, What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!' Matthew 8:27. When Jesus walked upon the waters of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples proclaimed, 'Truly you are the Son of God', Matthew 14:33.
Now, Peter proclaims the deity of Christ. Jesus tells Simon, son of Jonah, John 1:42 / John 21:15-17, that he is blessed, Matthew 16:17. The word 'blessed' in Greek is the word 'makarios', which is used in the beatitudes at Matthew 5:3-10, and it means happy.
How did Peter know that Jesus was the Christ? God revealed it to Him, Matthew 16:17. Peter had witnessed all the Lord's miracles and heard His teaching and preaching, John 3:2 / John 5:36 / John 10:37-38 / John 14:11 / John 20:30-31.
When anyone proclaims deity and then backs that claim up with sure miracles, there is no denying it, Matthew 15:21-28. Peter and the apostles believed that he was the Christ due to divine revelation.
After stating that Jesus was the 'Christ, the Son of the living God', Matthew 14:33 / Matthew 17:17 / John 6:69 / John 11:27. Jesus now responds to Peter's confession by saying that 'upon this rock, I will build my church', Matthew 16:18.
Peter's name, 'Petros' is a Greek word that is masculine in gender, the word means a stone or rock, John 1:42. The gender of this Greek word, 'petra' is feminine, and so, doesn't refer to Peter whose name is masculine.
The rock here is the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. The rock or foundation that the church will be built upon will be the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, 1 Corinthians 3:11 / Ephesians 2:20.
Note that Jesus said, 'I will build my church', Matthew 16:18, indicating that it had not been built or established at the point of this conversation. This is the first mention of the word 'church', which is 'ekklesia' in the New Testament. The Greek word means an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned to call an assembly.

When the Lord's church was built, Jesus said that 'the gates of Hades will not overcome it,' Matthew 16:18 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14. The gates of ancient cities were the most vulnerable part of the city, and so, when a city was attacked by an enemy, the enemy attacked the gates.

If the gates fell, the city fell. The word 'gates' became a metaphor meaning power or strength. Hades is actually hell, Matthew 13:41-43 / Luke 16:22-23 / Matthew 25:41.

There is power in sin, and that is death, Genesis 2:17 / 1 Corinthians 15:55-56. This power, however, couldn't hold Jesus when He was resurrected from the dead, Revelation 1:18 / Revelation 6:8 / Revelation 20:13-15. When Jesus rose from the grave, he went on to establish His church so that all others may have power over sin and death through His blood sacrifice.

The Lord proclaims to Peter, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven', Matthew 16:19. The word 'keys' is the Greek word 'kleis', which means that which serves for closing, a bar or bolt. Notice that Jesus says 'keys', not key.

Peter used one of those keys to open up the way to heaven to the Jews in Acts 2, and He used the other key to open up the way to heaven for the Gentiles in Acts 10.

Keys are sometimes used as a metaphor which refers to privilege or authority, Luke 11:52 / Isaiah 22:22 / Revelation 1:18 / Revelation 3:7 / Revelation 9:1. The word 'bind' means to bind, tie, to put in bonds and the word 'loosed' means to loosen, unbind, unfasten, Matthew 16:19. In other words, the apostles would be given the Gospel message of repentance and forgiveness of sins through the blood sacrifice of Jesus.

Those who received this message would be loosed from the bondage of sin, yet those who rejected the message and would not repent remained bound in chains to their sin and destined for an eternity of torment. The 'keys' given to Peter and the apostles are clearly the Gospel message.

Jesus tells His disciples not to tell anyone at this time that He was the Christ, Matthew 16:20 / Luke 9:21 / Mark 8:30 / Matthew 8:4 / Matthew 17:9, because it was not His time to die yet, John 10:17-18.

Jesus still had much work to do; therefore, He didn't want any unnecessary hindrance from those who tried to kill Him. This event took place around two and a half years into Jesus' earthly ministry, which meant the cross was around six months away.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH

'From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and 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. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Matthew 16:21-23

Jesus teaching to His disciples up to this point was mainly about His identity, but in Matthew 16:21 / Mark 8:31, Jesus' teaching ministry changes. He now focuses on His upcoming death, burial and resurrection, Matthew 16:21 / Matthew 16:12 / Mark 8:31 / Luke 9:22 / Luke 18:31-33 / Luke 23:46 / Luke 24:46 / Matthew 17:22.

After Peter's great confession, Jesus now turns His face to Jerusalem, and He goes on to warn His disciples about how He was going to be rejected and crucified, Matthew 17:22-23 / Matthew 17:9 / Matthew 17:12 / Matthew 20:18-19 / Matthew 27:63.

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for the tragedy that was nearing. He warned them that He would be betrayed into men's hands and be killed, but encouraged them by announcing that three days later He would rise again, Matthew 16:12 / Mark 8:31 / Luke 9:22.

The disciples didn't understand. Why? Because the concept of an afterlife was foreign to them, it was Jesus who brought life and immortality to light, 2 Timothy 1:10. Mark tells us later that they were afraid to ask Him about it, Mark 9:32.

Why were they afraid to ask Him about it? They didn't understand the purpose of Christ's death, and when Jesus spoke of His death, the subject didn't bring them any comfort, John 16:6 / John 19:30.

It's obvious that Peter was horrified, Matthew 16:22. He couldn't imagine the Lord being killed, and so, he began to correct Jesus, telling Him that this would never happen! Matthew 16:22 / Mark 8:31-37 / Luke 9:22-25.

'Peter took him aside', Matthew 16:22 / Mark 8:32, means Peter literally grabbed Jesus, trying to protect Him. Then Jesus sternly rebuked Peter, Matthew 16:23 / Mark 8:33.

It's interesting to note that Jesus doesn't rebuke Peter but Satan, Matthew 16:23. It's obvious that Satan was trying to use Peter to distract Jesus from His mission, Genesis 3:15 / 1 John 3:8.

Peter was tempting Jesus not to suffer. Temptations are often strongest when they come through people we are close to. So, Jesus flatly rejected Peter's advice. Isn't it strange that one minute Peter proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the next, he was calling Jesus aside to inform Him that He was mistaken! If Jesus was truly the Christ, Peter had no business arguing with Him, nor do we.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

''Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Matthew 16:24-28

After speaking about His own future sufferings, Christ now informs the disciples of their upcoming suffering, Matthew 16:12 / Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:31. Jesus plainly explained what was required to become His disciple. Over the years, I've seen many Christians fall away for a variety of reasons. Many churches in their eagerness to 'make disciples' have baptised people, without first sitting down with someone to explain what is involved in becoming a Christian, and then the church wonders why people don't stay faithful for very long!

I believe that before anyone becomes a Christian, there should be some element of teaching about what they are getting themselves into, Matthew 16:24-27 / Luke 9:23-26 / Mark 8:34-38 / Luke 9:57-62.

Jesus said that you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, Matthew 16:24 / Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:34. These requirements are demanding; a person doesn't naturally deny himself, rather, he usually does what he wants. Death to self is painful, but that is exactly the meaning of taking up one's cross. The cross was an instrument of death; to take it up would be to die to oneself and one's own desires in order to serve Christ.

1. Give up.

First, Jesus tells us that we must deny ourselves, Matthew 16:24 / Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:34. I've spoken to many people over the years, and many have been honest enough to say, 'they would become a Christian, but there are certain things they simply cannot give up.'

Now I understand that denying ourselves goes against everything the world says. We see something we like, and we go ahead and buy it. We do sinful things we enjoy, and we keep doing those sinful things we enjoy.

A person doesn't naturally want to deny themselves anything. That's why going on a diet is so difficult for some. That's why giving up alcohol and drugs is so hard to do.

When it comes to giving things up, we shouldn't think Jesus is just speaking about denying ourselves things like coffee and cakes. And we shouldn't think He is speaking about locking ourselves away in some kind of monastery for twenty years.

The word deny, literally means to deny utterly, and so, Jesus is speaking about a total surrender of self. We often think we know what is best for us, and we often think about which direction our lives need to go in, Proverbs 14:12. But we really need to allow Jesus to drive our lives in the direction He wants us to go. That's what denying ourselves means: we let go of our lives and trust that God knows best, Isaiah 55:8. Trust that God knows which direction our lives are to go.
When you speak to some people and mention the words 'give up', they often think that this means that they can't enjoy life anymore. Yes, self-denial isn't easy, but it doesn't mean we can't enjoy life.

In fact, the opposite is true; Jesus not only came to give us life, but He came so that we can live it to the full, John 10:10. In other words, He wants us to enjoy all the experiences of life; He wants us to get everything good out of life. Giving up certain things doesn't mean we can't enjoy life anymore, nor does it mean we must follow a bunch of manmade rules and regulations. It means we're continually trying to live our lives for Christ, instead of living our lives for ourselves. Denying ourselves isn't a one-time act; denying ourselves is a continual action. It's a total continual surrender of my will for His will.

2. Take Up.

The second requirement to be a disciple of Jesus is taking up our cross daily, Matthew 16:24 / Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:34. Just as we are to continue to deny ourselves throughout our Christian lives, we must also continually take up our cross.
In the religious world today, the cross has become a piece of jewellery that people wear around their necks. It's become a lucky charm which people hold in their hands when times get tough. If we were around in the days of Jesus, you would know exactly what taking up your cross meant.

You would have witnessed a condemned criminal being forced to carry the very heavy wooden cross through the streets of Jerusalem as they made their way to the place where they would be crucified. Before entering Jerusalem, if you were a visitor, you would have seen criminals who had been crucified hanging on crosses on both sides of the road.

Carrying our cross daily means we trust in God regardless of what's happening in our lives. Anyone who ever says, 'Become a Christian and your life will be nothing but one blessing after another' has told you a lie, 2 Timothy 3:12. Anyone who ever says, 'Become a Christian and your life will be free from trials and burdens' has told you a lie. The Lord doesn't promise that if we follow Him, our lives will be free from difficulties. He promises us that when times get tough, He will take us by our hand and walk through those dark times with us, Psalm 23:4.
Jesus didn't come to die on the cross so that He could bring an end to human suffering. We only have to look around in the world we're living in to understand that's not the case.

He came as a man and filled that pain and suffering with His eternal presence. In the darkest moments of our lives, or even the everyday struggles and temptations we face, Jesus is with us.

Just as Christ was crucified and gave Himself up for us, we too must crucify ourselves and give ourselves up to Him, Galatians 2:20. Just as He willingly took up His cross for us, we must willingly take up our cross for Him.

The cross symbolises pain, suffering and death, and Jesus says if we want to become His disciples, then we too must be willing to die to self and go through pain and suffering for His sake.

3. Keep Up.

The third requirement to be a disciple of Jesus is to follow Him, Matthew 16:24 / Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:34. When it comes to denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily and following Jesus, the first person that came to mind was Simon from Cyrene.
When Simon was forced to carry Jesus' cross, he had to keep up with Jesus; he more or less followed in the steps of Jesus to Golgotha, Matthew 27:32. I can imagine him thinking to himself, 'I'm glad I'm not walking in His shoes'. But as Christians, we should be very glad that we're walking in His shoes.
Imagine if you were Simon, Andrew, James, or John. Imagine you're going about your daily business of fishing, when all of a sudden, from nowhere, this man named Jesus calls you to follow Him, Matthew 4:18-22.
I'm sure you, just like these disciples, had no idea how much those two words changed their lives forever. Jesus asked them to leave their boats, their livelihood, their friends and family and their very lives. Everything they had ever known, everything they were used to, was about to be left behind because they decided to follow Jesus. Think about it!

They left the safety and comfort of their own homes for danger, uncertainty, and persecution. That's what following Jesus means, it means to continually follow Him wherever He goes, even if that means to death.

Keeping up with Jesus means we live as He lived, we think as He thinks, we love as He loves, and we treat others as He treated others, 1 John 2:6. It means we become fishers of men, we get out of our comfort zones to reach lost souls with the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus isn't demanding much from His followers; He's demanding all from His followers.
Let me try to illustrate why it is so important to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus. When you look around you, you may see many other Christians carrying their crosses. This is you as a Christian, and your life is going really well.

Suddenly, life throws some challenges at you, and you ask God to lighten your load. And so, God hears your request and removes some of your burdens. Once again, life is great, and you are happily living a Christian life with less weight to carry.

You notice that other Christians appear to be struggling to carry their crosses, but they just carry on regardless. But once again, your life becomes burdensome, and once again you ask God to remove some of those burdens to make your cross smaller.

And once again, God hears your request and removes some of your burdens. Life is great again, and the cross you are carrying is much lighter and easier to carry.

While others are struggling to carry their crosses, yours is much easier to carry. Then, when your life is almost over, you come across a problem. You notice that others don't have the same problem because they are using their crosses to get to the other side.

You try to do the same thing, but your cross is simply too short; it can't read the other side. While the others have long gone, you are left on your own, hopeless and helpless.

The point is, if we want to make it to heaven, we must deny ourselves as Christ did, take up our cross as Christ did and follow the example of Jesus. Remember when Jesus was in the garden? He starts praying to the Father, and His sweat becomes like drops of blood.

Jesus knew what was coming up; He knew He was going to be arrested, put on trial, and then be crucified. He knew He was going to be one of those who were hung on the side of the road.

Jesus knows that it is the Father's will that He dies on the cross, but He wilfully accepts this because of His perfect submission to God's will and His love for you and me, Matthew 26:39.
He knows that what He is about to go through will be painful, He knows how much He will suffer, but He also knows He must go through all of this if He wants to return to the His Father in heaven.

Becoming a Christian isn't an easy decision, Acts 14:22, but it will certainly be the best and most important decision you ever make in your life. If you're not a Christian today, you might be wondering, Is it all worth it? Well, instead of focusing on the things you need to give up, maybe you should think more about the things you gain.
Paul says whatever we might have to suffer here on earth, even as we deny ourselves, that those things are not worth even comparing to the eternal glory that awaits us, Romans 8:18. In Jesus, though we deny ourselves, we have all that we could ever hope for, Romans 8:32. Let me encourage you to 'Give Up, Take Up And Keep Up'.
If you're not a Christian today, then you need to ask yourself, how much value do you place on your soul? There is no profit in gaining the entire world, only to lose one's soul in the transaction, Matthew 16:25-26 / Luke 9:24-25 / Mark 8:35-36 / Luke 12:20-21.
It's worth everything to submit to God's stringent requirements for discipleship. Jesus highlighted the requirements for being a disciple because it's so easy to imagine that you are a follower of Jesus when, in fact, you aren't.

Discipleship isn't mere church membership or moral living; it's total devotion to Jesus Christ. It's to die to self and live one hundred per cent for the Lord. Am I really Jesus' disciple? Romans 6:16-17.
The confession that Jesus demands isn't a simple statement with our mouths that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. It's a confession that we make with our whole life that is totally committed to Him, Galatians 2:20.
Everyone who would seek to be a disciple of Jesus must commit themselves to follow Jesus above all things of this world, Matthew 6:24 / Matthew 10:32-33 / Romans 1:16. Becoming a follower of Christ means you will receive persecution of some kind, 2 Timothy 3:12 / 1 Peter 2:21 / 1 Peter 4:16.
Jesus says, that if we are ashamed of him here, he will be ashamed of us there, Luke 9:26 / Mark 8:38. Jesus also said that He, the Son of Man is going to come, in His Father's glory, with His angels and reward people according to what they have done, Matthew 16:27 / Mark 8:38 / Romans 2:6 / Romans 14:12 / 2 Corinthians 5:10 / Ephesians 6:8. This is obviously speaking about the final judgment.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'He will come in glory, the glory of his Father, the majesty with which God is accustomed to appearing, and which befits God. He will be attended by angels. He will judge all people. The word 'reward' means recompense. He will deal with them according to their character. The righteous he will reward in heaven with glory and happiness. The wicked he will send to hell, as a reward or recompense for their evil works. This fact, that he will come to judgment, he gives as a reason why we should be willing to deny ourselves and follow him. Even though it should be now attended with contempt and suffering, then he will reward his followers for all their shame and sorrow, and receive them to his kingdom. He adds Mark 8:38, that if we are ashamed of him here, he will be ashamed of us there. That is, if we reject and disown him here, he will reject and disown us there.'
Some of Jesus' immediate disciples would be alive when the kingdom reign of Jesus would be manifested from heaven, Matthew 16:28 / Luke 9:27 / Mark 9:1 / Acts 7:54-56.
After His resurrection, Jesus would ascend to the throne of David in heaven, Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14 / Luke 1:31-33. He would sit down at the right hand of the Father and rule over all things, Ephesians 1:20-22 / Philippians 2:8-11 / 1 Peter 3:22.

It was a spiritual kingdom in the sense that men responded on earth in their hearts to the fact that He was Lord and Christ, Acts 2:36-37. The manifestation of Jesus' reign in heaven was made known by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Luke 24:49 / Acts 2:1-4 / Acts 1:8 / Acts 2:1-4. The presence of the kingdom's reign in heaven would be manifested on earth by the obedience of men and women who submitted to His reign.

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION

'After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.' Matthew 17:1

Although Mark, Mark 9:2, and Matthew, Matthew 17:1, say after six days, Luke says eight days, Luke 9:28. The Jews counted any part of a day to represent a whole day, and so, by counting the partial beginning and end of two days, with six full days, we would have the eight days of Luke.
Jesus' 'inner circle', that is, Jesus took Peter, James and John, Matthew 26:37 / Luke 9:28 / Mark 5:37, were privileged to be taken by Jesus to a high mountain. Peter, James and John were with Him in Jairus' house, the synagogue ruler, when Jesus healed his daughter, Luke 8:49-56. Peter, James and John went with Him when He went to pray at Gethsemane, Mark 14:33.

THE MOUNTAIN

The mountain, Matthew 17:1 / Luke 9:28 / Mark 9:2, in question is either Mount Taber in modern-day Syria or Mount Hermon in Israel, which is the highest mountain in Israel, 2 Peter 1:17-18.
Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

'The tradition that places the transfiguration on Mount Tabor is beyond question false.'

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'Robertson would appear to be correct for these reasons.

1. Tabor does not qualify as a 'high' mountain, being only 1,800 feet in elevation, compared with Hermon's 9,000 feet.

2. Tradition favouring Tabor, first advocated by St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century, is much too late to have much weight.

3. Mount Tabor was populated, having a fortress on top, during the time of Christ, and was not suitable for such an event as the transfiguration. To have ascended Tabor would not have taken them 'apart', as Matthew expressed it.

4. Mount Tabor was a three-day journey removed from the last-named geographical placement of Christ and his disciples, although a sufficient time interval of six or eight days had elapsed, none of the gospel narratives mentions a journey of any kind. Hermon, on the other hand, was nearby and is the most likely site.

5. Furthermore, when the gospels again take up the narrative, they were still in the vicinity of Hermon. Peter, in after years, called it the Holy Mount, 2 Peter 1:18, and in the words of A. L. Williams, 'We may conclude that we are not intended to know more about it, lest we should be tempted to make more of the material circumstances than of the great reality.'

Why did they go up the mountain? Luke 9:28 tells us they went up the mountain to pray. Why didn't He take the other disciples with Him? Why did Jesus take only Peter, James and John up the mountain? Luke 9:28 Matthew 17:1 / Mark 9:2.

He was simply preparing them for leadership. Remember that Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Christ, Matthew 16:13-20 / Luke 9:18-20 / Mark 8:28-38. The transfiguration was the confirmation of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. It also points to a change from the law and the prophets to the One to whom the law and prophets pointed, Luke 24:44.

Peter was given the keys to the kingdom and Jesus says to him, 'whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven,' Matthew 16:19. Which means he was given the right to teach the new law of forgiveness with its terms and conditions.

James was executed by Herod, Acts 12:1-2, which tells us that James must have been a man of influence, or Herod wouldn't have bothered to kill him. John seems to be the quiet one, but at the cross of Jesus, he was given the responsibility of looking after Jesus' mother, which also tells us that by this time, Joseph, Jesus' stepfather, was dead, John 19:26-27.

How do you think the other disciples felt when Jesus only took Peter, James and John to certain places? I can imagine they felt a little jealous; that's possibly why they started arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, Luke 9:46 / Luke 22:24. This could be possible because Jesus tells them not to tell anyone about what happened up on the mountain, Matthew 17:9.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

'There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then, there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Matthew 17:2-4

Jesus had taken three of His closest friends with Him to a high mountain. There, whilst Jesus was praying, Luke 9:29, He began to glow with breath-taking brilliance, Matthew 17:2 / Luke 9:29 / Mark 9:2-3.

The word transfigured, 'metamorphoo', means to be changed or transformed, and so, in some way, Jesus' appearance was changed into a state of heavenly glory in order to manifest His deity, John 1:14.

Matthew tells us that 'His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light,' Matthew 17:2. This light was an outward appearance from within; the light came from within Jesus, John 18:6 / Exodus 34:35 / 2 Corinthians 3:13.

IMAGINE BEING THERE!

I can imagine James and John tugging one another's cloaks and saying to Peter, 'Peter, Peter, is it just me or is Jesus' head glowing a little?' And the more he glows, the more they say, 'He's definitely glowing'.

We read these passages like they went and got a drink, and they went and got a burger and chips. Just as though it was the most normal thing in the world for Jesus' head to begin to glow.

I can imagine the jaws of those men would have dropped, I can imagine them backing away, even from the Lord that they knew, and here is glowing as though God is ripping open the flesh of Christ and letting divinity itself peak out.

And as that bright light is shining and as Jesus is glowing, and what an amazing scene, it just gets better. For all of a sudden appearing with them are Moses and Elijah, and it seems the disciples knew and recognised Moses and Elijah, Matthew 17:3 / Luke 9:30 / Mark 9:3.

MOSES AND ELIJAH

Elijah and Moses appeared, and the disciples were awestruck, Matthew 17:3 / Luke 9:30 / Mark 9:4. We don't know how the disciples recognised Moses and Elijah.
The only possible explanation is that God opened their eyes. Moses was the great Lawgiver, Exodus 24:12-18 / John 1:17, the one who had led Israel out of Egyptian bondage and through the wilderness. Elijah was a great prophet, one of two men in the Old Testament who went directly to heaven without dying, 2 Kings 2:11.
Notice they were talking to Jesus, Matthew 17:3 / Luke 9:3 / Mark 9:4, but what were they talking about? Luke tells us that 'they spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem,' Luke 9:31. The word 'departure' is the Greek word, exodus, which means going from one place to another, 2 Peter 1:15.
Luke tells us they were discussing the fulfilment of the purpose for which both Moses and Elijah came to do their work, and talking about the fulfilment of the promised 'head crusher' that started with the seed of the woman in Eve, Genesis 3:15, and had continued to Jesus, Luke 9:31.
After feeling sleepy, Luke 9:32, the disciples were now fully awake, Luke 9:32. Peter was profoundly moved by the occasion and suggested that they build three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah, Matthew 17:4 / Mark 9:5 / Luke 9:33. Mark tells us that Peter didn't know what to say, they were so frightened, Mark 9:6.
There are times when we simply need to listen, rather than do. Peter's problem was that he needed to connect everything with something he needed to do. Peter always jumped up and said, 'Well, Lord, I guess I need to say something.'

Peter was always the one who would jump up and say, 'I'm not going to let that happen to you, Lord, well, I'll be the last one to leave you, Lord', Matthew 26:31-35 / Luke 22:31-34 / Mark 14:27-31.
And the Lord finally had to say, 'Peter, will you just hush up, put that sword down, Matthew 26:51-55 / Luke 22:49-51 / John 18:10-15, before the rooster crows three times you'll deny me', Matthew 26:33-35 / Mark 14:29-31 / John 13:37–38.
And Peter is still doing it, he's here on the mountain, and James and John are saying, 'look at this,' and Peter jumps up, and what does he say? 'We're very glad to be here,' Matthew 17:4 / Luke 9:33 / Mark 9:5.
That's literally what he says; he jumps up and says, 'Well, I'm glad I came here today.' 'It's good for us to be here, Lord. In fact, we need to do something about this; we need to build a shelter for Moses and a shelter for Elijah,' Matthew 17:4 / Luke 9:33 / Mark 9:5.
No doubt he felt that it would honour Jesus to receive a shelter alongside Moses and Elijah, but it seems as though Peter wanted to stay on the mountain for a while and enjoy the company; there was work to be done in the valleys.

According to Jewish tradition, these shelters would have been temporary places of prayer and meditation, Leviticus 23:34 / Exodus 25:8-9. Peter may have been suggesting that places of honour be placed at the location for the honour of Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

GOD'S VOICE

'While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.' Matthew 17:5-8

As Peter was speaking, a cloud enveloped the disciples, and then God's voice boomed from heaven, 'This is My Beloved Son, listen to Him', Matthew 17:5 / Luke 9:34-35 / Mark 9:7. The voice of God is very seldom heard in the New Testament, in fact, only three times, Matthew 3:17 / Mark 9:7 / John 12:29.
Notice that when the disciples heard the voice of God, the natural reaction was worship, Matthew 17:6. Falling facedown suggests that they worship God, Daniel 8:17 / Revelation 1:17 / 2 Peter 1:18.
Remember that prophets weren't worshipped. And so, because Jesus was God, all three disciples worshipped as a natural response to their realisation of the presence of God.

They had obviously fallen to the ground in reverence, and so Jesus reassuringly touches them and tells them to get up. I can imagine the disciples being very afraid after hearing God's voice; no wonder Jesus reassures them that they have nothing to be afraid of.

Matthew tells us 'When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid,' Matthew 17:6. Jesus came and touched them and told them to get up and don't be afraid, Matthew 17:7.
Moses and Elijah vanished, and only Jesus remained, Matthew 17:8 / Luke 9:36 / Mark 9:8. The lesson was simple; they used to listen to Moses and Elijah, but now they must listen to Jesus, Acts 4:12 / Hebrews 1:1-3. No other prophet was assumed to be the Son of God.

THE DESCENT

'As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.' Matthew 17:9

As they descended, Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about what had happened until after He was raised from the dead, Matthew 17:9 / Mark 9:9. Luke tells us the disciples kept what they had witnessed to themselves and didn't tell anyone, Luke 9:36.
Jesus told them not to say anything until He, the Son of man, was resurrected, Matthew 17:9 / Mark 9:9. Why were they told not to say anything to anyone? One plausible reason could be that if the disciples spoke about what had just happened publicly, especially during this crucial point in Jesus' ministry, it may have caused a lot of unnecessary confusion among the people.
There's also the possibility which we alluded to earlier that the other disciples may possibly have become jealous of Peter, James and John, for having the special treatment, Mark 9:34 / Luke 22:24.

Peter, James and John had no idea about what Jesus meant about rising again, Mark 9:10. They didn't believe in the death of Jesus, at this time, never mind believe that He would rise from the dead, Mark 9:10.
Remember, the disciples and the Jews as a whole had no concept of the resurrection; every blessing in the Old Testament was all about the land and long life.

This is why the disciples never really understood anything Jesus taught about the afterlife, or they were afraid to ask Him about it. The resurrection from the dead was a whole new concept because it was Jesus who brought immortality to light, 2 Timothy 1:10.

'The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist." Matthew 17:10-13

By the appearance of Elijah on the mountain, their thinking was focused on the prophecies of the coming of Elijah, Matthew 9:10 / Mark 9:11 / Mark 4:5, but Elijah had already come in the sense that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, Matthew 17:11-12 / Mark 9:12-13 / Luke 1:17.
The teachers of the Law had correctly understood and interpreted the Old Testament law concerning the prophecies that a messenger must first come before the coming of the Messiah, Matthew 17:10-12 / Isaiah 40:3 / Malachi 3:1 / Malachi 4:5 / Matthew 11:14.
These prophecies were of John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, Luke 1:16-17. He came preaching repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, Mark 1:1-4, but the teachers of the Law failed to understand and accept that these prophecies were fulfilled in John Himself.
As it is with most people who don't understand one thing, this leads to another misunderstanding about something else. The disciples understood that Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist, Matthew 17:13.
The Jews didn't recognise John as the fulfilment of prophecy in preparation for the Messiah, so they wouldn't recognise Jesus, John 1:11. This is clearly seen later because they will eventually want to crucify Christ, because of their refusal to believe who He was, the Son of God, the Messiah, Mark 9:12.

THE GREATNESS OF JESUS

God's refusal of Peter's suggestion to construct three shelters teaches us a lot of things. The problem with Peter's plan was that it put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah; he isn't. Jesus is above everyone in this case, above the greatest figures of the Old Testament era.

Our problem is like Peter's; we often tend to build multiple shelters, one for Jesus and one for our parents or one for Jesus and another for our preacher, or a favourite activity. Jesus must be the only shelter; He must be the supreme authority in our lives, nothing else can be on a par with Him.

Through the years, people have built cathedrals to honour Jesus, people have fought wars to honour Jesus, people have gone on fasts to honour Jesus, people have thrown banquets to honour Jesus, people have married multiple wives, and people have remained celibate to honour Jesus.

But God calls out to us all and says, 'before you go building your booths, or making your plans before you do what you think will honour Me, will you please stop and listen to Him'.

The world would be a better place if it stopped to actually listen to Jesus' words and obey them, and our churches would be in better health if they stopped to listen to what Jesus actually teaches on any given subject. Our own Christian walk would be totally transformed if we stopped long enough to listen and apply Jesus' words to our very lives. Who are you listening to?

JESUS HEALS A DEMON-POSSESSED BOY

'When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." "You unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:14-20

Jesus, Peter, James and John had remained part of a day and night on the mountain of transfiguration, Luke 9:37. While He was on the mountain, the scribes were entering into an argument with the other disciples, Mark 9:15-16. As Jesus descended the mountain, He noticed a great commotion in the valley. The crowd ran to meet Him, Matthew 17:14 / Mark 9:14-15 / Luke 9:37. Notice, as soon as the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed, Mark 9:15. Why?

It's certainly possible that just like Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai, his face was radiant as he reflected God's glory, Exodus 34:35. But here the glory of God is Jesus, and He's not reflecting God's glory; He is God's glory.

A man approached Jesus and knelt before him, Matthew 17:14. The father of the tormented boy asked Jesus to do something, if He could, the man obviously feels hopeless and helpless, Matthew 17:15.

The demon caused this poor boy to lose his speech, threw him to the ground in convulsions, He often falls into the fire or into the water, Matthew 17:15 / Mark 9:20. Mark and Luke add he was foaming at the mouth, his teeth gnash together, he screams and becomes rigid, Mark 9:17 / Luke 9:39.

He begged the disciples to help, but they couldn't, Matthew 17:16 / Mark 9:18 / Luke 9:40. While Jesus had been with three of the apostles on the mountain, the others had been unable to cast a demon out of a boy, Matthew 17:16. The apostles had normally been able to cast out demons, but here they couldn't, probably because of a lack of faith, Matthew 17:19-20. This failure puzzled them and surprised the bystanders.

Jesus' enemies were taking advantage of this lapse to discredit Him; we can imagine how embarrassed the disciples must have felt as they were being ridiculed.

Jesus says to all who were present that they were an unbelieving and a perverse generation and asks, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Matthew 17:17 / Mark 9:19 / Luke 9:41.

Jesus asks that the boy be brought to Him, Matthew 17:17, and when Jesus saw the effect the demon was having on the boy, Luke 9:42, He asks how long he has been like this, Mark 9:20-21.

It seems as though everyone was still having a hard time accepting Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, John 9:3. The father of the tormented boy asked Jesus to do something if He could; the man obviously feels hopeless and helpless.

Notice that the Lord turned the boy's father's statement back on him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes,' Mark 9:23. The father said that he believed, but recognising the possibility that his faith wasn't as strong as it needed to be, he begged Jesus to help his unbelief, Mark 9:24.

Everyone thought the boy was dead, and so, with that, Christ commanded the unclean spirit to leave the boy, the demon cried out and threw the boy into convulsions but left, Mark 9:25 / Luke 9:42. The Jews believed that no one could cast out a mute spirit unless one knew its name.
Mark gives an extended account of the events surrounding the exorcism, Mark 9:25-26. Jesus rebuked the demon, Matthew 17:18 / Mark 9:25 / Luke 9:42 / Luke 4:41, which shows His power over the devil, Matthew 4:24. The demon did what all demons have to do, the demon left the boy immediately, Matthew 17:18 / Mark 9:26 / Luke 9:42. Jesus said on this occasion that all things are possible to those who believe, Mark 9:23. The Jews believed that no one could cast out a mute spirit unless one knew its name.
Jesus said on this occasion that all things are possible to those who believe; therefore, this healing was a test of Jesus' divine power in contrast to the lack of power in the disciples because of their lack of faith. Jesus had total control over the world of Satan and his works, and because of Jesus' command, the demon immediately left the boy.

Unlike what some people claim today concerning casting out demons, here there were no formulas, performances, money or ceremonies in order to exorcise this demon; Jesus simply spoke, and it was done.

Later, the disciples asked why they had been unable to cast out the demon, Matthew 17:19. Jesus explained that they weren't relying on God enough, but on their own power.
The disciples seem to be somewhat embarrassed over their inability to take care of the demon-possessed boy, and notice it was the disciples' unbelief, not the belief of the one who was healed, that was questioned. They could have cast out the demon because Jesus had given them such authority.

They had demonstrated a lack of faith, Matthew 17:20 / Matthew 19:26 / Matthew 21:21-22 / Luke 10:1 / Luke 10:17, but if they had the faith as small as a mustard seed, Matthew 17:20 / Matthew 21:21-22 / Mark 11:23-24 / Luke 17:6 / 1 Corinthians 12:9 / 1 Corinthians 13:2, they could achieve much more, Matthew 17:20. Nothing would be impossible to them for nothing is impossible for the One who actually does the miraculous work, Matthew 17:20 / Mark 9:23 / John 11:40. However, the qualification for being able to command the power of the supernatural demanded that they believe, Matthew 19:26 / Matthew 21:21-22 / Luke 10:1 / Luke 1:17.
Faith takes time to grow, and the disciples were no different, in fact by the time Jesus leaves them to return to the Father, they would indeed do great things for God. Please note that this kind of faith is supernatural, miraculous faith, 1 Corinthians 12:9. We must remember to keep these verses in their proper context.
Jesus wasn't talking to all the disciples, but only to the twelve, and so this isn't a promise for Christians today. He was promising them, the twelve, special authority in reference to their work as His personally chosen and sent apostles.

Notice that Matthew 17:29, has no words, but the footnote tells us the words are similar to Mark 9:29. Perhaps the disciples prior success in expelling demons had caused them to be self-reliant, Mark 6:13 / Mark 6:30, and they had neglected to pray in faith to God so that He would cast out the demon, John 9:31 / John 11:41. The KJV says 'this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.'
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning prayer and fasting.

'In order to work miracles of this kind to cast out devils in cases so obstinate and dreadful as this, faith of the highest kind is necessary. That faith is produced and kept vigorous only by much prayer, and by such abstinence from food as fits the mind for the highest exercises of religion and leaves it free to hold communion with God.'

Time and again the disciples demonstrated a lack of clear spiritual understanding; they saw Jesus multiply loaves and fish but failed to see that He could handle another food emergency.

Peter affirmed that Jesus was the Christ but thought it best to give Him some needed 'advice.' He believed Jesus was great, but on the same level as Moses and Elijah.

The nine disciples in the valley boldly attempted to expel a demon, but without relying on the Lord. They were like those formerly blind who even now saw men like trees walking.

We all take time to grow as Christians, and there are times we exercise a lack of faith, especially when we just go through the 'routine' of being a Christian, but when difficult times come, we quickly realise what we've been neglecting in our spiritual lives. Maybe those difficult times come to remind us to ask God to increase our faith in Him. Have you asked God to increase your faith lately?

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A SECOND TIME

'When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." And the disciples were filled with grief.'
Matthew 17:22-23

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for the tragedy that was nearing. He warned them that He would be betrayed into men's hands and be killed, Matthew 17:22, but encouraged them by announcing that three days later He would rise again, Matthew 17:23.
The disciples didn't understand, and were filled with grief, Matthew 17:23, why? As we saw above, the concept of an afterlife was foreign to them, 2 Timothy 1:10. Mark tells us they were afraid to ask Him about it, Mark 9:32.
Why were they afraid to ask Him about it? They didn't understand the purpose of Christ's death, and when Jesus spoke of His death, the subject didn't bring them any comfort, John 16:6 / John 19:30.

THE TEMPLE TAX

'After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" "Yes, he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the children are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not cause offence, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth, and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."
Matthew 17:24-27

It's been well documented that all Jews throughout the Roman Empire were required to pay the Jewish temple tax in order to fund the maintenance of the temple in Jerusalem.

Although this was ordered by Julius Caesar, the amount commanded by God for the temple tax was originally instituted to 'pay' for the individual's sins and was half a shekel of silver, Exodus 30:11-16. By the time Jesus came on the scene, half a shekel was equivalent to two silver Roman denarii or two silver Greek drachmas, which was about two days' wages.
The money was needed because it was the duty of every male Jew who came to the temple to worship to pay half a shekel for the upkeep of the temple, which was called the 'Temple Tax.' A half-shekel was equal to a third, or a fourth of a Denarius, or a penny and could only be paid in the temple.

But many currencies were in use in the Roman Empire at that time, and pilgrims from abroad usually only had Greek, Roman or Syrian money, which couldn't be used.

Obviously, Jewish money wasn't likely to be used in the wider Roman Empire, so their foreign money had to be exchanged into coins that the temple treasury would accept.

TAX COLLECTORS

Most people know that a tax collector wasn't highly esteemed in Biblical times; in fact, most were hated because they were considered either a traitor or a thief. This is because Israel was occupied by Rome, and all the taxes collected went to Rome.

The Romans demanded a certain amount of tax, but the tax collector could add more to bump up his wages, Luke 3:13. The tax collectors were called 'publicans', which is the equivalent of what we would call the Inland Revenue. The temple tax was paid yearly, about a month before Passover, in order to support those who worked with the religious services of the temple, Exodus 30:13-14, and on this occasion, the tax collector asked Peter if Jesus pays the tax or not, Matthew 17:24. Peter says that Jesus paid the tax, though he evidently hadn't seen Jesus do so, Matthew 17:25.

THE EXEMPTION

The tax collector asks if Jesus pays the temple tax, and Peter replies yes, Matthew 17:24-25. Jesus asks Peter a question, Matthew 17:25, and the answer is simple. The sons of the king are free from paying the taxes, but the subjects of the king must pay, Matthew 17:25-26.
Jesus is making the point that since He is greater than the temple, He was the Son of God, then He wouldn't be subject to paying the tax to the temple. It's clear here that Jesus is claiming His sonship of God.

WHY DID JESUS PAY?

Jesus paid the tax because He didn't want to cause any offence, Matthew 17:27. In other words, He wanted to avoid any unnecessary controversy concerning the payment of the tax, 1 Corinthians 8:12 / 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Later, Jesus will miraculously provide the money to pay the tax, but Peter will still have to pay the tax. He, as well as all Jews, was subject to paying the tax.

THE MIRACLE

When Jesus was approached about paying His temple tax, he told Peter to catch a fish on a line and open its mouth, Matthew 17:27. Some suggest that the fish was probably a 'Tilapia', which has a marked pouch beneath its mouth where tiny young fish hide from danger, but we simply don't know.

Think about this for a moment: What are the chances of this actually happening? Please don't miss the miracle; this wasn't just some random chance of Peter catching a fish, even though he was a fisherman, and the fish just happened to have a coin in its mouth. No! This was all God's doing, just like Jonah, when God provided a great fish to swallow him, Jonah 1:17.

Here we see Jesus not only providing the fish and directing the fish straight onto Peter's hook at the exact right moment, we also see that when Peter did as Jesus said and when he opened its mouth, he found a 'stater', a four-drachma coin, the equivalent of a silver shekel, which was the exact amount needed to pay the temple tax for both of them, Matthew 17:27.

Just as a side note, some suggest that Jesus never ever touched money; the text doesn't suggest that He did here. Even in Matthew 22:18-22, the text suggests that He didn't touch the money, which was brought to Him; He simply asked to see it.

Jesus could have chosen not to pay the temple tax, as He had no legal obligation to do so; however, He did pay for the sake of peace, and I think we can learn a simple lesson of humility from Him. There are times we, too, can avoid some unnecessary conflict with people if we're wise enough to choose to do so.

Sometimes we're so eager to stand up for what's right and our rights, we actually end up causing more harm than good, and so, in other words, winning the battle doesn't necessarily mean we've won the war, Romans 12:18.

CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION

''At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'
Matthew 18:1-5

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for the tragedy that was nearing. He warned them that He would be betrayed into men's hands and be killed, Luke 9:44, but encouraged them by announcing that three days later He would rise again, Mark 9:31.

The disciples didn't understand, Mark 9:32 / Luke 9:45, why? They didn't understand the purpose of Christ's death, and when Jesus spoke of His death, the subject didn't bring them any comfort, John 16:6 / John 19:30.

They didn't understand the purpose of Christ's death, and they were too busy arguing about who would be the greatest in Jesus' coming kingdom. In other words, they were struggling with pride, and they even argued about this during the Supper, Luke 22:24. Why were they afraid to ask Him about it? Mark 9:32 / Luke 9:45. As we saw above, the concept of an afterlife was foreign to them, 2 Timothy 1:10.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, 'it was hidden from them', Luke 9:45.

'It was God's will that the apostles, while being so thoroughly briefed on all that would take place, should also fail to 'get it', as we might say. This seems to be a hint here that they were providentially prevented from understanding it, but it is more likely that the very conception of human salvation as something which Almighty God alone could achieve, and that even he could not achieve it without the death of the Beloved on the cross, that such a colossal truth

was utterly beyond the power of the natural man to understand it until after the fact. The concealment was not due to the design of God but to the limitations of men.'

This all happened at Peter's house, Mark 9:33. Can you imagine how Jesus must have felt? He's about to go and die for the world, and all the disciples can do is argue about who is going to be the greatest. It must have disappointed Him greatly to see the disciples competing for power while He was preoccupied with His coming suffering.

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Notice they were arguing about who was the greatest, Luke 9:46 / Mark 9:34. There's no doubt that the disciples were still thinking that Jesus was here to establish a physical kingdom, Acts 1:6, and they wanted to know who was going to be in charge.
Mark tells us that Jesus sat down, Mark 9:35. In other words, Jesus adopts the position of a teacher, which signalled to the disciples that teaching was coming. It was then that the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Matthew 18:1.
It appears that selfish ambition is beginning to creep in among the disciples, Mark 10:35-45. In fact, this subject came up four times when they were with Jesus: Matthew 20:20-28 / Mark 9:33-34 / Mark 10:35-45 / Luke 22:24-27. In Jesus' kingdom, He Himself would be the One with all authority, Matthew 28:12 / Ephesians 1:20-23.
It must have disappointed Jesus greatly to see the disciples competing for power while He was preoccupied with His coming suffering. Can you imagine how Jesus must have felt?

He's about to go and die for the world, and all the disciples can do is argue about who is going to be the greatest! Matthew 20:20-28 / Mark 10:35-45 / Luke 22:24-27.

THE CHILD OBJECT LESSON

Jesus didn't need to ask what they were arguing about because He already knew, and so, knowing what they had been disputing, Jesus took a child into His arms and used the child as a model of the humility that should characterise the disciples, Matthew 18:2-5 / Luke 9:47-48 / Mark 9:36-37.
Jesus tells them they must 'change', Matthew 18:3, which means to change their thinking, change their lives, change their attitude, Acts 3:19 / Acts 28:27. The need for change by the apostles was because of their sin of worldly pride and ambition.
They must also become 'like little children', Matthew 18:3. Children submit to their father's rule, they trust their father will always do what is right and as a result, they will obey their fathers, Ephesians 6:1-4 / Colossians 3:20 / Exodus 20:12 / Deuteronomy 5:16 / Proverbs 22:6.
As Christians, we need to have the same submissive attitude toward our heavenly Father if we want to receive eternal life, James 4:6-7 / 1 Peter 5:6-7. The humility of a child should always be the characteristic of a disciple of Jesus. We should always be willing to serve and put others before us, not thinking too highly of ourselves, Matthew 18:4 / Luke 9:48 / Mark 10:35-45.
Jesus wants disciples who are humble like a child, free from prejudice like a child, teachable like a child, lovable as a child, He wants His disciples to have the same simple faith of a child, trust like a child, He doesn't want His disciples to worry about anything but trust their Father and He wants His disciples to be as innocent as a child.

Welcoming a little child in Jesus' Name, Matthew 18:5 / Luke 9:48 / Mark 9:37, refers to the complete acceptance of a child-like believer because of their innocent and unrestrained trust in the Lord. If we welcome a disciple of Jesus who is of the character which Jesus discusses in this context, we receive Jesus, Matthew 10:40-42.

CAUSING TO STUMBLE

'"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, 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 stumble, 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.' Matthew 18:6-9

We should never underestimate the severity of Jesus' warning here. Make no mistake about it, He isn't just speaking about someone causing someone else to stumble in terms of causing someone to sin, but He's speaking about someone causing someone to stumble to the extent that they cause them to lose their soul. In other words, they cause someone to lose their eternal salvation, Matthew 18:9 / Luke 17:2.

The result of someone doing so is worse than death. Jesus mentions a 'large millstone', Matthew 18:6. This is the large millstone, which is turned by a donkey, which contrasts with the smaller millstones which are turned by the human hand.

Why is their fate worse than drowning? Matthew 18:6 / Deuteronomy 32:35 / Romans 12:19 / Hebrews 10:30. Simply because eternal death is worse than physical death. Anyone who persecutes Christians in order to cause them to stumble will be held accountable, Luke 17:2.

Anyone who seeks to cause God's children to stumble will not receive any deliverance but will be punished because they hurt God's children, Romans 12:19 / Hebrews 10:30. Because Jesus uses the word, 'woe', Matthew 18:7, we can be sure of the seriousness of the crime and the punishment of the crime, Luke 17:1 / 1 Corinthians 11:19 / 1 Timothy 4:1.

Not only does Jesus give us the warning, but He also gives us the promise that 'such things must come', Matthew 18:7. We shouldn't be surprised when these things happen, and people fall away because of them, so we must be diligent and help each other and watch out for each other's souls.

When it comes to any passage of Scripture, context is always the key and with these verses, we must keep them in context. The reason for this is that some sincere people have read Matthew 18:8-9 and taken them literally, but Jesus didn't mean that a person should literally cut off one of the limbs of their body, Matthew 18:8-9.

As far as I'm aware, all commentators agree that Jesus uses a figure of speech in order to emphasise the seriousness with which one must consider those things that would cause them to fall.

Remember the context is that the disciples are having problems with selfish ambition concerning greatness, Matthew 18:1, and so Jesus is emphasising that they should seriously consider their attitude, or else it will lead to their condemnation, Matthew 18:8-9 / Matthew 5:29-30 / Matthew 25:41 / Matthew 5:29-30 / Mark 9:35-45 / Colossians 3:5.

If we were to think about these words in physical terms, sometimes if a person had a disease such as gangrene, in order to preserve their life, they would need to be an amputation performed to preserve their life.

It's much the same spiritually; there may be sins which need to be cut off from our lives in order for us to inherit eternal life, Matthew 5:22 / Matthew 10:28 / Galatians 5:19-21 / 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 / Revelation 20:14-15.

Jesus explains that severe punishment will be rendered to those who harm the flock of God, Matthew 10:28. Hell is a place that no one wants to go to, Matthew 18:8-9 / Matthew 5:29-30 / Matthew 25:41. We could focus on those who cause others to stumble, but maybe it's useful to look at ourselves as Jesus wanted the disciples to do.
We must be on our guard against false teachers and those who would encourage us to stumble, mainly those in the world, but we must also take a good look in the mirror and ask ourselves, is there anything in our lives which needs to be cut off? Matthew 18:8-9. Our soul is just too precious to play games with, our eternal salvation is just too important to throw away.

THE PARABLE OF THE WANDERING SHEEP

'See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. "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, truly I tell you, 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 perish.' Matthew 18:10-14

Jesus now gives a warning to anyone who would become a stumbling block to the 'little ones', that is, the humble children He's just been speaking about, Matthew 18:2-9.
These 'little ones', as all Christians do, have angels in heaven, Matthew 18:10, who are ever in the presence of the Father, and serve those who are being saved, which is a clear reference to guardian angels, Psalms 34:8 / Hebrews 1:14.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following, concerning 'the angels, seeing the face of the Father'.

'This is an allusion to the privilege granted by eastern monarchs to their chief favourites, a privilege which others were never permitted to enjoy. The seven princes of Media and Persia, who were the chief favourites and privy-counsellors of Ahasuerus, are said to see the king's face, Esther 1:14 / 2 Kings 25:19 / Jeremiah 51:25. Our Lord's words give us to understand that humble-hearted, child-like disciples are objects of his peculiar care, and constant attention.'
Notice that Matthew 18:11 isn't included in most translations, but the footnote says, 'For the Son of Man came to save what was lost'. Luke 15:4-10 / Luke 19:10. This verse actually adds another reason why no harm should be done to His followers. The Son of man has so loved them as to come into the world to lay down His life for them, Luke 19:10 / John 3:17 / John 12:47.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning 'the parable'.

'Christ spoke this parable twice, evidently for a different purpose on each occasion. In this instance, it stands for the infinite love and solicitude the Lord has for the very least of his human children, but in Luke's account of it, it appears to have been spoken as an argument against the Pharisees who would go to a lot of trouble for a lost animal but had no regard for a lost man. The parables are the same, but they are spoken with significant variations, Luke 15:3-7.'
Let me share with you five points from this parable about the love of God.

1. The love of God is an individual love.

The ninety-nine sheep weren't enough for Jesus; He wanted the whole lot, Matthew 18:12 / Luke 15:4. And when one went wandering, He wasn't going to rest until He brought it back home again. Jesus is telling us that He has a love to offer that's not just for everyone, but a priceless love especially for you.

The Palestinian shepherds were experts at tracking down their sheep, and they could follow the tracks of their sheep for miles. They would go to any lengths to bring that sheep back.

Our God is not happy until the last one is gathered in. Paul, when he recognised that he was a sinner, he also understood that God's love was an individual love, 1 Timothy 1:15.

2. The love of God is a patient love.

We all know how stupid sheep are; they are such foolish creatures. And so to a degree the sheep had no one but itself to blame for the dangers it had got itself into.

The sheep might be foolish, but thank God, the Good Shepherd would still risk His life to save it, John 10:11. Thank God that even though mankind can be foolish, God, in His love, loves even the foolish man who has got no one to blame for his sin and sorrow but himself. Thank God that He is a loving, patient God, 2 Peter 3:9.

3. The love of God is a seeking love.

The flocks of sheep in Palestine were very often communal. In other words, they didn't belong to an individual; they usually belonged to the whole village. And so, because of that, there were usually two or three shepherds with them; that's one of the reasons the shepherd could leave the other ninety-nine, Matthew 18:12 / Luke 15:4.

Because if they couldn't leave the sheep with other shepherds, when they returned, they would find that other sheep would have gone astray. The shepherd wasn't willing to wait for the sheep to come back. He went out to search for it, Matthew 18:12 / Luke 15:4. For in Christ Jesus, God came to seek and to search for those who wander, Luke 19:10.

He's not content to wait until men come home, Oh, no! He goes and searches for them, no matter what it costs Him. He doesn't want any of His 'little ones' to perish, Matthew 18:14.

The shepherds of Palestine would always make the most strenuous and the most sacrificial efforts to find a lost sheep. Jesus came to find us before we thought about finding Him, John 10:7-10 / Luke 19:10 / 1 John 4:9-10. He came to seek and to give life, but not just life, but life to the full. The love of God is a seeking love.

4. The love of God is a rejoicing love.

This parable is all about joy, Matthew 18:13 / Luke 15:6. When the shepherd went to find the lost sheep, they had a rule. And the rule was that if the sheep couldn't be brought back alive, then, where possible, the sheep's fleece or bones must be brought back to prove that the sheep was indeed dead.

If the sheep was found alive, the shepherd would often come back with the sheep on his shoulders, Luke 15:5-6.

When one of the flock goes astray and returns home, instead of reminding them of their sin, maybe we can put their sin behind God's back as He does with ours when we get lost and come back to Him, Matthew 18:13-14.

If you're involved in a sin, which is dragging you away from God, then you can be sure that if you repent and turn back to God there will be rejoicing in heaven, Luke 15:7.

The day you became a Christian was a day of rejoicing and if you're not a Christian today and one day you decide to become a faithful follower of the Lord, then heaven will rejoice with you too. The love of God is a rejoicing love.

5. The love of God is a protecting love.

It's not just a love that seeks, it's also a love that saves. There can be a love which ruins, there can be a love that softens, but the love of God is the protecting love which saves a person for the service of their fellow men, Psalm 34:18-20 / Psalm 55:16-17 / 2 Corinthians 12:10.

In other words, it's God's protecting love that makes the wanderer wise. It's God's protecting love that makes the weak strong. It's God's protecting love that makes the sinner pure.

It's God's protecting love that makes the captive of sin a freeman of holiness. It's God's protecting love that makes the overpowered by temptation the conqueror of sin.

God's love is a protecting love, and God's love will not only protect us in this life but also in the life to come. Because as long as we're faithful to Him, then you can be sure that nothing can separate us from His love.

Paul says there is nothing in heaven or hell or on this earth that can stop God from loving you, Romans 8:34-39. Jesus says, no one will snatch us from God's mighty hands, and that's because He's a protecting God, John 10:27-30.

DEALING WITH SIN IN THE CHURCH

'If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.' Matthew 18:15

DEALING WITH ISSUES PRIVATELY

Unity between believers has always been paramount in Jesus' teachings, because it speaks so much about our own relationship with God Himself, in terms of obedience to Him.

The way we act not only with outsiders but also with our brethren should reflect the love of God and the unity we have with each other and Him. As Christians, we must deal with situations the way Jesus asks us to; how else will the world know we are different from them? John 13:35.
It's a sad fact that many Christians go about settling their differences the way the world does. The offender often doesn't care what someone thinks and has no interest in listening to the complaint.

The offended often tell everyone else what has happened, instead of personally speaking to the person who offended them, or, in most cases, they take the matter straight to the church and bypass Jesus' first instruction.

In my experience, if Christians would only follow Jesus' instructions on these matters, all parties involved would save themselves and the church, a whole load of unnecessary strife, stress and heartache. Let's see what Jesus commands to help us keep unity within the church.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke of the innocent party who remembered that someone had a complaint against him, Matthew 5:23-24, and here Matthew informs us that Jesus is speaking about the one who causes the sin in the first place, Matthew 18:15 / Luke 17:3. Notice that the person who has been sinned against must make the first move and go to the offending brother.
One thing which is clear is that if we take Matthew 5:23-24 and Matthew 18:15 and read them together, we see that both parties involved have the responsibility to approach each other.
Both parties have the responsibility of keeping unity between them; both parties must do whatever it takes to keep the peace between them, Romans 12:18. This is why Jesus speaks about 'between the two of you'. In other words, not all faults are or need to become 'public' announcements; some matters can be dealt with privately, 1 John 5:16.
I've heard way too many issues being publicly announced from the pulpit; I've heard too many preachers pointing out someone's sin, especially if they have been affected by it. The pulpit isn't the place to deal with personal issues, 'go and point out their fault,' will always mean 'go and point out their fault', Galatians 6:1-2.

WHAT KIND OF SINS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

'To point out their fault', Matthew 18:15, means to rebuke, convict, reprove him but the rebuke needs to be gently done, not in anger, for man's anger does not accomplish the righteousness of God, James 1:20.
In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Paul teaches Timothy how to treat the brethren if they need to be rebuked. An elder should be rebuked as you would your father, in the same way, Naaman's servant rebuked him for not obeying the Prophet Elisha, 2 Kings 5:12-14.
When a brother or sister speaks reckless words against you to your face, words which damage your character, words which are not true, would certainly be in mind here. Maybe if a brother or sister deliberately causes you physical harm.

These can be things like physical harm, things which cause you to lose your job or affect your health. Maybe it's a sin which involves damage to your property or results in your property becoming lost or stolen.

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF DEALING WITH MATTERS PRIVATELY?

I don't know about you but there have been times in my Christian life when I offended someone, and I wasn't even aware of it, until I heard it through 'the grapevine,' so to speak.

This was a matter which could have easily been avoided if that person had come straight to me, because as it turned out, he totally misunderstood what I was teaching.

We could have settled the issue in minutes if he had come straight to me, so I could explain; instead, he spoke to every other member about it, rather than simply coming straight to me.

In the context of the passage here, Jesus is teaching that the real purpose of the two brothers or sisters coming together is to open the way up for communication because when the two parties begin to speak to one another, hence Jesus says, 'if they listen', Matthew 18:15, it opens up the door to accept the plea for forgiveness from the offending brother or sister.
Shouting and arguing back and forth doesn't do them or the church any favours, and making it public straight away doesn't help matters either. So often, many things can be discussed and settled privately if both parties would simply agree to listen to each other.

If we listen to Jesus' words and put them into practice, the result is unity, peace and winning the offending brother or sister over, but when we ignore Jesus' words and, instead of dealing with the matter privately, we make it public, it makes it so difficult for the offending brother or sister to redeem themselves and make things right.

Yes, if we have been offended, we're left feeling hurt and let down, but do we seriously think that making a public scene about it will make it easier to win our brother or sister over?

Of course not, think about their feelings, think about their reputation. The longer we leave matters, or we just go public with it first, the harder it will be 'to win our brother or sister over', simply because we dealt with it in the wrong way, Leviticus 19:16-18.

DEALING WITH ISSUES WITH WITNESSES

‘But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ Matthew 18:16

It’s clear that Jesus is saying that there may be some occasions when going straight to the offending brother or sister won’t settle the issue, and so, He tells us that the offended should take one or two others with him back to the offender.

The word ‘others’ in the text, Matthew 18:16, should be the word ‘witnesses’ as this adds an important meaning to the text, Deuteronomy 17:6 / Deuteronomy 19:15 / John 8:17 / 2 Corinthians 13:1 / 1 Timothy 5:19 / Hebrews 10:28. There are two schools of thought about the witnesses. Some believe that they were the ones who actually witnessed the sin taking place in the first place, and others believe that the witnesses were there to stand as witnesses to what was being said and the final outcome.

In other words, if the offending brother or sister doesn’t repent, they will be witnesses to this fact. We could also say that having the presence of the witnesses would also highlight to the offending brother or sisters the seriousness of the matter.

Notice so far that the offending brother or sister has now had two chances to make things right, privately, Matthew 18:15, and now with witnesses present. Jesus now takes it to the next level, he says if they still won’t listen, take the matter to the ‘church’.

DEALING WITH ISSUES PUBLICLY

‘If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church.’ Matthew 18:17

THE CHURCH

Interestingly, the church wasn’t established until the day of Pentecost, Acts 2, yet Jesus speaks of the ‘church’ here before it’s established, Matthew 18:17. There are two schools of thought about what the word ‘church’, ‘ekklesia’, is referring to here in these passages.
One suggests that Jesus is speaking about the principles which should be enforced when the church is established, and the other suggests that this is referring to the Jewish assembly in the synagogue.

Whichever side we come down on, we must be consistent with the rest of Scripture. If the offended party hasn’t been able to encourage the offending brother or sister to repent of their wrongdoing, then the matter needs to become public, that is, dealt with within the church, 1 Corinthians 6 / 1 Timothy 5:20 / Titus 3:10.

REMINDER!

All too often, when someone wrongs us, we want to speak to our friends first and really 'set the scene' about what our offender did to us and just how much they've hurt us.

All too often, people go straight to the elders of the church and 'spill it all out' about what's happened. Both of these ways of dealing with someone who offends us are unscriptural.

We must always go to the offender ourselves first and foremost, Matthew 18:15, and if that doesn't work, take witnesses, Matthew 18:16, and if that doesn't work, take it to the church.

DISFELLOWSHIP

'And if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.' Matthew 18:17

This is the result of someone who simply refuses to listen to anyone and admit their wrongdoings; they haven't listened to the offended, they haven't listened to the witnesses, and they haven't listened to the church.

When a person becomes so unrepentant, they've placed themselves in a situation where the church has no choice but to disfellowship them, although the reality is they have disfellowshipped themselves from the church, Ephesians 5:21 / 1 Corinthians 5:11 / 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.
To be treated like a pagan or a tax collector, Matthew 18:17, was interesting because they were both classed as ungodly and dishonest by the Jews in general, so those listening would understand the full extent of Jesus' words. Those who are unrepentant should be avoided, 1 John 5:14-16.

'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.' Matthew 18:18-19

We must remember Jesus isn't going on to speak about something else here. He's highlighting the seriousness of the matter He's just been discussing. In other words, He's saying that what is agreed on by the church on earth, Matthew 18:18, concerning the unrepentant spirit of the sinner, has already been recognised by God in heaven, Romans 16:17 / 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 / Titus 3:10-11.
When the church as a whole, and that's very important that the whole church is involved, withdraws its fellowship from the unrepentant brother or sister, then the sinner can't expect or should even expect to have fellowship with God. We'll deal with how it's done at the end of this part of the study.

There is strength and unity when the church prays together on such matters, Acts 4:24-35, and this is the example of unity we read about throughout the New Testament Scriptures. Unity must prevail even during difficult times when dealing with a brother or sister who is much loved by the church.
Notice that Jesus mentions 'if two of you on earth agree', Matthew 18:19. This again is in reference to unity in prayer, two people praying together. Those who are unrepentant need our prayers; they need God's help. Why? Because of their sinfulness, their eternal destiny is at stake.
We also see the closeness of the relationship between Jesus and His Father. He calls Him, 'my Father', Matthew 18:19, and when He was teaching the disciples how to pray, He said, 'our Father', Matthew 6:9 / Luke 11:2.

SERIOUSLY MISUNDERSTOOD

‘For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.’ Matthew 18:20

Time and time again, I’ve heard Christians say that ‘where two or three are gathered, Jesus is present’, Matthew 18:20. This to me suggests that if we were alone, Jesus wouldn’t be present, but if there were two or three gathered, then someone ‘guarantees’ that God will be amongst us. This is simply not true, Acts 17:28. The church is the body of Christ, which is made up of individual members, and so wherever one Christian is, the church is.
Was he present when the offended party went to the brother or sister who offended them? Yes. Was he present when the offended party took the witnesses along to sort matters out? Yes.

Was He present in His church when His church was left with no choice but to disfellowship the offending brother or sister? Yes. Was he present when the church made the final decision? Yes.

Jesus is simply implying that the agreement of Christians on matters that relate to their unity with one another is paramount. Jesus is ever-present, even when difficult decisions need to be made through prayer.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Church discipline is one of those topics which isn’t spoken about or even taught very often within churches, simply because either people don’t understand the reason for it or don’t know how to enforce it, but in most cases.

Church discipline is mainly neglected and not practised because the leaders feel they don’t want to confront anyone and upset the flock. This, sadly is the downfall of many a congregation.

‘Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’ Matthew 18:21-22

After teaching about the importance of unity within the church, it appears that Peter needed some things cleared in his head. He’s basically asking Jesus, ‘Lord what I really want to know is, how often should I forgive my brother, as many as seven times, is that enough?’ Matthew 18:21. Note that the footnote says, ‘or seventy times seven.’
In Peter’s mind, he was looking to be complemented by Jesus because he was willing to forgive more than most people would. In the Jewish mindset, many Rabbis taught that a man was to be forgiven three times, but no more than three.

And so what Peter did was, he multiplied this number by two and then added an extra one in there just for good measure. And he patted himself on the back and thought to himself, ‘What a wonderful person I am, to be willing to forgive like that.’

Peter was willing to forgive, but his mistake was that he measured himself by human standards rather than by divine standards. Jesus answers Peter and more or less says to him, ‘Peter, you shouldn’t just forgive your brother seven times, but seventy-seven times’, Matthew 18:22.
Now, please don’t misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. He’s not saying, ‘we forgive someone seventy-seven times and when we get to seventy-eight, that’s it, we don’t have to forgive them anymore.’

He’s not saying that, what He’s saying is that a person should always be ready to forgive. It’s not a matter of counting, it’s a matter of conduct, Matthew 6:12 / Matthew 18:35 / James 2:13.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

"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. 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. "The servant fell on his knees before him.' Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go." Matthew 18:23-27

Jesus teaches us three things about relationships, and He's going to reveal more truths about the kingdom of God.

1. When it comes to the divine nature of forgiveness, God is merciful and just.

It's obvious that the king who owns everything is God, Matthew 18:23. The debt stands for sin, Matthew 18:24-25, and the servant stands for all of mankind. And the first thing that strikes you with the King is His pity.
The King couldn't hold His pity back from His servant who had wasted his money, Matthew 18:26-27. And that's because that's the kind of God we have. He is merciful to everyone, Psalm 130:7 / Isaiah 1:18 / Psalm 103:12.
God is willing to forgive all of our sins. Because although He is merciful to us, He is also just in forgiveness. The heart of this parable is that God will not forgive us our sins unless we freely forgive others, Matthew 5:7. Forgiving others is truly a Christian grace.
The Law of Moses didn't obligate a man to forgive his fellow man; the forgiveness of enemies wasn't regarded as a virtue in Israel. But Jesus comes along and says, 'forgiveness is a duty'. Jesus says, 'If someone sins and they repent, then it's your duty as a Christian to forgive that person,' Luke 17:3-4.
We need to be careful not to get involved with their sin, too, Galatians 6:1-2, but if they have truly repented and are seeking forgiveness from you, you can't hold their sin against them. Because all that does is stop that person from learning from their mistakes and stops them from growing into the likeness of Christ, Ephesians 4:32.
There's not an offence which is so great that your brother or sister can commit against you that you cannot forgive. I'm not saying it will be easy to forgive, but what I am saying is that you need to forgive them because we're to forgive each other just as God forgave us, 1 John 1:9.
Remember that the man who has no pity for his fellow man will not get pity from God, Matthew 6:12. That text was never meant to be rehearsed week in and week out. That text was meant to be understood and lived by. God forgives us, we have forgiven others, Matthew 6:14 / Ephesians 4:32.
In other words, we must forgive others before we can be forgiven. Jesus says that when it comes to forgiveness, God's forgiveness and man's forgiveness of each other are inseparable.

"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. "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt." Matthew 18:28-30

2. He says that 'human judgement is always condemning'.

The unmerciful servant has just had all his debts cleared by the master, Matthew 18:27, and this poor guy, who only owed him one hundred denarii, which is around a day's wage, was grabbed by the throat, Matthew 18:28, and this was nothing less than pure heartlessness.
During these times in Greek and Roman culture, it was common practice for a debtor to be taken by the throat and brought before the court to stand trial. You've probably heard the saying, 'he almost choked the life out of me.'

That saying came from the Greeks, and what it meant was that this debtor was going to be made to pay his debt. So what he was basically doing was demanding payment; in other words, he was saying, 'pay me what you owe me!'

And in the unmerciful servant's mind, he's probably thinking, 'honest people pay their debts.' But what a short memory he has, hasn't he?

It was only moments ago that he had 'ten thousand talents' cancelled, Matthew 18:24-27, and yet the text tells us that even though his fellow servant begged and pleaded with him, he didn't listen, and so he had him thrown into prison, Matthew 18:29-30.

The unmerciful servant expected from his fellow servant what he didn't expect from himself. In other words, it's very easy to see other people's faults and failures, but we're so slow when we look at our own. It's in mankind's nature when we judge people, to also condemn them. What did Jesus say about condemning judgment? He said before you go judging and condemning others, take a close look at yourself first, Matthew 7:1-5.

Take a look at your own life and see if you are sinless, Romans 3:23 / 1 John 1:8. Or in the words of Jesus when he's speaking to those who claimed that a woman had been caught in the act of adultery in 'Let you who has no sin throw the first stone,' John 8:7. If only we were as gentle and as understanding and as kind to others as we are to ourselves.

'When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled 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 handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart." Matthew 18:31-35

3. All men are debtors to God.

The unforgiving spirit of the wicked person stirred anger in the heart of the forgiving master. Even those who witnessed the unforgiving spirit of the man were grieved, Matthew 18:31. As a result, he was tortured and put in prison until he could pay off the debt, Matthew 18:32-34.

I don't care who you are or where you're from; you are a debtor to God, and you need to know that, Isaiah 53:6 / Romans 3:23. In other words, man's relationship to God is one of debtor to creditor. We owe much more than we can ever pay. Jesus deliberately chose the two sums of money mentioned in the parable because both amounts are extreme.

Jesus said that 'the servant owed his fellow servant 100 denarii,' Matthew 18:28. A denarii was a Roman coin, which was worth around 5p or 6p, which made the total debt around £5 or £6. But Jesus says, the unmerciful servant owed the king ten thousand talents, Matthew 18:24.

It's hard to imagine just how large an amount of money that was. The talent was worth around £500, so that meant that 10,000 talents would be worth around £5,000,000.

This was a staggering amount of money; it was an unimaginable amount of money. When you read your Biblical history, it's said that Judea, Idumea, Samaria, Galilee and Perea brought eight hundred talents in tax money every year. So this guy's debt was much more than all the tax money brought in from many provinces.

What's the point Jesus is making? The point is simply this: neither guy could pay! And it is the same with our obligation. How much do we owe Him? Because some people believe that they owe Him nothing, and yet they breathe in His air, they enjoy His sunshine and rain, Matthew 5:45, but they never give Him a passing glance or an ounce in return.

Some people acknowledge that they owe the Lord something, but others confess that they owe much. This parable of Jesus screams out and says to each and every one of us, 'You owe the Lord much more than you can ever pay.'

What can we give to God? Shall we give Him some animal sacrifice? We can't give Him animals because He owns the animals, Psalm 50:9-10. Or shall we give Him our lifelong service? Luke 7:10.

So if our debt to God is enormous and if we really have nothing with which to release our obligation, then salvation truly is of divine grace and not of mortal merit, Ephesians 2:8-9. We are debtors because none of us has anything to offer God.

Jesus warns us that we too will be punished if we are not willing to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ, if we're not willing to show mercy to others when we're in so much need of it ourselves, James 2:13.

When our brothers or sisters sin against us, we must forgive them, Matthew 18:35 / Matthew 6:12-14 / Matthew 7:2 / Mark 11:26 / Luke 6:37 / Ephesians 4:32 / Colossians 3:13 / James 5:9.

I don't know if you have noticed, but this parable has many contrasts. For example, there's a contrast between Peter's number and the Lord's number. Peter was willing to forgive seven times, but the Lord said to forgive infinitely, Matthew 7:21-23.

There is another contrast between the two debts. One was almost a silly sum of money, Matthew 18:28, the other was unpayable, Matthew 18:24. And likewise, the wrongs were done to us, and the injuries we receive from our fellow servants are amazingly small in comparison with the magnitude of our sins against God.

And lastly, there is a contrast between the creditors. The mighty king forgave, Matthew 18:27, but the lowly servant wouldn't, Matthew 18:30. If God is willing to forgive the more, then surely we should be willing to forgive the less.

CHAPTER 19

INTRODUCTION

'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.' Matthew 19:1-2

At this time in His ministry, Jesus went south to the region of Judea, Matthew 19:1. In Mark's writing of the ministry of Jesus, this was the only journey to Judea of the three possible journeys that Jesus made during His ministry to this area that was recorded by Mark.

Mark records the final journey. From this chapter onward, Jesus focused on the cross. He prepared His disciples for His final confrontation with the religious leaders and His subsequent victory on the cross. We read that large crowds followed Jesus and He healed them there, Matthew 19:2.

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

"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?" "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 flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "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 sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those

who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." Matthew 19:3-12

The topic of marriage, divorce and remarriage is probably the most debated topic there is within the religious world. There are many sermons, lessons and books written on the topic, some of which are very useful, and others just make the topic even more confusing to understand.

Surprisingly, the Bible really doesn't have much to say about divorce and remarriage; there aren't a lot of references on the subject. You would think, by all the books that have been produced and all the uproar that has been made over it, that the Bible says a whole lot about it, but the Bible says very little.

I think it would be useful if we look at a few passages from the Old Testament where we can highlight some important points. We'll look at these passages again in the wider context later to make further points, but for now, I want to focus on some words in the immediate context. For the purpose of this study, I will be using the N.R.S.V. unless otherwise stated.

PROMOTING DIVORCE!

You might be wondering if I'm advocating divorce; no, I'm not. I believe that marriage is for life and shouldn't be entered lightly, but at the same time, I realise that sin can enter a marriage relationship like every other part of our lives, which may end up leading to a divorce. I'm simply trying to show that some of the doctrines being put forward on this subject are not as straightforward as we think.

CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND AWAY

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, we see that God, through Moses, was protecting the rights of women, and if one thing is clear, it's simply this: divorce and remarriage were happening back in Moses' day.
Moses gives an example of a woman who is married, but her husband isn't happy about something. We'll look at what the word 'objectionable' means later, so he divorces her. She then marries again, and sadly, the same thing happens.

Notice there are two separate actions required in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, 'write her a certificate of divorce' and 'send her out'. Notice again, there are two separate actions mentioned in Jeremiah 3:8, 'sent her away' and 'a decree of divorce'.
The Hebrew word for 'put away' is 'shalach', which means to send away, or out. And the Hebrew word for 'certificate or bill or decree of divorce' is 'kriythuwth', which means a cutting, of the matrimonial bond, i.e. divorce.

Clearly, there are two separate words used to describe two separate actions. Just as there is a legal way to get married, there is also a legal way to get a divorce. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 / Jeremiah 3:8.
Any man who wants a divorce must give the woman 'a certificate of divorce' and then 'send her away', otherwise legally they are still married. They are still married because they haven't got the legal paperwork, i.e., the divorce papers, to prove they're legally divorced.

SEND AWAY

The word ‘shalach’, ‘send away’, is used seven hundred and ninety times in the Old Testament. There are too many to quote, but below are a few examples. Please take the time to read each passage because it will help clarify the point. The English equivalent word is written in blue.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN GENESIS

In Genesis 3:22-23, we find the words ‘reach out’ and ‘sent’, which is the word ‘shalach’. In Genesis 21:14, we find the words, ‘sent her away’, which is the word ‘shalach’.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN EXODUS

In Exodus 2:5, we find the words, ‘sent her’, which is the word ‘shalach’. In Exodus 8:32, we find the word ‘go’, which is the word ‘shalach’.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN 1 SAMUEL

In 1 Samuel 4:4, we find the word ‘sent’, which is the word ‘shalach’. In 1 Samuel 30:26, we find the words ‘he sent’, which is the word ‘shalach’.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN MALACHI

In Malachi 2:16, we find the word ‘divorce’, which is the word ‘shalach’. The Hebrew word used in Malachi isn’t the word ‘divorce’ as the N.R.S.V. translates it; it should be the word ‘shalach’, which means to ‘send away’ or ‘put away’, the K.J.V. renders it correctly.

TWO SEPARATE WORDS

The word ‘shalach’, ‘send away’, has a different meaning from the word ‘kriythuwth’, ‘bill of divorcement.’ They don’t mean the same thing, and neither word certainly means divorce. I simply want us to see that there are two separate words which imply two different actions.

We’ll come back to the Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Malachi passages later and look at them in more depth. I believe this is important to understand and make the distinction between the two words used, as we go on to the New Testament passages which deal with this topic.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE WORDS

In Matthew 5:31-32, we find the words, 'divorces, divorce, divorced'. We will look at these verses in more depth later, but for now, I want to focus on two words again to show that we're dealing with two separate actions.
We saw earlier that the Hebrew word for 'bill of divorcement' is 'kriythuwth', which means a cutting of the matrimonial bond, i.e. divorce. Here in the New Testament passages, we have the Greek word equivalent.

The Greek word for 'writing of divorcement' is 'apostasion', and it means something separative, especially divorce. The Hebrew word for 'put away' is 'shalach', which means to send away, or out.

Here in the New Testament passages, we have the Greek word equivalent. The Greek word used for 'put her away' is 'apoluo' which means to free fully, that is, literally relieve, release, dismiss, reflexively depart, or figuratively, let die, pardon, or specifically, divorce:- (let) depart, dismiss, divorce, forgive, let go, loose, put (send) away, release, set at liberty.

I included the entire entry from Strong's definition of the word, but remember that anything after the ':-' isn't a part of the definition but is merely a listing of ways the word was translated in the KJV.

Also, remember that Strong stated that the first word is the most reliable word, in this case, 'free fully', while the most radical understanding is the last word, in this case, 'specifically divorce'.

Notice again in Matthew 19:1-9, the Greek word used for 'writing of divorcement' is 'apostasion', and it means something separative, especially divorce. The Greek word used for 'put her away' is 'apoluo', which means to free fully. The K.J.V. again makes this clearer.
Notice also in Mark 10:1-12, the Greek word used for 'a bill of divorcement' is 'apostasion', and it means something separative, especially divorce. The Greek word used for 'put her away' is 'apoluo', which means to free fully. Note again that even in the New Testament, there are two separate words used to describe two separate actions. The K.J.V. makes this clearer.
I think it's possible that some sincere people have kind of joined the two words together to make them mean the same thing. This is possibly because of some bad translations, as we shall see later, many times the word 'divorce' has been translated in the Scripture when the word should be 'put away', you see this, especially in the N.I.V., which we'll look at later too.

The Greek word, 'apoluo', 'put away', cannot mean the same as 'apostasion', 'bill of divorcement'. It cannot mean 'divorce', and here are a few examples of why it can't. Here is a list of passages which use the word 'apoluo'. Please take the time to read through them, as it will drive the point I'm trying to make across.

THE WORD 'APOLUO' USED IN MATTHEW

In Matthew 5:31-32, we find the words, divorces, divorced, this is the word 'apoluo'. In Matthew 14:15, we find the word 'away', which is the word 'apoluo'.

THE WORD 'APOLUO' USED IN MARK

In Mark 6:36, we find the word ‘away’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In Mark 6:45, we find the word ‘dismissed’, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN LUKE

In Luke 6:37, we find the words, ‘forgive, forgiven’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In Luke 13:12, we find the words, ‘set free’; this is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN JOHN

In John 18:39, we find the word ‘release’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In John 19:10, we find the word ‘release’ again, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN ACTS

In Acts 3:13, we find the word ‘release’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In Acts 23:22, we find the word ‘dismissed’, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN HEBREWS

In Hebrews 12:23, we find the words ‘set free’, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

‘APOLUA’ TRANSLATED AS DIVORCE

As you have just read, the word ‘apoluo’ appears quite a lot in the New Testament, and hopefully, you noted that only one time in all of these verses was the word ‘apoluo’ translated ‘divorce’.

Please note that the Matthew 5:32 passage is the only occurrence of the word ‘divorce’ in this list and should have been rendered ‘put away’. Other translations, such as the N.I.V., use the word ‘divorce’ and the words ‘send away’, which may be the cause of much of the confusion on the subject.
If ‘divorce’ is the only possible translation of ‘apoluo’ in Matthew 5:31-32, then it must be asked, why would it not be the only legitimate translation in all other uses of the word?
Though context might often affect the appropriate translation of a particular word, it does not necessarily preclude other possible translations. The word ‘divorce’ is a legal term.

In Acts 19:41, we find the word 'dismissed', which is the word 'apoluo'. So, if it's valid to translate 'apoluo' only as such, then we must admit that in Acts 19:41, for example, the entire assembly were married to the town clerk of Ephesus and then divorced by him.
It seems to me that many who support the idea that Matthew 5 is addressing the matter of divorce are perhaps not making a distinction between being separated, without being divorced, and actually being divorced.
The problem Jesus was speaking about isn't primarily focused on 'divorce' but on the 'sending away'. Men were 'sending their wives away' without giving them the 'certificate of divorce', which had devastating results for the women of the time.

They couldn't marry anyone else without this certificate, and if she did, she would end up committing adultery, hence causing the man who 'sent her away' to make her an adulteress. Why? Because legally she was still married, Matthew 5:31-32.

THE BRIDE PRICE AND THE DOWRIES

Jesus is dealing with the real problem, the problem of HOW they were 'sending their wives away'. I believe it all had to do with the dowry. Let's look at these passages, which speak about the dowry: Genesis 29:18-27 / Genesis 34:11-12 / 1 Samuel 18:25 / Hosea 3:2.
In eastern countries, the bridegroom was required to pay the father of his betrothed a stipulated portion, in money or other valuables, proportioned to the rank and position of the family to which she belonged; this was the dowry. This is still practised in many countries even today.

There were two forms of payment made on the occasion of a wedding: first, there was the bride price, and then there was the dowry Exodus 21:10-11 / Exodus 22:16-17.
Both of which were designed to support a woman and her children, should she be left widowed or divorced. The Bible constantly commands God's people to look after the vulnerable in society, especially widows and orphans, Isaiah 1:17 / Psalm 68:5 / James 1:27.
What was the bride price? The bride price was more than money; it was about protecting the woman. If a widow or a divorced woman wanted to be independent, she needed this money to help her in her current circumstances. Women didn't want to be at the mercy of a husband who might or might not provide for her and her children.

The prospective groom gave the bride's father a present, either a sum of money or its equivalent in goods, cattle, land, woven goods, work, etc, we see this in Genesis 29:15-30, where Jacob paid for Rachel's sister Leah with seven years' work.
We see this with David in 1 Samuel 18:25-27, where David paid for Saul's daughter Michal with the grisly gift of one hundred Philistine foreskins. We see this in Judges 1:11-15, where Othniel conquered a town as payment for Achsah.
The amount of this bride price was geared to the status and wealth of the girl's family. It was seen as compensation to the family for the loss of the girl, as well as the means of providing her with certain necessities.

We don't know what the Israelite custom was regarding the disposal of this money, but in Babylon, the goods belonged to the girl. The father was given the interest or other income on it for life, but he wasn't allowed to touch the capital, Genesis 31:14-16.

The purpose of the bride price was to ensure the woman would not be left unsupported if she were widowed. Without a dowry, they could end up destitute. What was the dowry? There are many passages in the Bible relating to dowries, but sadly, specific details are not given.

However, in Babylon, a bride's parents had to make a settlement on her which remained her property even though the husband received the interest from the capital and was entitled to invest the money in business. If a woman was later widowed or divorced through no fault of her own, the capital reverted to her.

Pharaoh gave his daughter the city of Gezer as a marriage settlement when she married King Solomon, 1 Kings 9:16. Rebecca, Leah and Rachel were each given a handmaid as a wedding gift from their parents.
The sum of money or goods was registered in the marriage contract. If it was money that the husband wanted to invest, he contracted to repay his wife the full amount, plus one-third interest. If it was something that would depreciate, such as clothing or household goods, the husband only had to repay one-fifth of the original value.

WHY DID THE JEWS SEND AWAY THEIR WIVES WITHOUT THE CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE?

Do you know why the Jews were 'putting their wives away' without giving them a 'certificate of divorce'? They didn't want to return the dowry; it was going to cost them, Exodus 21:10. It was much easier to just abandon them, to put them away and allow them to go back to their home or fend for themselves and ignore them.
If a man ever gave his wife the 'bill of divorce', then he had some obligations to their wife; he had to return the dowry, and he had to provide for his wife if they 'sent them away'.

This was the Jew's loophole, they 'put them away' without the official 'divorce'. If there is a 'legal divorce', then the husband would be required to return the dowry; the sad news is, he probably would have spent it.

What dowry are we speaking about? It's not the dowry the groom paid to the father, but the dowry that the bride's father gave his daughter as a gift for her marriage. This included servants, Genesis 24:59 / Genesis 24:61 / Genesis 29:24 / Genesis 29:29, land, Judges 1:15 / 1 Kings 9:16.
When the couple are married, the servants, the land, gold, silver, whatever gifts she was given by her father, now become her husband's property. However, if he were to legally divorce her, that is, give her a certificate of divorce, he has a duty, not only to care for her but to return the dowry to her that she received from her father.

The 1901 Jewish Encyclopaedia says the following.

'The dowry that the woman brought to her husband, whether real estate, slaves, or movable property, was recorded in the marriage contract (KETUBAH). Custom decided whether the sum mentioned in the marriage contract should be exactly the same as the dowry was really worth, or more or less. In some places the custom prevailed of recording an amount one-third or one-fifth more than the value of the actual dowry; in others, less than the value of the dowry (Ishut 23:11 / Eben ha-'Ezer, 66:11). This sum then became a claim upon the husband's property equally with the ketubah itself; so that when he died or divorced her, the woman could collect from his estate both the sum stipulated in the marriage contract and the value of her dowry. During the husband's life, however, the dowry belonged to him, and he might derive all benefits from it. He might even sell it for the period of his lifetime. The laws governing the relation of the husband to the dowry vary with the manner in which the woman has acquired that property.'

Jesus is going to imply this later, He basically is going to say, 'husbands have to honour and respect the rights of their wives'. It shocked them in a society where women had no rights because they didn't have to think about this. Hence why the disciples were shocked at Jesus' teaching, Matthew 19:10.
The 'sending away' without the 'certificate of divorce' was also liked by the wives because it didn't require any court case, you didn't need to prove negligence or any other embarrassing details in public, and unless the wife had been unfaithful, she would get her marriage dowry back.

This was often enough to live on, or it would help her get a new husband. Remember Joseph didn't want to go down the court road, to 'divorce' 'apoluo' 'send away', Mary 'quietly', i.e. without a public hearing, Matthew 1:19.

THE EXCEPTION CLAUSE

What about the exception clause? Jesus said anybody who 'apoluo', 'puts away' his wife, commits adultery, Matthew 19:9 / Matthew 5:32. Why? Because he entered into a relationship with someone else, but doesn't have the legal right to do this. Now Jesus says that one can 'put away' his wife without the 'apostasion', without the 'written certificate of divorce', in the case of marital unfaithfulness.
Now, why would that be true? Why does 'unchastity', 'sexual immorality', N.I.V., 'fornication', K.J.V., become the ONLY reason that a man can 'put away' his wife without the legal, official written document of divorce? I believe that the answer to that is very simple. But to understand it, there is something of vital importance that we must remember.

What Jesus is saying is written to a society that was governed and controlled by the Law of Moses. What could be done and would be accepted practice in Jesus' day could never be done in our own culture.

THE DEATH PENALTY

Now under the Law of Moses, the penalty for adultery, for marital unfaithfulness, was death, Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25. Now, quite obviously, if a man 'puts away' his wife because of marital unfaithfulness, legally, technically, she is to die.
Therefore, you DO NOT NEED an 'apostasion', 'certificate of divorce'. You DO NOT NEED to divorce if your wife is stoned to death, just like if your wife were to die naturally, you would be free, 1 Corinthians 7:39.
So, whether that death comes by natural causes or whether that death comes by a violation of the Law of Moses and the penalty is death, the man is free and wouldn't need the 'apostasion'.

But Jesus says, 'I tell you if anyone puts away his wife, commits adultery,' Matthew 19:9 / Matthew 5:32 / Mark 10:11, he puts her away without the 'apostasion', except for marital unfaithfulness, of course. Because then the woman comes under the penalty of death.
Now God's original law was that a man marries a woman, and if that woman committed adultery, then that woman would be stoned to death, and the man would be free to marry again.

By the time Jesus came on the scene, they weren't practising the stoning to death of people who committed 'porneia' or 'marital unfaithfulness', or 'fornication', and it appears they only wanted to stone someone when it suited their own evil purposes, John 8:11 / John 8:48-49.

The Romans had come in and taken over that facet of the law in the first century in Palestine and had taken away from them the right of the death penalty. That's why the Jews had to take Jesus to Pilate to get Him officially condemned and executed, John 18:28-38.

Now, of course, there were some riot acts in the New Testament. Stephen was stoned to death, but that was the result of a riot, Acts 7:54-58, but it wasn't a legal action.

Paul was arrested in the temple, and they were going to kill him, Acts 21:27-40, but again, that was a riot, that wasn't formal legal action. The Romans had taken away from the Jews the right of formal, legal execution for any crime.

Jesus is talking about the Law of Moses. The Pharisees said, what about Moses? Moses commanded it, Matthew 19:7-9 / Mark 10:3. Jesus is saying that if they're going to enter into a relationship with somebody other than the person that God intended for them to marry. They already have a relationship with a person that God expects them to honour.

If their mate is unfaithful to them, if they break this vow, the intimacy of this covenant, then, as far as the Law of Moses is concerned, technically, they are dead. Therefore, they don't need an 'apostasion' because they have dissolved the relationship by virtue of their action; they have violated the covenant.

If you think about it, dead people can't marry, dead people don't marry, and here the guilty party, in the sight of God, is technically dead. That's why God doesn't give them the freedom to remarry; it's a part of their penalty for having transgressed the marital covenant.

In that culture, in that day, Jesus says to a man, 'If their wife is unfaithful to them, technically, she is dead, and you can remarry in that case'. But, if she isn't unfaithful to them, then they have no right to 'put her away'. They've entered into a covenant with her, they've entered into a contract with her, and they are to honour that.

If they 'put her away' without officially dissolving it, without going through legal channels, just like there must be legal channels to have a marriage, there must be legal channels to dissolve that marriage.

If they don't go through the legal channels, if they don't protect the rights of a woman, if they don't see that her needs are met and give the legal document, 'a certificate of divorce', that proclaims to others that she is free of this marriage bond and is free to marry someone else if they just 'put her away', they're committing adultery, that's what He says in Matthew 19.

In Matthew 5:32 and Mark 10:12, Jesus said that when the man who marries the woman who was 'put away' and the woman who is 'put away' remarries, they commit adultery because they aren't in a legal, official situation where they are free to contract new relationships.

They thought they could just go ahead and 'put away' their wives for any old reason, but Jesus says, if they're going to 'put away' their wives, they better make it legal. They'd better give her a 'certificate of divorce'.

Otherwise, whenever any of them marry again, they will be committing adultery, and they know what the penalty is for that, stoning to death, Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25.

TWO DIFFERENT WORDS WITH TWO DIFFERENT ACTIONS

No one would ever argue when Jesus said, 'you must believe AND be baptised to be saved,' Mark 16:16, that Jesus meant the same thing and the same word was used for both. They are two different words which imply two different actions.

When we understand that there are two different words used, ‘certificate of divorce’, ‘apostasion’ and ‘putting away’, ‘apoluo’, which imply two different actions, I believe we can see that the issue Jesus was addressing wasn’t about divorce but about how they were sending their wives away.

They were sending their wives away without the certificate of divorce; this meant the divorce wasn’t legal, and they were still legally married. Notice the word ‘and’ in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 / Jeremiah 3:8 / Matthew 19:7. This is what Jesus emphasised when He said, ‘It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE,’ Matthew 5:31.
If the ‘sending away’ and ‘divorce’ were two separate words used in the Old Testament, what makes the same Greek equivalent words in the New Testament, ‘sending away’ and ‘divorce’, mean the same? They don’t mean the same because they are two separate words with two separate actions implied.

The point is that the Jews had to do both; they had to give their wives the divorce certificate and then send them away. That’s what Moses said in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and that’s what God did with Israel, Jeremiah 3:8.
In other words, just as there was a legal way to get married, there was also a legal way to get divorced. They were just sending their wives away without making it legal, and this is what Jesus was emphasising. Jesus was doing what Moses was doing, protecting the rights of vulnerable women.

DIGGING DEEPER

Let’s go ahead and have a deeper look at all these passages mentioned above to emphasise the point further and try to answer some questions. Let’s turn to Matthew 19 and Mark 10, that’s where we want to start and begin to set the stage.

MOTIVES BEHIND THE QUESTION

1. Let’s look at the attack.

There’s an attack made here on the Lord Jesus. ‘Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him,’ Matthew 19:3 / Mark 10:2. They didn’t come because they were looking for honest answers; they didn’t come because they had some serious questions about marriage, divorce and remarriage.
They came because they wanted to test Jesus, they wanted to attack what He was teaching, and they had two underlying motives in doing that. One of them was to ‘discredit’ Jesus so that He would lose popularity; they see Jesus as a threat. Here is a rabbi who has no official training, He hasn’t been to any seminars, and He doesn’t have a certificate.

He’s not a qualified, certified rabbi, and yet He has a tremendous following. That concerns the establishment, so they are seeking to discredit Jesus, to try to get him to say something that would cause Him to lose favour with the populace, so they would stop following Him. So, they are seeking to discredit Him.

2. They are seeking to ‘destroy’ Jesus.

They are trying not only to get Him to lose favour with the people, but they are trying to get rid of Him. So those are their underlying motivations; they aren't honest in the pursuit of the question that they raised. We have to remember that as we listen to what Jesus has to say to these men.

The Pharisees did have a particular view of divorce; divorce was a volatile issue in the first century, even as it is today. That was very common, very widespread, even among the Jewish people, but there were a lot of disputes over divorce and what would be satisfactory and what wouldn't be satisfactory to God.

SHAMMAI AND HILLEL

Just before Jesus was born, there were two rabbis living who became the most influential rabbis of the day; their names were Shammai and Hillel. Pretty much in the first century, in the time of Jesus, people lined up behind Shammai or Hillel on any given issue. It's kind of like in some churches today, you are either conservative or liberal.

You're either with Hillel or Shammai, one or the other. Who do you stand behind? Fundamentally, what these Pharisees are asking Jesus is, 'Okay, buddy, who do you line up behind?' We can see how they put the people behind them because some will be with Shammai, and some will be with Hillel.

Shammai was the conservative one. Let's read a section from the Mishnah, which is the collection of the oral traditions of the Jews, the oral law that you hear so much about.

A couple of hundred years after the time of Jesus, one of the rabbis realised that they were forgetting all this accumulation of oral knowledge, all the oral laws that the people were expected to keep. Because Jerusalem had been destroyed in 70 A.D. and the centre of Judaism had been destroyed, they began to write it down.

'The School of Shammai says a man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, because he has found in her indecency in anything.' Giteen, chapter 9, section 10. And the School of Hillel says, 'He may divorce her even if she spoils a dish for him, for it is written that he has found indecency in anything'. Rabbi Akebah says, 'even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written if she has found no favour in his eyes.'

This is a discussion these rabbis had based on Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and we will get to that later, but the point is that Hillel and Shammai had two opposing points of view. They also mentioned Rabbi Akebah, who didn't live until after 100 A.D., so what he said doesn't bear on the discussion here.
Rabbi Shammai says, 'The only reason for divorce is if you find unchastity, if there is marital unfaithfulness on behalf of your partner. If you find sexual infidelity on behalf of your marriage partner, then you may divorce.'

Hillel, on the other hand, said, 'No, it says in Deuteronomy 24, if you find indecency in her in anything.' You notice the text said, 'she had prepared a dish that he didn't like. Oh, dear, you scrambled these eggs. I wanted them fried, divorce her!
In other places, it's said that Hillel said, 'if she talked to a man in the street, that was a legitimate reason for divorcing her'. 'If she turned around too quickly so that her legs became exposed, that was a reason for divorcing her'. 'If you didn't like your in-laws, good enough reason, divorce her.'

Hillel has a much more generous interpretation of what the Old Testament said about the basis for divorce. So, people of the first century were lining up behind one or the other, and the Pharisees came to test Jesus, to find out with whom he stood, Shammai or Hillel, and in so doing, they could turn the people against him.

After all, the majority of the people followed Hillel, who had the liberal interpretation that any old reason you could think up was an adequate reason for divorce.

Now they have already heard Jesus address the subject of divorce and remarriage before, in Matthew 5:31-32, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made a statement about it.
They have already heard about this; that's why they can come up with this test question, because they know Jesus has taken a conservative approach, and they can turn the majority of the population against Him. Remember, that is their motivation.

We need to see what it was that Jesus said back in the Sermon on the Mount that became the basis of what the Pharisees are going to use against Him or try to use against Him. When you read Matthew 5:31-32, ask yourself, which of those two rabbis does that sound like? Sounds like Shammai, doesn't it?

DO THE TWO WORDS MEAN THE SAME?

I think it is important to understand the distinction that I believe existed in the first century. The N.I.V. follows many other translations in using the word 'divorce', which I believe is a mistranslation and leads to an erroneous conclusion. Remember what we learned earlier: there are two distinct words used in the Bible that we need to be familiar with.

In the Old Testament, there is the word 'shalach', and it means 'to send away, to drive away, to drive out'. We saw that its corresponding word in the New Testament would be the word 'apoluo', which means to let loose, to set free, to send away, to drive out. The other word we looked at earlier in the Old Testament is the word 'keriythuwth', which means 'a divorcement'.

We saw that its corresponding word in the New Testament will be 'apostasion'. Now, here we have 'send away' or 'put away' for the first word I mentioned, 'shalach' or 'apoluo'. The second one, 'apostasion', means 'divorcement'.

What happens is that these two words, both Old and New Testament words, become sort of blended, and we accept them as meaning one and the same thing.

Part of the problem comes from the fact that if we were to read all of the passages in the New Testament that deal with divorce and remarriage, and we found the parallel passages, the ones that read the same, as just one test, we would find that Jesus uses the word 'apoluo' ten or eleven times.

The King James Version translates it every time when it is 'apoluo' as 'put away' with the exception of one time. Here in Matthew 5:32, the word occurs twice and the second time they translate it as 'divorce'. Every time the word 'apostasion' occurs in the New Testament, it will be rendered 'divorce'. Now there is a difference; they aren't the same.
In the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, there is only one divorce recorded. Did you know that? For all we have talked about it, for all the instruction in the Bible, in the word of God, there is only ONE divorce recorded. Do you know who it is?

In Jeremiah 3:8, God says, 'I have divorced Israel,' which is the only time. You have information about divorcing and remarrying, but that is the only time that we know of in Scripture when somebody divorced somebody, when God says, 'I divorced Israel.' In Jeremiah 3:8, it's the word 'keriythuwth', the word that in the New Testament is rendered 'apostasion'.

But we know from reading the Old Testament, for example, that men put away their wives. Men had more than one wife, and David had several wives. Abraham is another example, he was married to Hagar as well as Sarah, Genesis 16:3. Now look at what he did, 'he sent her away', Genesis 21:14. She was still married to him, technically, but he didn't fulfil any husbandly responsibilities to her.
What we have in effect then is that our word 'apoluo', which means 'to send away' or 'put away', becomes 'practical divorce.' But 'apostasion', which literally means 'a bill of divorcement', becomes 'legal divorce', and this is an important distinction.

We need to see this in Scripture. There were men who were putting away their wives and marrying somebody else, but they never gave their wives a legal divorce; therefore, she had no legal right to marry again.

In each instance, with one exception, Matthew 5:31-32, the word is 'apoluo' or 'to put away', or maybe we would say 'abandon' on some occasions. A man abandons his wife and then goes out and marries somebody else. What would we call that? Bigamy, right? He technically, legally has two wives.
Jesus says, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce,' Matthew 5:31. Now, see what I'm saying? Here were men who were putting away their wives, not legally, they weren't finalising it. They didn't go to court; they didn't give her the written certificate that legally sets her free.
Jesus says, 'Anyone who puts away his wife must finalise that process. He must give her a certificate of 'apostasion', a certificate of divorcement. I tell you, anyone who puts away his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery.

And anyone who marries a woman who has been put away commits adultery,' Matthew 19:9 / Matthew 5:32. Why? Because it hasn't been legalised, the man put her away; he sent her out. He didn't want anything else to do with her. Why didn't he want to legalise it?
As we noted earlier, he might have to pay dowry. It's just easier to put her on the back shelf and not have anything to do with her and marry someone else he liked more. Polygamy in the Old Testament is a big problem; even in the first century, there is evidence of polygamy.

Jesus understood that there were practising practical divorce, but if they are going to practically divorce somebody, they better legally divorce their wives. Because if they marry somebody who has been practically divorced, but not legally divorced, they are committing adultery.

It's not just a matter of divorce; it's a matter of whether this thing has been made official or not. I believe that this is an important distinction to make between these two words.

They were proclaiming that they don't commit adultery, but Jesus tells them that they are propagating adultery all over the land, Matthew 5:27-28. Do you know how you do it? They put away their wives without giving her a bill of divorcement, they put her away without making it official, and then they go out and marry someone else.
They needed to know that when they marry someone else without officially having separated from their first wife, they commit adultery, and anybody who marries her, who has been put away without having been officially separated with a bill of divorcement, commits adultery. Because they would now have two legally binding marriages for one person, and that's wrong. That's what He is talking about, Jesus uses a different word.

Is divorce sinful? Or is it the sending away without the divorce papers? If a couple divorces for adultery reasons and the 'guilty' party then remarries, do they have to leave their new wife and return to their former wife? Matthew 19:9 / Matthew 5:31-32.
A simple diagram may help us out here.

Here we have a man, let's call him Mark and a woman, let's call her Sue. Right here in this chapter, Jesus says if this woman, Sue, is sent away and she marries another man, let's call him Ben, the result is adultery. Why? Because she was abandoned or sent away, and she wasn't given a bill of divorcement. It's not legal.

Another diagram may be useful.

Now, we would assume also that if Mark, then, marries a woman who we will call Beth, the same thing would be true, but that's an assumption that would be adultery, based on this verse because Jesus doesn't say that in Matthew 5:31-32, or Matthew 19:9.

We'll get to that later, but here in Matthew 5:31-32, and Matthew 19:9, He doesn't say that Mark and Sue is a case of adultery. This position that we just looked at here in Matthew 5:31-32, and Matthew 19:9, is a teaching that Jesus made, you can't put your wife away unless it was for marital unfaithfulness.

That sounds a whole lot like what Shammai said; it's very unpopular, and that spread like wildfire. The Pharisees heard that back in Matthew 5, and they came to Jesus in Matthew 19, knowing they could use this teaching to turn the people against Him.

One time, John the Baptist had something to say about divorce and remarriage, and it cost him his head, Matthew 14:3-4. It's here that we see the Pharisees thinking, they thought, they could probably do the same thing with Jesus. They thought they could get people turned against Him if they could just test Him and expose Him and get Him to make a commitment on this thing.

JESUS' RESPONSE

They have come with the question, 'Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife 'apoluo' for any old reason?' Can he send her away? Matthew 19:3 / Mark 10:2. And Jesus responds to their question.

Jesus, in making His defence, goes back beyond Himself, He goes back beyond Hillel and Shammai, He goes back beyond Moses, and He goes all the way back to the creation, Matthew 19:4-6 / Mark 10:6-9. And he's going to make four points of defence as to why you shouldn't put away your wife.

All they bothered about was divorce, divorce, divorce; they were always talking about divorce. Why and how can they get a divorce? Jesus tells them that God didn't even think about divorce when He made man and woman.

And we can imagine Him thinking to Himself, why don't they talk about permanency? Why don't they talk about what they can do to keep this thing together? Why are they always talking about why and how we can put her away?

FOUR REASONS

These are the four reasons that Jesus gives why they shouldn't even be concerned about this issue.

1. Because in the Genesis account, there was one man for one woman, Matthew 19:5 / Genesis 2:24.
Jesus was very clear. In the Garden in Eden, God didn't create Adam and Eve and Ethel. He didn't say, try it with Eve, and if that doesn't work, try it with Ethel.

If Adam had put away Eve for any old reason, if he had said, 'You ate from the tree, I'm going to put you away,' the Bible would have ended on page two; that would be the end of it. One man created for one woman, that was God's original design.

2. He says that there is a strong bond made, Matthew 19:5.
He says, 'a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,' Matthew 19:5 / Genesis 2:24 / / Mark 10:7. A strong bond, the word for 'united' means to be stuck fast, to be glued to, it's a bond that is being made.
The Jews were always talking about ways to break the bond. They should have been talking about how strong the bond is to stay together. Here again, we are talking about the ideal.

We talked about the permitted; we'll talk about the exceptions later, but right now, Jesus is calling these Jews back to a discussion of the ideal. There will be a uniting of husband and wife, a strong bond.

3. He said, 'They will become one flesh', Matthew 19:5 / Mark 10:8 / Genesis 2:24.
In the sight of God, there formerly were two personalities, but Jesus says in marriage, those two become one. One is the indivisible number; if you divide it, you get a half, and that's not a number.

One is a whole number; it's the first whole number, you can't get any less than that. Jesus says that when God made Adam and Eve, He made them to be one. For that reason, you shouldn't try to break that bond because you end up with something less than a whole person in the sight of God; that's the way God meant it.

4. The last reason that Jesus gives is that this whole marriage business is the work of God, Matthew 19:5.
Notice, He says, 'therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate,' Matthew 19:5 / Mark 10:9 / Genesis 2:24. It's not just some registrar official, it's not just something that a minister does, it's not even a decision that you make.
In the final analysis, when a marriage takes place, that marriage is the work of God; in the mind of God, they are one. In the mind of God, that oneness should not be broken; God intends for that oneness to be formed and to stay oneness.

It is the work of God, and to divorce is to wreck the work of God without His permission. He is the one who bound them together; if He wants to set them free, He sets the rules for setting them free. He does it.

The Jews want to talk about divorce, practical divorce, but Jesus won't let them get away with that. Jesus talks about marriage. He goes all the way back to the beginning to stress the permanency of this relationship. All they talked about was reasons to divorce, instead of speaking about reasons to stay together. Jesus refuses to deal with the issue that they want to deal with.

WHEN IS A MARRIAGE A MARRIAGE?

I think it is important to ask the question when is a marriage a marriage because there seems to be a lot of confusion on this. What makes a marriage? How do I know that a marriage has taken place?

There is a point of view that says, 'when a man and a woman have a sexual relationship, at that point, they are married'. Because people believe that, then they say that if a single man out there goes to bed with a single girl in the sight of God, they are married because they had sex, and sex makes a marriage.

If that were true, you couldn't have 'fornication'. You could have a marriage, but you couldn't have 'fornication'. The Bible does recognise fornication; it does recognise sexual activity outside the marriage relationship that God says is illegal. If simply having sex made one married, God would talk about marriages, but He wouldn't talk about fornication, so the Bible does recognise it.

More evidence comes from Exodus in the giving of the law to Moses. Exodus 22:16-17 says if a man finds a woman who isn't even engaged to be married and he sleeps with her, he has a moral obligation to go to her dad, pay the bride price and marry her.
If her father says, 'No way! We don't want to be hooked up with your family. You still have to pay the bride price because you've dishonoured her, but no wedding takes place.'

We must remember that it's not just a daughter marrying a man; it was the union of two families back then. This man couldn't turn him down if the marriage had already taken place automatically because of the sex act. That gives me evidence that marriage isn't made by sexual activity.

Furthermore, adultery doesn't dissolve a marriage. Some people think that if they're married and their husband or wife goes out and sleeps with someone else, that means the marriage has ended.

That's not the case; it may give the innocent party freedom to divorce, but that doesn't mandate it, nor does it automatically end a marriage. It's important to recognise that.

In Malachi 2:14-16, we find that the Israelite men had been adulterers, but they still had the wives of their youth. God calls on them to be faithful to the wives of their youth. If adultery destroyed marriage, they would not have the wives of their youth anymore. God says you need to be faithful to your wives.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A MARRIAGE?

In the Old Testament and the New Testament, and even today, marriage is constituted by the covenant. Marriage is the coming together of two people who pledge a lifelong commitment to each other. God says, 'Remember the wife of your youth with whom you entered into a covenant,' Malachi 2:14.
It's the entering into a covenant; it's the intentional choice to blend your life with hers. Whatever that covenant is will vary from culture to culture. In some countries, there are different things that you do.

Maybe you take a pig and give it to the girl's father, so he'll give you the girl and a written contract is made, and it's official. In other cultures, you can buy a wife; that's a part of a covenant.

Whatever it is, when you meet those agreements, then in the sight of God and in the sight of the law of the land, you are married; you have intentionally entered into that arrangement. Jesus says that marriage should be viewed as permanent, that's the way God intended it, that's the ideal.

THE IDEAL

What happens if we don't measure up to the ideal? What happens when there is a failure? What does God say about that? What are we to do? The Pharisees come to Jesus, and they ask him, 'Is it lawful to 'apoluo,' is it lawful to put away your wife for any and every reason?' Matthew 19:3 / Mark 10:3. After all, that was the practice in their culture. We know from the Talmud that polygamy was exceptionally widespread among the Jews in the first century; it was being practised. The Talmud is very clear that it was expected of a rabbi that he have only one wife. The high priest, specifically stated in the Talmud, 'a man could only have one wife, but the average person could have more than one'.

So, polygamy was practised; a man would find something he didn't like about a wife and become displeased with her, so he would simply send her back to her father.

There would be no legal divorce, and, in that culture, he could do that. In our British culture, that can't be done, there are specific legal specifications that must be met for a divorce to be recognised in this culture and for remarriage to take place without there being bigamy or polygamy. But, not so in Jesus' time.

In Biblical days, a man could simply send his wife away; he could stop meeting her emotional needs, her sexual needs, her financial needs; he could send her back to her home and go out and contract a new marriage, and it really didn't matter. So, 'apoluo' became 'practical divorce', while 'apostasion' was 'legal, official divorce'.

Jesus had commented on this back in Matthew 5. 'It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce 'apostasion', Matthew 5:31.
Jesus was saying, 'anyone who divorces his wife, 'apoluo' except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced 'apoluo' woman commits adultery,' Matthew 5:32.
How does He do that? Because he hasn't given her the 'apostasion', he hasn't given her a 'legal certificate of divorce' and anybody who marries that woman who has been put away, who didn't get the legal divorce, who didn't have that 'written bill of divorcement' in her hand, anyone who would marry her also commits adultery because he's forming a relationship with a woman who, in the eyes of God and, technically, in the laws of the land, is still married to someone else.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus took a very conservative point of view, so they came here in Matthew 19:3 / Mark 10:2, on the attack. They are looking to discredit Jesus; they are looking perhaps to destroy Him, to turn the masses against Him and perhaps to use His teaching against Him, as John the Baptist found his teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the situation with King Herod to work against him.
Jesus gives a reply, which we read in Matthew 19:4-6 / Mark 10:8-9, where Jesus goes back beyond their culture, back beyond the Law of Moses, back to the creation.
They were always looking for loopholes; they were always looking for ways to get around things. But God has a design, and that design is permanency in marriage.

They were always looking for ways to break things. They always wanted to know how they could put their wives away for any and every cause, but God said they should stick together with their wives; they ought to be united as one, be one flesh in the sight of God.

THEIR ARGUMENT

The Pharisees began to press Jesus, and they came up with an argument. Their question to Jesus is, 'What does the Law of Moses say?' Matthew 19:7 / Mark 10:4. Why did Moses command us to give our wives a certificate of 'apostasion' and then send her away?
Jesus had been teaching that permanency in marriage is the most important thing. They ask, why did Moses talk about divorce? Why did he talk about this certificate, this legal, official thing of divorce?

Jesus will have an answer for this argument in just a moment, but let's think about what's behind the words of the Pharisees. The Pharisees didn't practice divorce; rabbis were discouraged, as I mentioned earlier, but as a general rule, people in the first century, including the Pharisees, did practice the putting away of their wives.

Their rationale was based on Deuteronomy 24:1-4. That is the only place in the Law of Moses that speaks of divorce. Let's go for a moment to Deuteronomy 24 and find out what Moses said.

MISTRANSLATION

There is a great misunderstanding; the Pharisees misunderstood it, and that misunderstanding continues even today. If you have the King James translation of the Bible, you will find that it has a mistranslation. In fact, its mistranslation is so bad that it leads to a misunderstanding of the passage altogether.

Now, the problem here comes in the fact that the word 'then', which occurs in Deuteronomy 24:1, in the King James translation, doesn't occur in the Hebrew text.
The word 'then' draws a conclusion, and it makes it sound like Moses is saying, 'If a man marries and finds something that he doesn't like about his wife, THEN let him divorce her'. But a point of fact is that it isn't what Moses said; the word 'then' doesn't occur in the text until Deuteronomy 24:4.
In the New International Version, the New American Standard Version, and perhaps in others, it's correctly translated in Deuteronomy 24:1. So, if you aren't using the N.I.V. or the N.A.S.V. or a translation that has correctly translated this passage, read these four verses very carefully together. Moses is speaking to the people. In fact, this is the only place where he gives them insight into this situation of divorce and remarriage.
Now, notice the King James Version has this saying, 'If a man marries and if he becomes displeased with his wife, THEN let him give her a bill of divorcement', but that's not what Moses said. Deuteronomy 24:1-2 is written without any comment, without any editorialising, without any approval or disapproval. Moses simply says the following.
'If a man marries, if he becomes displeased with that wife, if he gives her a certificate of divorce (Moses didn't say whether that was right or wrong, he simply said if he does that), if she goes out and marries husband number two and if husband number two divorces her or if husband number two dies, THEN, (here is the conclusion). God said that a woman cannot go back to her first husband; she cannot remarry her original mate, it's an impossibility. Moses goes on to say it is an abomination in the sight of God. So, Moses didn't command a 'bill of divorce'.

He simply assumed that a 'bill of divorce' was being given. If it were given, if the woman were legally divorced and she goes out and marries again, then she cannot under any circumstances ever go back to her first husband. God said that it is morally objectionable to Him; it's an abomination in His sight.

WHAT DOES UNCLEANLINESS MEAN?

But what does 'uncleanness' mean as the King James renders this? What does 'indecency' mean in Deuteronomy 24:1 as the N.I.V. has it? It's the Hebrew word, 'ervah', and that's really where the Pharisees got hung up, they tried to figure out, what is this 'indecency' that allows him to give her a bill of divorce and send her away so he can marry someone else.
Again, the debate between Hillel and Shammai comes in here. Shammai took a very conservative point of view; he believed it was fornication or adultery. Hillel, on the other hand, took a much more liberal view; if he finds any uncleanness in her, any indecency in her, then he may put her away.

Hillel said that indecency could be something like talking to men in public, spinning around so that her legs could be seen when she was out in public, or maybe cooking a meal that he didn't like, maybe she scrambled his eggs when he wanted them fried, anything about her that she did, whether it was actions, appearance, attitude, if it displeased the husband, Hillel said that was enough justification to get rid of her. He said you can put her away, you can give her a bill of divorcement and send her out.

Well, what is this uncleanness? What did Moses have in mind? I'm not exactly sure, and to be honest, nobody knows; nobody is positive, the Pharisees debated it, and we debate it today.

However, there is something very interesting back in Deuteronomy 23, just prior to what Moses said here in Deuteronomy 24. It's interesting because we find this same Hebrew word used, 'ervah', in Deuteronomy 23:14. The word 'indecent' is the same word that is used in Deuteronomy 24:1. In Deuteronomy 23, in context, it's a reference to human excrement.
God says that He is going to come down and walk in the camp of the Israelites, and He doesn't want to be stepping into that. When they go out, He wants them to dig a hole, relieve themselves and cover it over. He doesn't want to see that indecency.

Moses says, 'Now if a man marries a wife and he finds some indecency in her (something shameful, something vile, something corrupt, something that is a tremendous embarrassment to the husband) and he writes her a bill of divorcement and sends her away.' Deuteronomy 24:1. N.I.V.
Even Moses doesn't pretend that it's a light-hearted matter, it's something vilely immoral to the man, something terribly offensive. But may I say, with all confidence, that it's not adultery. Shammai contended that it was adultery.

I don't believe it is for the simple reason that in Deuteronomy 22, two chapters earlier, God said that the penalty for adultery is death, not divorce, Deuteronomy 22:22-24.
If a husband found some indecency in his wife and God meant by that, indecency in adultery, the solution wouldn't be divorce under the Law of Moses; it would be death.

This implies the indecency must be something short of adultery, something short of marital unfaithfulness. Whatever it is, it was something vile and terribly offensive to the husband.

Moses says if a man marries and his wife does something horrendously vile, offensive, and embarrassing to him, and if he gives her a bill of divorce and sends her away and if she marries somebody else, then he never, never, never can remarry that woman again.

No matter if he comes to forgive her and love her and wants to return to her, God says that it would be an abomination in His sight. Now that's what is behind what the Pharisees had to say when they started talking about Moses commanding them to write a certificate of divorce.

JESUS' ANSWER TO THEIR ARGUMENT

Remember, we are talking about 'apoluo', putting away a wife without giving her an official, legal certificate of divorce. They want to know, can we put them away for any reason?

The Pharisees are thinking, if God is so interested in permanency in marriage, why did Moses command us to divorce our wives? Matthew 19:8-9 / Mark 10:5 / Mark 10:11-12.
Notice what Jesus says in Matthew 19:8. Jesus is going to tell them that Moses 'allowed' it, Moses never 'commanded' it. You will not find anywhere, not even in Deuteronomy 24, nor anywhere in all the Law of Moses, where Moses commanded people to divorce.
In Matthew 19:8, Jesus replied, 'Moses ALLOWED you to divorce.'
In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Moses assumes that was what was happening, that there already was a certificate of divorce, but Moses didn't command it. Moses did recognise it, though, he did allow it.
Jesus said, 'Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard,' Matthew 19:8 / Mark 10:5. In other words, they wouldn't consent to live with the same woman; they wouldn't consent to honour God's arrangement in the marital relationship.
It's the hardness of their heart that kept God from forcing the ideal on them, so there is the ideal of permanency, but then, there is the divorce, which is 'allowed'.

God did tolerate them putting away their wives with a legal certificate of divorce and then marrying someone else. But, Jesus said, 'it was not this way from the beginning', Matthew 19:8 / Mark 10:6. God didn't tell Adam, if you don't like Eve, then give her a bill of divorcement.
From the beginning, God's intent was for permanency, but as through sin men became corrupt, as men became hardened and rebellious, as they were determined not to honour the ways of God, God gave them the arrangement of divorce, that is, He 'allowed' it, permitted it. It wasn't His pleasure, and it didn't please Him. It wasn't what He really wanted, it wasn't the ideal, but God did recognise divorce, He did allow it.

Notice carefully what Jesus says. Anyone who puts away his wife has committed adultery, Matthew 19:9 / Mark 10:11. Why is he putting her away? Possibly because he wants to marry someone else, yet he doesn't have the right in the eyes of God to marry that other person because he hasn't given his first wife the certificate of divorce, 'apostasion'. He hasn't taken care of her.
They didn't want to return the dowries their wives were given by their fathers. The certificate of divorce was going to cost them. It was much easier to just abandon them, to put them away and allow them to go back to their home or fend for themselves and to ignore them.

If they ever gave them the certificate of divorce, then they had some obligations; they had to provide for their wives and children's needs if they sent them away, but this was their loophole; they put them away without the official divorce.

THE DISCIPLES REACTION

The very thought that what Jesus was saying brings the disciples to a very surprising conclusion; it shocks them, Matthew 19:10. Is it possible that a person who has a 'bill of divorcement' is really free to marry again? Now, traditionally, some have said, 'No!' The only reason you could divorce your wife, or your husband, was because of 'marital unfaithfulness'. That doesn't seem to be what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is saying if they 'put them away', they must make it an official divorce for them to be able to marry again. It seems to me that if our traditional position is the correct one, then we have jeopardised the integrity of God because God is the only one in all of the Bible who is ever said to have divorced someone and given them a bill of divorcement.

Israel had chased after pagan gods, they had chased after false gods, and they had entered into a covenant with God. They said, You'll be our God, we'll be your people, but they opposed that, not just once, but many, many times.

They were unfaithful to God, and so God said, 'I gave them a certificate of divorce,' Jeremiah 3:8. When he sent her away then, he had the freedom to marry another.
The bride of Christ today is the church, but if divorce is wrong, if giving a certificate of divorce and marrying someone else is wrong, then we have jeopardised God, it would appear to me, because God Himself is the only illustration in Scripture of anybody who divorced.

He didn't do it just one adultery, He did it for many adulteries, Jeremiah 3:8, many, many occasions. He held on as long as He could with the people, but they wouldn't come around. This again is about the hardness of the people's hearts, their inability, and their lack of desire to be loyal and faithful to God.
We saw earlier, Matthew 19:1-9 / Mark 10:1-12, that Jesus uses two different words in the text, one word that could properly be translated as 'putting away', which is 'apoluo', meaning 'to send away' or 'to abandon'.
Then he uses the word 'apostasion', which is the legal document, certificate of divorce, granting a divorce. On the basis of the fact that there are two different words used to describe two different actions, the distinction should be maintained.

Jesus says, if they put their wives away if they don't make it legal and they go out and marry somebody else, they commit adultery because they have married a second person when they are still married to the first person. Therein lies the problem.

Back in Matthew 5:31-32, we saw the other side of the coin: if a man sends away his wife without granting divorce and she marries somebody else, then she commits adultery, and the man who marries her commits adultery because, legally, technically, she is still married to her first husband.

WHY WERE THE DISCIPLES SHOCKED?

All of this raises a question on the part of the disciples; they are in absolute shock, Matthew 19:10. What is it that shocks the disciples when Jesus says to them, 'you can't just send your wife away'?
There has to be a legal procedure before you are free to marry someone else. If there is a legal divorce, then the husband would be required to return the dowry his wife was given by her father.

Jesus is saying they have to honour and respect the rights of their wife, Exodus 21:10. It shocked them in a society where women had no rights because they didn't have to think of that.
They could just send their wives away for any old cause as far as they were concerned. Now Jesus says, no, they can't do that; they have to respect their wives. They have taken her into their home, they have married her, and they can't just dismiss her.

If they're not going to live with her, they must give her an official, legal divorce, whatever that might cost them, whatever they have to struggle with, whatever consequence that brings into their lives, they have to respect their wife

as a woman and meet her needs and meet her rights and legally set her free so she can marry someone else without incurring the charge of adultery.

I think there is something else here that shocks the disciples. Jesus says, if they send away their wife without giving her a legal divorce and they marry somebody else, they commit adultery.

What does the Law of Moses say about committing adultery? The disciples realise what Jesus was saying: death is the penalty for adultery! Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25. They realise that if that's the situation between a husband and wife, it's better not to marry.
When we read Matthew 19:11-12, we must bear in mind that Jesus isn't talking here about the person who has never been asked to be married. Nor is He talking about the person who asked someone to marry them, but was turned down when He talks about singleness here. He's talking about people who are single for three different reasons.
1. Congenital.

They were born that way; their sexual organs were dysfunctional, so they have no sexual drive. They have no real need to be married to satisfy that desire, so they don't get married. Jesus says some people are born that way.

2. Castration.

They were made that way by men; kings in ancient society used to do that a lot. They had their harems, and they didn't want the man in charge of the Harem messing around with the women, so they castrated them so they would lose sexual desire, and they could do their business without being attracted to the women.

3. Commitment to God.

They want to serve the kingdom of God without being tied down to a wife and the responsibilities and time commitment that would take. So, by choice, they remained single.

Jesus said, 'not everybody can accept that', Matthew 19:11. God designed man to be married, but when a man marries, here are the requirements that Jesus says he must meet. He cannot dismiss his wife for any old reason in the book and go out and marry someone else.
If they dismiss their wife, they must give her a certificate of divorce. If they don't legally divorce her, they commit adultery when they remarry; she commits adultery when she marries, and the one who marries her commits adultery because they have never legally been divorced.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PUTTING AWAY AND DIVORCE

If this distinction stands up between 'putting away' and 'divorce', then the only conclusion that I can come to is that God has NO regulations about reasons for divorce.

Jesus is saying, if they put their wives away, they better give them the 'apostasion', they better make it legal, so she can have the certificate and show anybody else that she has the right to marry again.

If they put their wives away, if there is separation, if there is abandonment, then they must give them the legal certificate of divorce, or they are going to incur adultery, and she will incur adultery when there is remarriage.

IS DIVORCE A SIN?

I think we can also come to the conclusion that Jesus doesn't condemn 'divorce' as a sin. Many people teach that divorce is a sin, but the Bible doesn't say that. Where does the problem come from in this text? Does it come in the divorce? No! It's in the remarriage that the problem is; the problem comes in the remarriage. Jesus says they can't remarry unless there has been an official divorce.

I'm sure some people will still ask, what about that passage in Malachi 2:16, in the Old Testament, where God says, 'I hate divorce'? He said, 'I hate shalach', which we now know means 'putting away'.
I hate putting away, God says. Why? Because they hadn't granted their wives the 'apostasion', they hadn't given them the 'keriythuwth', they hadn't given them the legal certificate.

God says He hates it when they just abandon their wives. He hates it when there is separation, and they don't meet her financial needs, her emotional needs, her sexual needs, and her psychological needs.

They just put her on the shelf and forget about her. And she doesn't have the right to go out and marry anybody else who will meet those needs. God says I hate that. If the husband is going to separate from her and abandon her, give her a divorce, make it official, so she can remarry. God says, 'I hate the putting away', not I hate divorce.

Even if Jesus is talking about legal divorce all the way through, He says the problem comes when one divorces his wife and then marries another. The person who divorces and marries another commits adultery. Isn't that what He said? However, by default, we could say if a person divorces and never remarries, they have not sinned in the sight of God; therefore, divorce is not a sin.

IMAGINE!

We know that there are women out there who are severely abused by their husbands; they beat them unmercifully. He's not a Christian and has no desire to treat her right. He has literally broken her bones at times while abusing her.

And finally, after having struggled through all that and trying to make that marriage work for the sake of her own emotional and mental health, she divorces him.

Would God say to her, 'That's wrong, that is sin'! There are some who would say, 'yes', and some would say, she must stay with her husband, or if she does leave him, she can't divorce him!

I don't believe for one moment that God penalises a person who is trying to do what is right. Some suggest that a person who was married but got divorced, not for unfaithfulness or adultery, must go back to her original husband. This would go against what God said through Moses back in Deuteronomy 24:1-4; this would be detestable in God's eyes.
It's really difficult speaking to anyone about divorce because we know that God wants permanency, but I believe that Jesus recognised that at times, sin enters into people's marriages as it does into people's lives.

Divorce is not what God wants; it's less than ideal, but God allows it. God permits it, but to say that they aren't free to marry again is reading into the text something which Jesus never said, Matthew 5:31-32 / Matthew 19:9 / 1 Corinthians 4:6.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the two words ‘apoluo’ and ‘apostasion’ mean different things and that Jesus is talking about ‘abandonment’ or ‘separation’ and remarriage without legal divorce from the first person. To do that means that one commits adultery when they form a second union to which they have no right because the first union still exists.

You see, slavery wasn’t what God wanted. He didn’t create slaves in the beginning, but He allowed it. He didn’t want a man to have more than one wife. He created Adam and Eve, and that’s all, but He did permit it, right?

Abraham had several wives, David had several wives, and Solomon had several wives. Others had several wives. God never came to David and said, ‘All right now, David, you have to give up all your wives except the first one that you married.’ He never said that, it wasn’t what He wanted, it wasn’t the ideal, but it was permitted.

God never wanted divorce, but He did permit it. Jesus spoke to people who were under the law of Moses, in a covenant relationship with God and as a part of that covenant, they had certain terms, certain conditions that they were to meet that flowed over into their marriage.

What about the Gentiles who weren’t under the Law of Moses, who didn’t have any special specifications laid out? Does God have any directions for them? I believe He does, and Paul addresses those questions in 1 Corinthians 7.
In Matthew 5:21-32 / Matthew 19:1-9 / Mark 10:2-12, Jesus deals with the problem of ‘abandonment’. He says, ‘If a man puts away ‘apoluo’ his wife, ‘if he abandons her’, he must give her a certificate of divorcement ‘apostasion’.’
The man must make it legal. If he puts her away, but he does not make it legal, and she marries somebody else, she is committing adultery. If he marries another woman without having put her away legally, he commits adultery. There must be a legal, official termination of the marriage for there to be freedom to remarry.

Paul comes along and says in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 that it would be better to stay unmarried for several reasons. In the present crisis, they can give devotion to the Lord, which will keep them from getting trapped in a relationship with an unbeliever who would make it difficult for them to function properly.
But he says if the pressure is there, the sexual, emotional, and psychological needs are there to be fulfilled, and they must have them fulfilled, and he says to get married.

In 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, he tells the divorced and the widows that they can get married, and he tells the virgins in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 that they can get married.
He tells the man who is engaged to the virgin that he can get married, that may not be the best thing to do because of the present crisis, but they can do it and do it in a way that will honour God, have a marriage that will uphold His ideals. Then he says that where both are believers, they mustn’t contemplate divorce; they must do all they can to maintain that marriage.

If they are married to an unbeliever, if they become converted after they are married, they are to maintain that marriage because it’s an acceptable marriage to God.

If the unbeliever terminates it, it’s terminated; it wasn’t what they wanted. They didn’t pursue it, they didn’t ask for it, they terminated it. Therefore, they aren’t bound in such circumstances.

This is the height, breadth, length, and width of what the Bible has to say about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The Christian has an ideal to uphold; the Christian looks to save the marriage, strengthen the marriage, and make the marriage last.

But sometimes marriages break down, sometimes sin enters the marriage relationship, and Jesus gives us the guidelines for what to do when that does happen.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN AND JESUS

'Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked 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.' Matthew 19:13-15

The disciples never seemed to want Jesus to be bothered, so they were constantly trying to keep certain kinds of people away from Him, Matthew 19:3 / Mark 10:46-52. In this case, it was children and notice the disciples actually rebuked those who brought the children to Jesus, Matthew 19:13 / Mark 10:13 / Luke 18:15.
When these children were brought to Jesus, He took them into His arms and blessed them, Mark 10:16 / 1 Corinthians 14:20 / 1 Peter 2:2. These children were simply brought to Jesus for blessing and prayer, a practice which was common in Israel, Matthew 19:13.
When the disciples hindered those who brought the children from coming to Jesus, Mark records that Jesus was greatly displeased, Mark 10:14. When Jesus saw that they were hindering the children from approaching Him, He was indignant and rebuked them, Mark 10:14.
He was greatly displeased because the children represented the nature of those who would accept His kingdom's reign in their hearts, Matthew 19:14 / Mark 10:14-15 / Luke 18:17. He said that the kingdom of God itself belongs to people who become like children, Matthew 19:14 / Mark 10:14-15 / Luke 18:16-17.
He took the young people into His arms and began to bless them, then left, Matthew 19:15. He always had time for children, Matthew 19:15 / Mark 10:16. As Christians, we need to have the same submissive attitude toward our heavenly Father if we want to receive eternal life, James 4:6-7 / 1 Peter 5:6-7.
The humility of a child should always be the characteristic of the disciple of Jesus, we should always be willing to serve and put others before us, not thinking too highly of ourselves, Matthew 18:4 / Mark 10:35-45 / Luke 9:48.
Jesus wants disciples who are humble like a child, free from prejudice like a child, teachable like a child, lovable as a child, He wants His disciples to have the same simple faith of a child, trust like a child, He doesn't want His disciples to worry about anything but trust their Father and He wants His disciples to be as innocent as a child.

THE RICH YOUNG MAN

'Just then, a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good." Matthew 19:16-17

This event is recorded in Matthew 19:16-30 / Luke 18:18-30 / Mark 10:17-31, but it's in Mark's account that we find the most detail concerning the event. Jesus and His disciples were leaving the region of Judea and heading towards Jerusalem when a young man ran up to Him and fell before Him, Mark 10:17.
The young man who addressed Jesus was rich, Matthew 19:22 / Luke 18:23 / Mark 10:22. He was doing well for himself; he was the kind of man everyone in society would look up to and strive to be like.
We must remember that he was a ruler with some position in society, Luke 18:18. He was a young man with responsibilities and status. This is important to understand because these positions were what James and John sought, Matthew 20:20-28 / Mark 10:35-45.
This is what this young ruler had but could not give up. There must have been something about his religion which was lacking; he knew something wasn't right with his religion.

Later, we see that he had been obedient to the law, Matthew 19:20 / Luke 18:21 / Mark 10:20, and he was a 'good' person, but still something wasn't missing from his life.

He was honest with himself and humble enough to call Jesus a 'good teacher', Luke 18:18 / Mark 10:17, which was a sign of respect. We know He was concerned about his own spiritual welfare because he ran up to Jesus requesting information on how to receive eternal life, Matthew 19:16 / Luke 18:18 / Mark 10:19; he was honestly looking for answers.

JESUS ANSWERS THE QUESTION REGARDING ETERNAL LIFE

Mark's and Luke's accounts leave out something very important. In Matthew's account, notice the young man asked Jesus, Which commandments? Matthew 19:17-18. This is very important to understand, as we shall see in a moment. Before we get into the text, let's address a question which is often raised.

IF JESUS WAS GOD, THEN WHY DID HE SAY, NO ONE IS GOOD EXCEPT GOD ALONE?'

The young man who addressed Jesus was rich, Matthew 19:16-30 / Luke 18:23 / Mark 10:17-32. However, we must also remember that he was a ruler with a position in society. The positions for which James and John sought in the following case of Mark 10:35-45 are what this young ruler had but could not give up.
The young man wanted to know how to receive eternal life, Matthew 19:16 / Luke 18:18 / Mark 10:17. In other words, he was asking, What must he do to be saved? Which is the question the disciples asked, Matthew 19:25 / Luke 18:26 / Mark 10:26.
He did everything right since he was a young man, including keeping the last six of the ten commandments, Exodus 20:12-17. However, he failed to keep the first and greatest of the commandments to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,' Matthew 22:37-38.
The one thing he lacked was giving up his wealth, Matthew 19:20-21 / Luke 18:22 / Mark 10:21. He loved money more than God, Colossians 3:5. His wealth had become his security, Matthew 19:23-25 / Luke 18:24-25 / Mark 10:23-25.
Everett, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jesus wanted this man to understand that no one could achieve salvation through good works, not even a Jewish "teacher." Thus, Jesus said that there was no one that was good except God, Isaiah 64:6.'
The question, if Jesus was God, then why did He say, 'no one is good except God alone', is often used by people to try to disprove the deity of Christ. There are two possibilities for how to answer this question. Jesus could be saying, don't call me good because He isn't good or at least not as good as God the Father, or He means something a lot deeper than we think.

Notice that Jesus never says He is not good, but the rich ruler recognises He is. The rich ruler calls Jesus 'good teacher', Luke 18:18 / Mark 10:17. Jesus asks the rich ruler, 'Why do you call me good', and then He says, 'No one is good, except God alone', Matthew 17:19 / Luke 18:19 / Mark 10:18.

Jesus is saying either I am God and good or I am neither God nor good. Or put another way, Jesus was saying if you address me as a 'good teacher', then I can't help you, for no man is good. Only as God can I do anything to help you, Matthew 19:26 / Luke 18:27 / Mark 10:27.
Jesus wanted the young man to acknowledge Him as God. He wanted the rich ruler to see Jesus as God, who is good, not a mere good teacher. Jesus' question was designed not to deny His deity, but rather to draw the rich ruler to recognise Christ's divine identity.

It's clear that Jesus was testing the young man when He said, 'no one is good, except God alone', Matthew 17:19 / Luke 18:19 / Mark 10:18. Jesus wasn't denying His deity; He wanted the man to acknowledge His deity.
If he genuinely believed Jesus is God, Hebrews 1:3, instead of walking away sad, he would have followed Him to secure his eternal inheritance, Matthew 19:21-22 / Luke 18:22-23 / Mark 10:21-22.
Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

'What he is doing is trying to awaken the consciousness of this man to the fact that he has received a divine revelation. He is getting close. "Why did you call me good?" The reason why you called me good is because you, though you don't realise it, have recognised something about me.'

CONCLUSION

How can Jesus be God if no one is good except God alone? Think about it this way. Jesus claims only God is good, but the rich ruler and Jesus also claim that Jesus is good, and so, common sense tells us that Jesus is claiming to be God.

If Jesus is good, what does that make Him? It makes Him God, 1 Chronicles 16:34 / Psalm 25:8 / Psalm 119:68. After all, He is the Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, John 1:1-3 / John 1:14 / Philippians 2:5-11. He said, 'I AM the Good Shepherd', John 10:11.

JESUS ANSWERS THE QUESTION REGARDING ETERNAL LIFE

"If you want to enter life, keep the commandments. "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'" Matthew 19:17-19

Notice that at this point, Jesus doesn't answer his question regarding eternal life, but what He does do is address the man's comment about Jesus being 'good', Matthew 19:17 / Luke 18:19 / Mark 10:18. We see that the real problem which people were facing was simply this: how can sinful people approach an all-good God? John 14:6 / Romans 7:24-25.
Erdman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Jesus' response to the young man.

'The perfect goodness of God was a universal doctrine of Judaism, and it is evident that the Lord was here building the young man's thoughts toward the recognition of Jesus as God. It is the equivalent of our Lord's saying, 'Look, don't you know that if I am good, as you say, then I am therefore God?'

Notice that Jesus only quoted the last five of the Ten Commandments, Matthew 19:18-19 / Luke 18:20 / Mark 10:19 / Exodus 20:12-16 / Deuteronomy 5:16-20. Why did He not quote the first five commandments?
It's clear that Jesus was trying to lead this young man into a deeper understanding of the truth, by not quoting, 'love God with your heart, mind, soul and strength', Deuteronomy 6:4-7 / Matthew 22:37-40 / Mark 12:30-31 / Luke 10:27, implies that the young man wasn't obedient to these commandments, but had no real problem keeping the others.
In other words, the young man won't receive eternal life simply by keeping only part of the law, he couldn't receive eternal life by law-keeping, and he couldn't save himself, no matter how obedient to the law he was, James 2:10. What's the point in keeping any of the law, if you don't love God with everything you've got.

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" 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." Matthew 19:20-21

Matthew gives us more information at this point. The young man asked Jesus a very important question. 'What do I still lack?' Matthew 19:20. If his question tells us anything, it tells us that he's honest with himself and sincere regarding his question about eternal life.
Notice the young man ticked all the boxes, 'yep Jesus, I haven't broken any of the commandments you've quoted to me', Matthew 19:20 / Mark 10:20 / Luke 18:21. I can imagine Jesus looking at this young man with a smile on His face. He loved him. He loved his honesty, and He loved his sincerity. What a refreshing change from those who were always trying to oppose Him.

ONE THING LACKING

Jesus loved the young man enough to tell him the one thing he lacked in his life, Matthew 19:21 / Luke 18:22 / Mark 10:21. He still lacked one thing, Philippians 3:6-7, he was good, but he knew that he still lacked something, Acts 10:1-6 / Galatians 3:21. The problem with the young ruler wasn't with his outward appearance of religiosity, but with his heart.
In order to come into a right relationship with God, this particular rich person had to relieve himself of that which emotionally kept him from dependence on God. He was self-sufficient in his riches and self-confident in his performance of the law from youth.

He, therefore, felt that he didn't need to trust in the grace of God. If he wanted to receive eternal life, he first needed to be right with God and for him to be able to do that, he had to give up the very things which he treasured most in his heart, his possessions, Matthew 19:21 / Luke 18:22 / Mark 10:21. He had to learn to depend on God rather than being self-sufficient and self-confident to receive eternal life.
Because Jesus tells him to 'go and sell everything he has and give it to the poor', Matthew 19:21 / Luke 18:22 / Mark 10:21, this tells us that Jesus saw in this man's life the very thing which was lacking from this man's life. It suggests that Jesus saw that this guy was greedy and all he cared about was himself and his wealth, Matthew 6:19-21.
He was to sell all that he owned, give the proceeds to the poor, and start following Him, Luke 12:33 / Acts 2:45 / Acts 4:34-35 / Acts 12:12 / Acts 21:8. He must be willing to sacrifice to follow Jesus, Matthew 19:21 / Luke 18:22 / Mark 10:21, in the same way the other disciples did, Matthew 9:9 / Mark 10:28.

TOTAL SUBMISSION

Anyone who wants to be a follower of Christ must submit to God's will to receive eternal life. For the young man, this would mean not only giving up his possessions but giving up his position as ruler, and as we read next, these sacrifices were just asking too much of him.

"When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth." Matthew 19:22

Jesus always knew what was in the hearts of people. He knew them better than they knew themselves, and for this young man, his problem was in his heart. Notice that he didn't get angry with Jesus, he didn't get all self-righteous with Jesus, he simply dropped his face and went away sad, Matthew 19:22 / Luke 18:23 / Mark 10:22.

FACING THE REALITY

I can imagine this young man coming to Jesus, thinking he was right with God, thinking he had been obedient to God all his life, thinking that he only had to make a few small adjustments to his life to receive eternal life, only to come face to face with the reality of the condition of his own heart.

The man really wanted eternal life, but not at this great price. Incidentally, this is the only account in the whole of the Gospels where Jesus commands someone to 'follow Him', and the command is rejected.

Like so many people who come to Jesus for salvation, they long to be saved, but when Jesus points out the costs involved, they too leave sad because they just can't bring themselves to sacrifice so much in order to follow Him, Matthew 19:21 / Luke 18:22 / Mark 10:21 / Luke 14:25-33.

THE DISCIPLE'S REACTION

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Matthew 18:23-25

Notice that Jesus didn't say 'it's impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God', He said it's 'hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God,' Matthew 19:23 / Luke 18:24 / Mark 10:23.
The reason it is hard is simply because of what has just happened with the rich young ruler. The rich had a tendency to trust in material possessions and not in God.

They believed that one's wealth was a sign that God was working in one's life; they were wrong. The earthly treasures are more important to them, and their wealth and position in society are just too much to sacrifice, Luke 18:24-25 / Matthew 6:20 / Matthew 13:22 / 1 Corinthians 1:26 / 1 Timothy 6:9-10.
Notice also He calls them 'children', Mark 10:24, and then gives them an illustration which even a child can understand the impossibility of it, a camel going through the eye of a needle, Matthew 19:24 / Luke 18:25 / Mark 10:25.

No one is sure where this figurate phrase originated, but some do believe it may have been taken from a gate in the walls of Jerusalem that were so small that it was difficult for a camel to enter. Whatever the source of the metaphor, the principle is still the same: it's difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples ask Jesus a question, 'Who then can be saved?' Matthew 19:25 / Luke 18:26 / Mark 10:26. It seems the disciples were in shock, not so much with the rich young ruler's leaving but with Jesus' teaching to the rich young ruler.
Remember, the Jews believed that if someone was rich, then that meant that they were highly favoured by God, but they were even more highly favoured by God if they kept the commandments.

The disciples must have looked at the rich young ruler and thought, 'Wow, God has richly blessed him; he must be a prime candidate for eternal life!' They must have thought, as many of the Jews did, if this young, rich ruler couldn't be saved, then who on earth can be saved?

Now obviously the Jewish thinking was wrong, the disciples' thinking was wrong because no one can be justified before God by keeping the law, because all sin, Galatians 2:16.
It's a sad fact that many people follow in the rich young ruler's steps; they desire eternal life, as long as they don't have to make too many sacrifices. Jesus referred to these people when He remarked about how difficult it is for those who are rich to enter heaven.

"Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, 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 wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." Matthew 19:26-30

Jesus tells them that God and God alone has the power to let people see the foolishness in trusting in their wealth instead of trusting in God, Matthew 19:26 / Luke 18:27 / Mark 10:16 / Romans 1:16. Even some of the Old Testament heroes who were abundantly rich had to trust God instead of their riches, Luke 13:28.
Peter also asked a question, 'What then will there be for us?' Matthew 19:27. Peter and the others indeed left everything to follow Jesus, Luke 18:28 / Mark 10:28 / Matthew 4:20 / Luke 5:11, but here Peter is wondering what he will receive for such a sacrifice as leaving everything behind to follow Jesus.
The shock of Jesus' teaching really got Peter thinking about his and the disciples' situation. They obviously didn't understand what Jesus was teaching, and so, Jesus answered him with three promises.

They will be blessed with numerous earthly possessions, their families will multiply a hundredfold, and they will receive the greatest reward of all, eternal life, Matthew 19:28-30 / Luke 18:29-30 / Mark 10:29-31.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the disciples sitting on thrones and becoming judges of the twelve tribes, Matthew 19:28.
'From the parallel place, Luke 22:28-30, it is evident that sitting on thrones, and judging the twelve tribes, means simply obtaining eternal salvation, and the distinguishing privileges of the kingdom of glory, by those who continued faithful to Christ in his sufferings and death.'
Jesus says that those who leave these family relationships and possessions in order to follow Jesus will receive a hundredfold in this life, Matthew 19:29 / Luke 18:29-30 / Mark 10:29-30.
Jesus says, 'many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first', Matthew 19:30 / Mark 10:31 / Luke 13:30 / Matthew 20:16. This simply means that just because you choose to follow Jesus before others, it doesn't mean you'll stay faithful to Jesus to the end; others who come later may well remain faithful to the Lord.

A good example of this is Judas, who was one of the first among the apostles, and Paul, who was the last of the apostles. Judas didn't remain faithful to the end, but Paul did, and so in this example, we see that Judas actually ended up being last and Paul ended up being first.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the first and last, Matthew 19:30 / Mark 10:31.
'The Jews, who have been the first and most distinguished people of God, will, in general, reject the Gospel of my grace, and be consequently rejected by me. The Gentiles, who have had no name among the living, shall be brought to the knowledge of the truth, and become the first, the chief, and most exalted people of God. That this prediction of our Lord has been literally fulfilled, the present state of the Christian and Jewish Churches sufficiently proves. To illustrate this fully, and to demonstrate that the Jews and Gentiles were now put on an equal footing by the Gospel, our Lord speaks the following parable, which has been unhappily divided from its connection by making it the beginning of a new chapter.'

CONCLUSION

As Jesus talked to the rich man, He observed that he lacked only one thing; he only needed to get rid of his possessions. It became obvious that Jesus had properly diagnosed the man's need because the man was unwilling to do so; he indeed was valuing his possessions over the Lord.

To follow Jesus, we must give up anything in our lives that is more important to us than He is. Interestingly, this man lacked only one thing. Some people have the idea that one sin is not all that bad; they think that while they may be failing in one area, at least they serve the Lord faithfully in all the others. This story shows clearly that even one thing can keep a person from being accepted by God.

I can only imagine what the rich young ruler must have thought if he had heard Jesus' three promises to the disciples. Maybe he would have thought twice, maybe he would have followed Jesus.

Sadly, it was these three blessings he actually turned away from. He forfeited his soul for wealth and his position of power, Mark 8:36. Is there one thing in your life that's stopping you from following Jesus?

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

"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." Matthew 20:1-2

THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

In 'The parable of the wicked tenants', we see how God left them in charge of His vineyard and gave them everything they needed to do the work required within it, Mark 12:1-2.
In this parable, we're going to see that everyone He calls upon is entitled to work in His vineyard. No matter where they're from or when they decided to listen to His call.

The issue in this parable isn't how long the people worked in the Lord's vineyard. The issue in this parable is the spirit in which the work was done. Notice that there are two types of workers in God's vineyard.

1. Those who came to an agreement with the master, Matthew 20:1-2.
They said they would work for Him if they were given the right amount of money. So these first labourers were given a contract, a denarius for a day's work.

"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. "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.'" Matthew 20:3-7

2. We have those who came to work for Him later, Matthew 20:3-7.
The difference between these guys and those who had an agreement is that they were thankful and glad just for the chance to work. And their pay wasn't an issue because Jesus said, 'He would pay them what was right,' Matthew 20:4.
It's sad when people think they will only work for God if they get paid enough for it, and although some get financial support to come and work with a congregation, that doesn't mean that they have to do all the work, just because they get paid for it. That's not the point of this parable because they didn't get their pay until their work was finished, Matthew 20:8.
Remember that Jesus isn't talking about actually receiving a denarius when we get to heaven, Matthew 20:2 / Matthew 20:9-10. He's revealing a spiritual and moral truth to His disciples. He's saying that your reward will be the same as any Christian, and that reward is eternal life.
A Christian doesn't work in God's kingdom for the money; a Christian works in God's kingdom for the joy, Proverbs 10:27-28 / 1 Peter 1:8-9. It's a joy to serve and work for the Lord. We all work for Him because of the joy we get out of serving our Lord in His kingdom.
Remember it's God's vineyard, Matthew 20:1; it's God who dishes out the wages, Matthew 20:8-9. He's the one doing the hiring, Matthew 20:1-7; it's His work that's being done. You're the worker, and He's the owner.
These men who were standing in the marketplace weren't being lazy, hanging around the street corners wasting their time. They didn't have a local job centre to go to like we have today. The marketplace was the place to go to find work, Matthew 20:3-7.
A man would go there first thing in the morning with his tools, and he would wait until someone came along and hired him. And so some of them would get hired first thing in the morning, but others would wait all day to get some work.

Some men worked only a few hours, and some men worked all day. And when I say all day, I don't mean a 9-5 job. I mean, these guys started at 6:00 am and finished at 6:00 pm. And even though work usually finished at 6:00 pm, some of these men would still be waiting until 5:00 pm hoping to get a job, Matthew 20:6-7.
Jesus said the landowner went in the morning, Matthew 20:1, then the third hour, Matthew 20:3, and then the sixth hour, Matthew 20:5, and then the ninth hour, Matthew 20:5, and then finally He went again to the marketplace at the eleventh hour, Matthew 20:6. This shows how desperate they were, they were still there waiting in the marketplace, desperate for work.

"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." Matthew 20:8-10

3. This parable also tells us about 'the generosity of God', Matthew 20:8-10.
These men didn't all do the same work, but they did receive the same pay, at the end of the day, Matthew 20:8-10 / Deuteronomy 24:15 / Leviticus 19-13 / Job 7:2 / Malachi 3:5 / James 5:4. These workers were grape pickers to a degree. And the grapes in Palestine would always be ready for harvest and be ripe around the end of September. And it was always a race against time to get the grapes in before the rains came. And so because of this, anyone who was willing to work was welcome to work at this time, even if they could only give an hour or two's work, Mathew 20:6-7 / 2 Corinthians 10:12.
Each man was given a denarius, Matthew 20:10, which was around a day's wages for a man back then. And so because a job was hard to come by, getting a job for a day's wages sometimes meant the difference between living and starving.
But God knew that a denarius was no great wage. He knew that if the workmen went home with less than a denarius, there would be worried wives and hungry children.

This parable tells us that God goes beyond justice and gives us more than we're due. Justice says that we deserve to die in our sin, but God goes beyond justice and offers us eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ, Ephesians 2:3-5.

"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.'" Matthew 20:11-12

And when it comes to God's justice and the way He gives His grace to people, there are two great lessons to be learned.

1. All service ranks the same with God, Matthew 20:11-12.
It's not the amount of service that counts but the love in which it is given. You can always tell the people who think they deserve more from God than their fellow brothers or sisters in the kingdom of God, Matthew 20:11-12. You can tell because they grumble a lot, and people are always grumbling against God.
Not only in today's world but also in the Biblical world, Exodus 16:2. And even after they received the Promised Land, they grumbled, Psalm 106:24-25. We shouldn't grumble about the amount of work a Christian is doing or not doing in the kingdom.
We should be patient and grateful for the little work that they're doing, James 5:8-9. God doesn't look at the amount of work given, so long as our service is all we have to give. All service ranks the same with God.

"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? 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Matthew 20:13-16

2. All God gives is grace, Matthew 20:13-16.
We cannot earn what God gives us, we cannot deserve it, and we cannot put God in our debt. People are always trying to put God in their debt; people are always trying to say to God who deserves to go to heaven and who doesn't.

Some people appear to have always been God-fearing people, but people aren't born Christians; they are born again Christians. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3-8 that people need to be born again to enter the kingdom in the first place.

Peter says that you need to be born again to be purified, 1 Peter 1:21-23. Purified from what? From our sin, all Christians have a history because nobody comes to the cross, sinless.
When we look down at others with that superior attitude, He will say to us what God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry?' Jonah 4:4 / Jonah 4:8. He will just say to us what He said in the parable, 'Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' Matthew 20:15.
When it comes to inheriting eternal life, nobody is going to get ripped off, whether they've been a Christian for one day or fifty years. We all know that Jesus' disciples were the first Christians in His church, and in Acts 2:41, we find that others were added and became a part of His church. And in Acts 5:14, we find that even more people were added and became a part of His church.
But Jesus' disciples had to learn a hard lesson: 'first come doesn't mean first served'! Matthew 20:16. And so Jesus explains what He meant when He said to His disciples about their position of honour in Matthew 19:26-30. But the point that Jesus is telling them is that the disciples couldn't claim any special place of honour just because they were Christians before anyone else.
There's a big lesson for the church today, mentioned in Matthew 20:16, isn't there? Too many people, just because they have been members of the Lord's church for many years, think that the church partially belongs to them.
They think they can dictate and control what goes on within the church. In the church, authority doesn't necessarily mean honour. I'm not saying don't honour those who have been in the Lord's church for many years, because the Bible teaches us that we should honour those who are older in the faith.

I'm saying just because you've been a part of the kingdom longer than some other people, it doesn't make you more important than any other Christian. No matter where you come from or when you became a Christian, you're of equal worth to God as any other Christian. But the point is that it doesn't matter if you've been a Christian for one hour or forty years, you're of equal worth to God in His kingdom, Galatians 3:26-28.
That was the problem the Jews had; they knew that they were God's chosen people, and they never forgot that. And it's because of this that they continually looked down on the Gentiles. They hated and despised the Gentiles and hoped for nothing but their destruction.

And so to a Jew, if the Gentiles were going to be allowed into God's kingdom, then they must come in as inferiors and on their terms. In Acts 15:1, we find some Jews saying to the Gentiles that they must be circumcised. We also know that the apostle Peter found this difficult to deal with, Galatians 2:14.
The Jews were willing to allow the Gentiles into God's kingdom only if they were circumcised and followed their traditions. And that spirit hasn't changed much in some religious circles, has it? Some people think they are more favoured in God's eyes because others don't match up to their level of spirituality.

There's no master race in Christianity, 'all are one in Christ Jesus' as Paul reminded us in Galatians 3:28. Instead of looking around at each other and wondering who's doing what in the kingdom. Maybe we should be looking out for those who are eager to work in the kingdom.
Instead of following the ways of the world, people turned and started following the ways of Christ, Galatians 5:21. So now that we understand why we needed saving so much because of our sinful lives, we should never say that no one is good enough for God's kingdom, Romans 3:22-24.
What God gives us is given out of the goodness of His heart, out of His grace. And what He gives us isn't pay, but a gift, not a reward but a grace. Grace is amazing, and it's a gift of God so that no one can stand before God or other people and say, 'look how great I am, look what I do as a Christian'.

It's a gift which cannot be earned by yourself, so that no one can boast, Ephesians 2:8-9. And it's available to everyone who is willing to obey the Gospel call of Christ.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A THIRD TIME

'Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, "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!" Matthew 20:17-19

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, and on the way, he took the Twelve aside, Matthew 20:17. For the third time, Jesus warned the disciples about what was going to happen when they got to Jerusalem. On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus prepared the disciples for what was about to happen in all their lives, Matthew 10:17 / Mark 10:32 / Luke 18:31.
He tells the disciples that in Jerusalem, He would be delivered over to the chief priests and teachers of the law, and it would be they who would condemn Him to death, Matthew 20:18-19 / Isaiah 53 / Mark 10:33 / Luke 18:32. Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen to Him, Matthew 16:21 / Matthew 17:22-23.
He knows that He will be handed over to Sanhedrin, Matthew 26:15, and He knows He would be handed over to the Gentiles, Matthew 20:19 / Mark 10:32-33 / Matthew 17:22-23 / Luke 18:32, that is, the Romans to be mocked, spat upon, flogged and crucified, Matthew 20:19 / Matthew 27:2 / Acts 2:23 / Acts 3:13-15 / Acts 4:27 / Acts 21:11.
Jesus knows He suffers all the humiliation of a common criminal. Flogging was a means of a whip, which was made up of broken bones or sharp stones that were tied at the end of a binding of numerous strips of leather.

He talked here about His death and resurrection, Matthew 20:18-19 / Mark 10:33-34 / Luke 18:32. The good news is that Jesus also knows that He will rise again on the third day, Matthew 20:19 / Mark 10:34 / 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, despite His disciples being saddened by Jesus even speaking about His death, Matthew 16:21-28 / Luke 9:22 / Luke 18:31 / Luke 24:46.
In Luke's account, notice that the disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant by His word because it was hidden from them, Luke 18:34.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'It was not hidden in that Jesus did not want them to understand. It was hidden because of their reluctance to accept it.'

A MOTHER'S REQUEST

'Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour 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." "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. Jesus 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." When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 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." Matthew 20:20-28

Jesus had just finished giving the disciples a detailed description of the suffering He would experience there in Jerusalem; meanwhile, James and John were imagining a different scenario. The future of the disciples still rested in their misunderstanding concerning the kingdom's reign of Jesus.

They were still thinking that the kingdom would be something of this world, Acts 1:6. And because they were thinking of the reestablishment of national Israel, their understanding of leadership in the kingdom was twisted.
The occasion sparked an opportunity for James and John to reveal what was in their hearts. Since Jesus spoke of His departure from this world, James and John realised that leadership must be assumed, Mark 9:33-34. They are seeking positions of power and influence in this physical kingdom, Luke 17:20-21 / John 18:36.

WHO MADE THE REQUEST?

It seems that their mother, Salome, Matthew 20:20 / Matthew 27:56 / Mark 15:40 / John 19:25, accompanied James and John and made the request as if were her own but in reality, it was from James and John because Jesus goes on to address his answer towards James and John and they, in turn, continue to demonstrate it was actually their request as we will see later, Mark 10:37.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the request mentioned in Mark 10:35.
'Mark 10:35, says that James and John made the request but Matthew says, Matthew 20:20, the request was made by Salome their mother; the two places may be easily reconciled thus: The mother introduced them, and made the request as if from herself; Jesus knowing whence it had come, immediately addressed himself to James and John, who were standing by; and the mother is no farther concerned in the business, Matthew 20:20.'
Remember that James and John's father was Zebedee, Matthew 20:20, who was a very influential man and the reason we know this is because when Jesus was going through His trials.
John 18:15 tells us that John was known to the high priest and went with Jesus into the courtyard. Not everyone had access to the Jewish leadership, but because John did have access, this tells us that his family must have been influential in Jesus' day.
The reason for mentioning Zebedee and his influence is simply to suggest that this may be the reason why James and John come to Jesus with the request in the first place.

In their mind, they know what it's like to be influential; they know people in 'high places' so to speak, maybe they thought out of all the disciples, they were the best two for the leadership role when this new kingdom is established.

Notice also that they're wise enough to come to Jesus privately, as they knew the other disciples wouldn't be too happy about it, Mark 10:41. Jesus gave a detailed description of the suffering He would experience there in Jerusalem, Mark 10:32-34, but James and John were imagining a different scenario. They asked Jesus to agree to do whatever they would request, Mark 10:35.
The request is made, Mark 10:35, probably by their mother on their behalf, Matthew 20:20. James and Johns mother's name is Salome, Mark 15:40 / Mark 16:1, she is the wife of Zebedee, Matthew 4:21 / Matthew 10:2.
She came to approach, possibly on behalf of her sons, to ask Jesus about special positions of power in the kingdom, Matthew 20:20. They wanted to know if Jesus would agree to their request, Matthew 20:21 / Mark 10:31.
Jesus asked what they wanted, Matthew 20:21 / Mark 10:36.
Jesus already knew what was on the two disciples' minds, as He knows all things, John 2:25 / Matthew 9:4, but He asked them what He could do for them because their request was going to demonstrate to them what was going on in their own hearts. It was going to demonstrate that once again, they didn't understand the nature of Christ's kingdom.
Jesus wasn't going to sign a blank cheque by agreeing before they made the request. They replied that they wanted to sit on Jesus' right and left hand, that is, they wanted the chief positions in His administration, Matthew 20:21 / Mark 10:37. The place of honour was the seat on the right and the place of second honour was the seat on the left, 1 Kings 2:19 / Psalm 110:1.

Coffman makes some important points here regarding the disciple's request.

1. It showed a lack of faith in what Jesus had just said regarding his being raised 'after three days.'

2. It was founded on human vanity and conceit.

3. It represented an effort on their part to gain ascendancy (power) over the other apostles.

4. It showed a fundamental misconception of what God's kingdom would be.

5. It was a selfish manoeuvre prompted by the Lord's repeated announcement of His forthcoming death and resurrection, in which they appeared as desiring the chief places in the presumed absence of the Lord.

6. It was a request founded in ignorance, Mark 10:38.
Sadly, like so many men who are in leadership positions today within the church, it's all about power, and it's all about them sitting down, whilst getting others to get up and do the work for them.

TOO HARD ON JAMES AND JOHN!

I think it's easy to come down too hard on James and John because we focus so much on their misunderstanding of the nature of Christ's kingdom. Let's pause for a moment about what they are requesting in their minds.

They are thinking of a physical kingdom, a physical kingdom which is going to get rid of these Roman dictators once and for all. For this to happen, many people would have to die to fight for this freedom.

James and John seem to be willing to do just that, Acts 12:1-2. They were obviously ambitious, courageous and far from being weak men who couldn't handle a leadership position, Mark 3:17.
In other words, if they were going to help establish a physical kingdom, it wasn't going to be easy, it was going to be full of struggles, and they seemed to be up for the task.

Notice that Jesus responds to their request with the spiritual kingdom in mind. Jesus responded by asking if they could drink the cup He was going to drink, or be baptised with His baptism, Matthew 20:22 / Mark 10:38 / Psalm 11:6 / Psalm 75:8 / Isaiah 51:17 / Jeremiah 25:15.
Jesus was referring to His sufferings which were often spoken of as a cup of agony that He would have to drink, Mark 14:36, and as a baptism of pain, Mark 10:39 / Luke 12:50.
Jesus asked them these questions because He knew they were going to have to face even greater struggles in this spiritual kingdom than they would in a physical kingdom.

They would need useful spiritual weapons, Ephesians 6:10-20; they would need to be courageous, they would need to be strong, and they would need to be willing to die.
Christ went through immense pain and suffering and demonstrated what real sacrifice was all about, especially when He went to the cross to die. Jesus is basically asking them if they are willing to go through what He's been going through and will go through at the hands of the Jews and the Romans.

They had no clue as to His real meaning, but they enthusiastically accepted the challenge, Matthew 20:22 / Mark 10:39. On the negative side, this shows their ignorance because they were still thinking of a physical kingdom, but on the positive side, it shows their courage and their strength. It shows their willingness to lead, and it shows their enthusiasm to lead if it costs them their lives.

These two simple Galilean fishermen have come a long way in their personal journey with Christ, Mark 3:17, despite their misunderstanding of Christ's kingdom. They would suffer, John 15:18-19 / John 21:18-19. James would even be the first apostle to be killed for the faith, Acts 12:1-2, though John, his younger brother, would be the last to die, Revelation 1:9.
Interestingly, Jesus makes no attempt to clarify the nature of His kingdom to the disciples; this is possibly because He knew that they would need similar courage and strength to be leaders in this spiritual kingdom.

They've just said, 'we can' and Jesus says, 'oh you guys can just count on that, you will go through the pain and suffering that I've been going through and will go through,' Matthew 20:23 / Mark 10:39. They will go through all the struggles that leaders have to go through when they go into battle; they will go through all the highs and lows involved in leadership.
Jesus then replied that He didn't have the authority to grant their request because He wasn't the One who assigned the positions of honour in the kingdom, Matthew 20:23 / Mark 10:40. Jesus couldn't give such honours, except to them for whom they were prepared.
The ten weren't simply unhappy with James and John; they were furious. The word 'indignant' means greatly displeased, Matthew 20:24 / Mark 10:41 / Mark 9:34 / Mark 10:31 / Luke 22:24.
The other disciples were indignant, why? It seems that James and John had jumped ahead of the game; it appears they wished to have the highest positions and resented the fact that the sons of Zebedee had requested them first.

As a result of this, it seems another dispute broke out among them concerning who was the greatest and got the positions of 'power', and Jesus had to once again step in to sort it out.

This is not the first time Jesus had to address this issue of greatness with His disciples, Luke 9:46, and it won't be the last, Luke 22:24, and on all three occasions, Jesus has just been speaking to them about His upcoming death.
This must have been so disheartening for Jesus. He's speaking about His upcoming death, and all the disciples could think about was who was going to take over when He leaves.

Jesus took some time to define what greatness in the kingdom really meant. He said that in human affairs, whether government or business, the greatest have the most authority, Matthew 20:25-28 / Mark 10:42-45.
In other words, they weren't to be like the Gentiles, who lord it over people and exercise authority over the people, Matthew 20:25 / Mark 10:42. In Christ's kingdom, they need to be serving, not lording it over people, Matthew 20:26 / Mark 10:43 / 1 Peter 5:3.
Jesus contrasts the leadership style of the world with that which would be among His disciples. The disciples need to learn, instead of 'lording it over' the people, they need to bear the burden of the needs of the people, they were to become slaves and be reminded that there is no authority among slaves.

There won't be any 'lords' among the disciples, there won't be any 'high officials' among His disciples. Leaders within the body of Christ must remember that Jesus has all authority, Matthew 28:18, and that He is the only Lord and Head, Ephesians 1:20-23 / Ephesians 4:4-6. Since Christ is all these things, then every other Christian must be a servant.
He explained that in God's kingdom it's different, the greatest is the one who humbles himself most and serves most, Matthew 20:27 / Mark 10:44 / Matthew 18:1-4 / Matthew 23:11 / Mark 9:35 / Mark 10:43-45.
He pointed to Himself as the model, Matthew 20:28 / Mark 10:45 / Matthew 26:28 / John 13:1-17. He hadn't come to be served, but to serve and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for others, Isaiah 53:10-11 / Daniel 9:24-26 / John 11:51-52 / Romans 5:15 / Romans 5:19 / 1 Timothy 2:5-6 / Titus 2:14 / 1 Peter 1:19. He would lay down His life as a ransom, Exodus 21:30 / Numbers 3:49-51 / Numbers 35:31.
Lane, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The ransom metaphor sums up the purpose for which Jesus gave his life and defines the complete expression of his service. The prevailing notion behind the metaphor is that of deliverance by purchase, whether a prisoner of war, a slave, or a forfeited life is the object to be delivered. Because the idea of equivalence, or substitution, was proper to the concept of a ransom, it became an integral element in the vocabulary of redemption in the Old Testament. It speaks of a liberation which connotes a servitude or an imprisonment from which man cannot free himself.’

If anyone had the right to demand service and lord it over people, it was Jesus Himself, but He didn’t exercise that right. He points to Himself as the model of servitude. He hadn’t come to be served, but to serve and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for others, Matthew 20:45 / John 10:17-18.
To lead men to redemption, Jesus had to give Himself. He had to ransom Himself for the sake of buying us out of the bondage of sin because we couldn’t do it ourselves. He is the ultimate example of what spiritual leadership looks like, 1 Peter 2:21.
Jesus didn’t say it was wrong to desire to be great in His kingdom, but He did say we have to go about it the right way, with the right attitude. Leaders must lead by following Christ’s example of serving because there are way too many Christians who want to lead but aren’t willing to serve.

TRUE GREATNESS

We still desperately need these lessons of Jesus. Many, even in religion, are seeking to be great by trying to gain honour, glory and power. Churches are infested with ‘politicians’ who want the limelight and who compete for positions of maximum control and authority. They should be ashamed.

Jesus was born in a stable outside a small town. He lived His life as a village carpenter and itinerant preacher. He accumulated neither riches nor worldly power.

Yet today, many of His self-proclaimed followers seek and promise the very things He rejected, as they pursue higher and higher positions in churches. It is hard to imagine that Jesus would feel at home in their costly cathedrals and church buildings.

It is impossible to believe that He would preach the ‘gospels of health and wealth’ which is so popular today. Jesus said the way to true greatness was the road of service and suffering. Jesus said the way to true greatness was the road of service and suffering.

As His followers, we must learn how to serve the Lord, we must learn how to serve each other, and we must learn how to serve those around us, those who so desperately need to not only hear Jesus in our words but see Jesus in our actions.

TWO BLIND MEN RECEIVE SIGHT

‘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!” The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” 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.’ Matthew 20:29-34

There are some people who suggest that the record of the two blind men in Matthew 9:27-31 is somehow related to the recording of the blind man Bartimaeus in Matthew 20:29-34 / Mark 10:46-52 / Luke 18:35-43.
However, there is no evidence of this from the Scriptures, and it also wouldn't make any sense. Just because the blind men essentially say the same thing in both passages doesn't mean they are the same event.

In Matthew 20:29-34, the healing of Bartimaeus takes place as Jesus the King is beginning to make His way to Jerusalem, Matthew 20:17. The Matthew 9:27-31 event took place as Jesus left the home of Jairus after raising the little girl and returned to the place He was staying, Matthew 9:18-26.
If it were the same event, this would imply that Jesus failed to heal these two men and somehow, He would have to heal them again later. Also, it would make no sense for Matthew to record the same blind healing event twice. I believe that these are two different blind men in two different places.

WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN?

According to Matthew 20:29-34 and Mark 10:46-52, the miracle took place when they were 'leaving' Jericho.
According to Luke 18:35-43, it appears the miracle took place as the Lord was 'approaching' Jericho.
At that time, there were two cities named Jericho, the city destroyed by Joshua, Joshua 6:24-26, which was rebuilt and destroyed several times, and one was subsequently built a little further west by Herod the Great. The ruins of these are still evident.
The curing of the blind men could have taken place after the Lord had passed through the toll of old Jericho and before he entered Herod's Jericho. Bible critics point out that the accounts of the healing of the blind men at Jericho, as recorded by Matthew and Mark on the one hand, and Luke on the other, reveal 'an apparent discrepancy'. The verses we should read are Matthew 20:29 / Mark 10:46, and Luke 18:35.
This appears to be a very clear contradiction. Is it possible to reconcile the two accounts? Well, I suggest that if we spend a short time looking at Jericho's history and geography, we shall find it easier to resolve the problem.

OLD JERICHO

Although this event is one of only two references to Jericho found in the Gospels, we must remember that it was a city that, by that time, had already existed for many centuries. This is a fact firmly established by archaeological research.

The first excavation of the Jericho site was carried out by a team of German archaeologists in the years 1907 to 1909, and their work was followed by an expedition by the British School of Archaeology led by Professor John Garstang, which lasted from 1929 to 1936, and which was followed in 1952 by that of the American archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon.

The latest and, I believe, the last work on what is known as 'The Garstang Trench' was done in 1957, after which the political climate in Palestine virtually ended the archaeological work of foreign nationals.

MANY JERICHO'S

However, the most important result to emerge from this work was the discovery of the earliest stratified levels revealing human occupation, ever found at any archaeological site anywhere in the world.

The mound at Ancient Jericho has revealed periods of human occupation down to a level of forty-five feet, and scholars now believe that the top, most evidence of human occupation of the site occurred about 1700 B.C., whilst the lowest remains, found on the bedrock of the trench, are thought to date from 7000 B.C.

Remember that the current site of ancient Jericho is actually a mound that 'grew' through thousands of years. It 'grew' simply because when the original settlement built on the bedrock was abandoned, those who later resettled the site did not clear it but merely built upon it.

In this way, the level of the occupied site was raised, strata upon strata, until it became the mound it is today. The various levels can be clearly seen on the sides of the forty-five-foot-deep trench.

This means that Jericho was an ancient Canaanite city long before it was destroyed by Joshua, Joshua 4:24, and there is evidence that, after its destruction by the Israelite army, in the course of its long history, the city was destroyed several times. After the city had been conquered, it was given to the tribe of Benjamin, Joshua 18:21.
Later, during the time of the Judges, it was occupied by the Moabites, led by their King Eglon, at which time it was known as 'The City of the Palms', Judges 1:16 / Judges 3:13.
Later still, we read in 1 Kings 16:34, that it was 'rebuilt' by Hiel of Bethel, in the time of King Ahab. And it was yet again destroyed at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, and later rebuilt once more.

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

It was during the Inter-Testamental Period that Jericho came under Roman control and was governed by a 'Captain', 'Strategos', in Latin, and during its time under the Romans, the city was given to Cleopatra by Mark Anthony, and she 'leased' it to Herod the Great for two hundred talents.

King Herod then built a new city south of the old one, complete with a castle, an amphitheatre, a hippodrome, and beautiful gardens with various water features, and Jericho became his winter residence. In fact, this is where he died in 4 B.C.

This city, known as 'Herodian Jericho', later suffered the fate of earlier cities. It was destroyed by Emperor Vespasian in 68 A.D. But the important fact is that this city, virtually adjoining the old site, was the city that Jesus knew.

We could continue to follow Jericho's turbulent history through succeeding centuries, turbulent because it was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Muslims destroyed it in 638 A.D. Egyptian soldiers destroyed it in 1840. In 1871, it was destroyed by fire. And after each destruction, it was rebuilt.

JESUS AND JERICHO

Although it would be interesting to study this later history, what concerns us at the moment is the fact that the miraculous healing occurred when Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem for the last time, after leaving Galilee in the north, Matthew 19:1.

Jericho was the last halt for pilgrims when they travelled to the City of David from Galilee and Perea. They came by way of Jericho, to avoid passing through Samaria, and Jesus, descending from the north, would first enter and pass through what archaeologists call ‘Canaanite Jericho’, that is our ‘old Jericho’, where the ‘Garstang Trench’ has been excavated, and he would then enter ‘Herodian Jericho’.

In other words, there was a point at which he left the ruins of the ancient city and passed into the modern city built by Herod. When we take into consideration the geographical proximity of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ cities, it is not difficult to reconcile the statements made by the Gospel writers: He was ‘leaving’ Canaanite Jericho and ‘entering’ Herodian Jericho.

The Gospel records, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, contain no contradictions when we take into consideration such matters as their geographical and historical setting.

HOW MANY BLIND MEN WERE THERE?

Matthew mentions that there were two blind men, Matthew 20:30. In Mark’s account of this healing, he mentions only the outspoken blind man of the two who approached Jesus, that is, Bartimaeus, Mark 10:46. Luke records that there was one blind man, Luke 18:35.
I have no difficulty accepting that there were, as Matthew states, two blind men healed, Matthew 20:30. This is stated so plainly that there can be no argument. The reason why Mark specifically names just one of them, Bartimaeus, is that he was apparently well-known in the Jericho region. This is suggested by the fact that the Greek text of Mark 10:46 translates quite literally as ‘the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus the blind beggar’.
The naming of the father in this way probably indicates that he was a man of some standing in Jericho. Notice, also, the use of the definite article, ‘the blind beggar’, not ‘a blind beggar’.

There would be little point in naming the father and son in this way if they were unknown in the community. This also suggests that the healing of Bartimaeus was given more prominence than that of his blind, anonymous companion because he was a familiar figure in Jericho.

It was quite common for beggars, whether blind or otherwise disabled, to become familiar figures in the towns and cities in which they lived. We have examples of this in John 9:1-41, which records the healing of another blind man, and also in the account of the curing of the lame man, mentioned in Acts 4:22-24; both were clearly very familiar figures.
Again, it may even be that Bartimaeus was the more vociferous, more vocal, of the two blind men in clamouring for the attention of Jesus. This seems to be suggested in Mark’s account.

BLINDNESS

We know that blindness is a horrible disability today, but in Bible times, it must have been so much worse. There was no way you could work and no benefit system to help you, which meant you had no way to sustain yourself.

There was no Braille available. A blind man in Bible times wasn’t permitted to approach the altar or give offerings to the Lord, which meant they could never become priests, Leviticus 21:18-23.

God, however, instituted some measures so that the needs of a blind person could be met and ensured that no one would mistreat them or take advantage of them, Deuteronomy 27:18. It's probable that these two blind men were beggars who looked for help from anyone who passed by.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning being blind.

'From various Old Testament passages, it is clear that blindness is a type of sin, Deuteronomy 28:29 / Isaiah 59:10 / Job 12:25 / Zephaniah 1:17 / Isaiah 29:8 / Ephesians 5:8 / Matthew 15:14. Several examples of Jesus' restoring sight to the blind are recorded and were prophetically included as a positive mark of the Messiah's power when he should be revealed. Isaiah said of the Messiah and his times, 'then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,' Isaiah 35:5.'
As Jesus and His disciples passed through Jericho, two blind men were begging by the side of the road. Mark specifically names one of them. A blind man named Bartimaeus, whose name means 'son of Timaeus', was sitting by the roadside begging, Matthew 20:29-30 / Mark 10:46 / Luke 18:35.
When they heard it was Jesus of Nazareth, as opposed to any other Jesus, he began to shout out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Matthew 20:30 / Mark 10:47 / Luke 18:36-38.
The crowds tried to silence him, Matthew 20:31 / Mark 10:48 / Luke 18:39, thinking that the Lord should not be bothered with such unimportant people, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Matthew 20:31 / Mark 10:48 / Luke 18:39.
'Son of David' was a common Jewish term that was used in reference to the Messiah, Luke 1:31-32. He cried out his belief that Jesus was the Messiah. His outcry would be the work of all disciples after the events of Acts 2. Since Jesus fulfilled all prophecies concerning the Messiah, He is the Messiah.
Their plea would be that Israel accepts Him as the Messiah. On His way to the cross, Jesus received this proclamation of who He was. He was the Prophet, the Seed of the woman who was the fulfilment of all messianic prophecies, Genesis 3:15 / Luke 24:44.
It's interesting to note that these blind men recognised who Jesus was, but the theologians of Jerusalem, who claimed to know the Scriptures, couldn't understand what they clearly saw.

They recognised that Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah, Isaiah 9:7 / Matthew 6:7 / Matthew 6:11 / Matthew 6:20 / Matthew 6:28 / Matthew 6:24 / Revelation 22:16.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, 'Son of David.'

'Son of David was the same as if they had called him Messiah. Two things here are worthy of remark: 1. That it was a generally received opinion at this time in Judea, that the Messiah should be the son of David, John 7:42. 2. That Jesus Christ was generally and incontestably acknowledged as coming from this stock, Matthew 12:23.'
Jesus stopped and called for the blind men to come to Him, Matthew 20:32 / Luke 18:40. Understandably, Bartimaeus was really excited about this as he threw his cloak to the side and ran to Jesus, Mark 10:49-50. Jesus asks them what they want, and their request was simple: they wanted to be able to see again, Matthew 20:32-33 / Mark 10:51 / Luke 18:41.
Jesus has compassion on them and tells them to go; their faith has healed them, and immediately they received their sight, Matthew 20:34 / Mark 10:52 / Luke 18:42-43. Notice also that they began to follow Him, Matthew 20:34 / Mark 10:52 / Luke 18:43.
Few rich men followed the Lord, Mark 10:17-22, but many of the poor and downtrodden did. It's not surprising that the many people who witnessed the miracle praised God, Luke 18:43.

LIFE CHANGING

Imagine being transformed from a life of darkness to a life of light, Luke 4:18. Assuming they were blind from birth, imagine these blind men going home and seeing their families or children for the first time.
Imagine seeing colour for the first time. Imagine them being eligible to become priests, approaching the altar and giving their offerings to the Lord, Leviticus 21:18-23.
I have a good friend who is physically blind, and when I spoke to him about his disability, he said, 'Don't feel sorry for me because I'm physically blind, feel sorry for those who are spiritually blind.' His words are very true. Jesus often spoke to the religious leaders of His day and called them blind, Matthew 15:14 / John 9:39.
We may not be able to miraculously heal people of blindness today, but we should continue to preach the Gospel to all people whose minds have been blinded by the evil one, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. Jesus doesn't want to just heal us of our sin; He wants to transform our lives, Romans 12:2 / 2 Corinthians 3:18 / 2 Corinthians 5:17.

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION

The triumphal entry is recorded in all four Gospels, Matthew 21:1-11 / Luke 19:24-44 / Mark 11:1-11, and John's account is the briefest, John 12:12-19. The fact that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, John 11:38-44, was well known by now, and the people of Jerusalem and other surrounding villages heard that both Jesus and Lazarus were to be seen together, John 12:9, so typically they flocked to see this 'show'.
The chief priests realised that Lazarus's presence now also constituted a threat to their power, John 12:10, so in their ruthlessness, they decided to rid themselves of this problem.
The fact that Lazarus had died and then had been resurrected was now a great source of embarrassment to the Pharisees and other Jews of high religious standing. They wanted to put Him to death in order to prove, to themselves, that they were greater than Jesus.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

'As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying 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. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 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 heaven!" 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."' Matthew 21:1-11

It is about five days before the Passover feast, Exodus 12:3 / Nehemiah 8:15 / Zechariah 14:4. The 'next day', John 12:12, we know from the Gospels that this was the first day of the week.
The crowd, already excited at his potential arrival, John 11:56, now hear that Jesus is on His way to the feast, as Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Matthew 21:1 / Luke 19:28-29 / Mark 11:1.

THE DONKEY

Jesus tells His disciples to go to a nearby village and get a colt, which was tied, which no one has ever ridden, Luke 19:29-30. John 12:14 tells us that 'Jesus found a young donkey.' Matthew 21:2 tells that He sent two disciples to find and bring an ass and a colt. Luke 19:30 says, 'a colt on which no one has ever yet sat', as does Mark 11:2.
Why would a donkey and a colt both be needed if Jesus only rode one into Jerusalem? The simple answer is that the colt was young and still attached to the mother, and vice versa.

They would travel together as a mother and offspring naturally would among many animal species. The donkey was traditionally ridden by kings who came in peace; if He had come on a horse instead, that would have reflected a more aggressive tone.

Jesus said to His disciples, 'if anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly,' Matthew 21:3 / Mark 11:3 / Luke 19:31.
According to Matthew all this was done to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, Matthew 21:4-5 / Zechariah 9:9. The disciples go and found things just as Jesus said, and united the donkey, Matthew 21:6 / Luke 19:32 / Mark 11:4. Some standing by asked what they were doing, as did the owner, Luke 19:33 / Mark 11:5. The disciples told them and the owner what Jesus told them to say, Luke 19:34 / Mark 11:6. This implies that Jesus possibly already knew the person who owned the donkey, hence why the owner gladly did as Jesus asked, Mark 11:6.
Jesus was the first on the back of this donkey. The disciples laid their garments over the donkey to make a saddle upon which Jesus could comfortably ride, Matthew 21:7 / Luke 19:35 / Mark 11:7 / 2 Kings 9:13.
The horse was the symbol of war and conquest, and the donkey was the symbol of peace. The disciples only made this connection between Jesus, the King of peace, the donkey and the Scriptural quotation after Jesus had ascended and they had received the Holy Spirit, John 12:13. Much became obvious to them at that time.

JESUS COMES TO JERUSALEM AS KING

As Jesus goes, they spread their cloaks in the way, Luke 19:36, and as He was getting nearer to Jerusalem, Luke 19:37, 'a great crowd' appeared, Luke 9:37 / John 12:12.
In Jerusalem crowded with Passover pilgrims, many of whom would be disciples of Jesus, Luke 19:37. A whole multitude of Jesus' disciples rejoiced and praised God for all the mighty works they had seen and said, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest! Luke 19:37-38 / Psalm 118:26.
In Luke 19:39-40, we read that the Pharisees objected, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples,' but Jesus tells them, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!'
The Pharisees objected, but Jesus tells them that the very things we would assume could never speak or respond, that is, the stones, Habakkuk 2:11, would actually give testimony to the Sonship of Jesus.

If the stones of the city of Jerusalem were in the mind of Jesus when He made this statement, the meaning again would be obvious: Jerusalem would be levelled by the Romans in A.D. 70. Matthew 24:1-35.
Jesus was basically saying to the Pharisees, 'you can't hide from what is happening right now, even if you could silence everyone, these very stones would have shouted glory to God because even they recognise that it's God's Son who is entering Jerusalem'.

The Pharisees didn't greet the arrival of Jesus with all that much enthusiasm, and they wanted Jesus dead. This crowd would make it all the more difficult, John 12:19. They seem somewhat frustrated by these goings-on, and their difficulty in finding Jesus in a quiet, dark alley where that could finish all this 'foolishness'.
The Pharisees saw Jesus as a serious threat to their position as leaders in the religious community. Even if they did have some idea that He was the Messiah, it was now too late to acknowledge Him, for that would lose too much. The 'Pharisees', who were the Sanhedrin officials, were extremely worried, and they had reason to be because huge crowds were involved, John 12:19.

JESUS' SORROW OVER JERUSALEM

As Jesus drew near to the city and He wept over it, He foresaw and described the disaster coming to a people who rejected the Messiah, Luke 19:41-44 / Matthew 23:37-40. We can almost feel the emotions of Jesus' words here. Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'If thou had known, says he, even thou, with all thy guilt, the things that make for thy peace, if thou had repented, had been righteous, and had received the Messiah, if thou had not stained thy hands with the blood of the prophets, and shouldn't have with that of the Son of God, then these terrible calamities would not come upon thee. But it is too late. The national wickedness is too great; the cup is full: mercy is exhausted and Jerusalem, with all her pride and splendour, the glory of her temple, and the pomp of her service, 'must perish!'

The days did indeed come when Jerusalem fell, and the temple was destroyed, the days indeed come when not one stone was left on another, Matthew 24:1-35. This was done by Titus in 70 A.D., about thirty years after this was spoken.
All this was done, says Christ, because Jerusalem knew not the time of its visitation, that is, did not know, and 'would not' know, that the Messiah had come.

'His coming' was the time of their merciful visitation. That time had been predicted, and invaluable blessings promised as the result of his advent, but they would not know it. They rejected him, they put him to death, and it was just that they should be destroyed.

Matthew and Mark give us details about what happened when Jesus approached Jerusalem. As He approached the city, a crowd accompanied Him, and another crowd went out who met Him, Matthew 21:8 / Mark 11:8.
The crowd, already excited at His potential arrival, John 11:56, now heard that Jesus was on His way to the feast. Great excitement overtakes them; they have heard of the raising of Lazarus and all the other miracles He had done before. Many must have believed that He was the Messiah and was about to restore the Kingdom to that which was in David's time.

A KING'S WELCOME

A welcome for a king is being written of here, as they, 'spread their garments on the road, also spread leafy branches before Him, Matthew 21:8 / Mark 11:8 / Psalm 118:25-26 / Leviticus 23:40.

Many carried branches of palm and spread them over the road, Matthew 21:8 / Mark 11:8 / John 12:13. These were symbols of victory, Revelation 7:9, and of the righteousness and vigorous spirituality of God's children, Psalm 92:12. They point to the joy of victory, the feeling that everything will now be better. The people were expecting something to change.

People were continually shouting that Jesus was the Messiah, the King of Israel. Jerusalem was packed with Passover pilgrims, 'was thrown into confusion', Matthew 21:9 / Mark 11:9 / John 12:13. A popular uprising looked possible, and that would bring savage reprisals from the Romans, John 11:48.

THE SAVIOUR

'Hosanna!' they cry, Matthew 21:9 / Mark 11:9 / John 12:13 / Psalm 118:25-26. This was a joyous call meaning 'save' or 'save us now'. It hadn't become a simple exclamation of surprise, such as we use 'hurrah' today. The call had a great deal of meaning to it.

THE MESSIAH

Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, His coming is in fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9 / Isaiah 62:11 / Matthew 21:4-5. The crowd of disciples wanted Him to assert publicly that He was the Messiah, and He did, but in such a way as to assert the peaceful nature of His kingdom, Zechariah 9:10.

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' Matthew 21:9 / Mark 11:10 / John 12:13 / Luke 19:38 is an extract from Psalm 118:25-26. This Psalm was part of the 'Great Hallel', Psalms 113-118, recited at the Feast of Tabernacles. They now acclaim Jesus as the Messiah, Matthew 21:9 / Mark 11:9-10 / Luke 19:38 / John 12:13.

The context of the Psalm is of a Messianic tone, indicating that they considered Jesus the Messiah, still expecting Him to establish some sort of earthly kingdom. The balance of the call that rang out seems to confirm this idea, 'Blessed is the King of Israel,' John 12:13.

Jesus, having found a young donkey, sat on it to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, John 12:14-15 / Zechariah 9:9. John records that Jesus' disciples didn't understand what was going on, but they eventually would after Jesus was glorified, John 12:16.

THE REACTION

Look at the reactions to all of this: 'All the city was stirred', 'agitated', 'went wild with excitement', Matthew 21:10-11. Remember that most in the crowd had seen Lazarus raised from the dead, so they would be witnesses to this, John 12:17.

The local people informed the visitors to Jerusalem who Jesus was, Matthew 21:10-11. He was the prophet, Deuteronomy 18:18 / John 1:21 / John 1:25 / John 6:14 / John 7:40 / John 9:17 / Acts 3:22-26 / Acts 7:37. But Jesus was more than a prophet; He was the Messiah, He was the Son of God.

CONCLUSION

We're living in a society where Christians are being told to 'shut up' by the 'politically correct' brigade. If we speak out against sin, any sin, we get told we're judging and need to 'shut up'. It's almost like we're allowed to have our faith, but we're not allowed to express our faith in any shape or form, as some people will find it offensive.

Society is permitted to speak out against Christians, but it seems that as time goes on, Christians aren't being permitted the same freedom of speech to defend their beliefs.

The world can try and silence Christians because they find their faith offensive, but the truth is, God would be even more offended if Christians didn't share their faith with others.

Let's continue to praise Him and lift up His Holy Name before the world because the time is coming when every being in heaven, everyone on earth, and every demon in hell, is going to bow down and confess what Christians have been confessing for years, Philippians 2:9-11.

JESUS AT THE TEMPLE

'Jesus entered the temple courts 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. "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.'" The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "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, Lord, have called forth your praise'?" And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.' Matthew 21:12-17

Mark tells us that every evening of that week, Jesus withdrew from the city, because it was evening, the city gates were closed, Mark 11:11. Jesus returned the next day and went straight to the temple and cleansed it again. Jesus entered Jerusalem at the commencement of the final week of His earthly ministry.

THE TEMPLE

The Temple had taken forty-six years to build, John 2:20. It was started around 20 BC, and the main work was finished in 10 BC, which gives us the date of this statement at AD 26. The Temple was still being worked on when it was destroyed in 70 AD. Some of the blocks used in building the temple were fifteen feet square by four feet high. The original temple was built on ground purchased by David and built by Solomon, 2 Samuel 24:18-25 / 2 Chronicles 3:1. It was by a long shot the grandest and rich of the temples, and once it was destroyed, its grandeur was never recaptured. It was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the rampant Babylonians.

A new temple, Zerubbabel's temple, was built in 520 B.C. after its foundations were laid in 536 B.C. Zechariah 4:9. This was rebuilt by Herod in 20 B.C., and the work was paid for before a start was made, and the sanctuary took just eighteen months to complete; however, it was still going on in Jesus' time about forty-six years later.

It is thought that work wasn't yet complete in the outer areas when this last temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. The site is now being used by Muslims who have built a Mosque, the Dome of the Rock.

Much is currently being said in Israel about rebuilding a temple. However, political considerations regarding the current Mosque on the site prevent this. The internal area was thirty-three and a half acres. Some wall blocks were fifteen by four feet.

Built with cream-coloured stone, with spikes on the roof. It was topped off with gold. There was also a plaque on the wall which read, 'a no enter sign' warning of death to all non-Jews who enter in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Arabic.

The Temple was divided into two parts, the Holy Place, with the altar of incense, golden candlestick and table of shewbread. The second part is the Holy of Holies, the heart of the temple, entered into only once a year by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

The different courts emphasised the strata of religious society; the more important you are, the closer you get to the Holy of Holies. The two parts were separated by a veil, made of thick cloth.

This is the veil that separated man and God, and it was torn in two at the point of Christ's death. The Inner court or priests' court was reserved only for priests, and the sacrifice was burnt on the altar located there. The Antonia Fortress was a Roman fortress that they used to keep an eye on the happenings on the Temple grounds.

When Jesus reached Jerusalem, He entered the temple courts and drove out those who were buying and selling. He also overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those who were selling doves, Matthew 21:12 / Luke 19:45 / Mark 11:15.
He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, Matthew 21:12 / Mark 11:15, and then quotes Jeremiah 7:11 / Matthew 21:13 / Luke 19:46. He also stopped trade from coming through the temple courts, Mark 11:16, and He quotes Isaiah 56:7 / Jeremiah 7:11.
What was it that angered Him? The abuse of the temple courts and total lack of reverence and respect for both the temple and the law is what angered Him.

THE MARKET HELD IN THE COURT OF THE GENTILES

This had become a recognised institute and was protected by the temple guard on behalf of their superiors, the priests. The market was known among the Jews as 'The shops of Annas,' because it was under the patronage of the High Priest and his family.

They took the franchise, so to speak, the monopoly and took their profit from everything that was sold. The market was not supposed to be a place for general merchandise but only for things needed for the temple ceremonies, i.e. sacrifices, wine, oil and salt used in the ceremonies.

Buyers were largely pilgrims who had travelled far but were also used by local Jews who could afford to spare themselves the inconvenience of bringing their own animals for sacrifice. Not only this, but they could avoid the uncertainty of the 'Official Inspection', which was compulsory.

Priests examined animals for sacrifice, for flaws or imperfections or disease, and I imagine that, in order to boost flagging sales, they would refuse to accept certain animals. Probably many animals failed their spiritual M.O.T.

MONEY CHANGERS

The money was needed because of the duty of every male Jew who came to the temple to worship, to pay half a shekel for the upkeep of the temple. This was called 'Temple Tax'. A half-shekel was equal to a third, or a fourth of a Denarius, or a penny and could only be paid in the temple or Jewish money.

But many coinages were in use in the Roman Empire at that time, and pilgrims from abroad usually only had Greek, Roman or Syrian money, which could not be used.

Obviously, Jewish money was not likely to be used in the wider Roman Empire. So, their foreign money had to be exchanged into coins that the temple treasury would accept.

We must note that Mark's and Luke's accounts of Jesus clearing the temple took place in the last week of the Lord's ministry; John puts the account at the commencement of His ministry, John 2:13-22.
This is important to understand because some believe it's the same account of Jesus cleansing the temple. One of the arguments, probably the strongest argument they are able to advance in favour of this theory, is that John does not mention the second cleansing, nor do Matthew, Mark and Luke.

I suggest to you that, far from being an argument against the genuineness of these accounts, this is an argument in favour of their genuineness. There is obviously no attempt on the part of these writers to make their accounts harmonise, and you might have expected such an attempt if they had not been genuine.

On the contrary, if you examine the three records carefully, you see that there are several differences, which should make it plain that we are dealing with two separate events.

John tells us that Jesus dealt with those who 'sold' in the temple, John 2:14, as does Luke 19:45, but Mark, for instance, tells us that he turned out those who 'bought and sold', Mark 11:15. Not just the sellers but also the 'buyers' who evidently had taken no notice of the first warning.
Similarly, John says that Jesus told those who sold doves to take their birds and their cages out of the temple court, John 2:15-16. But the second time, again because his warning had gone unheeded, he condemned the sellers of doves along with the rest and overturned their chairs, Mark 2:15.
John says that the Jews challenged Jesus as to His authority and His right to do this, John 2:18, but the second time, there is no such challenge or question from the Jews.
John does not report that Jesus dealt with those who carried objects through the temple, Mark 11:16, or the cries of the children, Mark 10:13-16, and the healing of the blind, Mark 10:46-52, and the lame and the apparently favourable reaction from the people, Mark 11:18.
Of course, the first time He cleansed the temple, he was virtually unknown, and His action was resented. But after three years and particularly with the presence of the Galileans, He has more popular support.

John does not quote Isaiah 56:7, and the mention of the temple as a 'House of Prayer for all nations'. Nor that Jesus quoted Jeremiah 7:11, 'Den of robbers', Mark 11:17. Nor the fear of the Jewish authorities for the people, Mark 11:18.
In fact, to really accept that there was only 'one' cleansing of the temple, which the writers have put into two different ends of the Lord's ministry, I think you have to come to the Scriptures with your mind already made up.

If these two accounts were submitted to unbiased critics, with the question, Do these records deal with the same event? I am sure they would see many differences that they would say, 'the situation in the temple had grown worse', this is suggested by the words, 'you have made it into a den of robbers', Mark 11:18.

Pilgrims in particular, of course, were at the mercy of these temple traders. What went on was 'not' honest trade, which itself would have been wrong in the temple anyway. This was a dishonest trade. No! more than that, Jesus said it was a downright robbery, Mark 11:18.
For instance, one record tells that those who sold doves in the temple court were at one time demanding a piece of gold for every bird they sold to the poor women who came to the temple for cleansing.

And Rabbi Simeon Ben Gamaliel urged them to be satisfied with a piece of silver. Now, if the poor local women were subject to this kind of exhortation, what do you suppose happened to the wealthier Jews, coming in from Rome or from other provinces?

And in this way, because they imposed an exchange fee, a great deal of profit was made, a part of which found its way to the priests. The doves are mentioned, Mark 11:17 / John 2:14, because they were required by the law for ceremonies concerned with cleansing, women after childbirth, Leviticus 12:1-8, lepers, Leviticus 14:1-32, and others. So, they too provided a good profit.
Mark reports that Jesus stopped the people from using the temple as a public thoroughfare, Mark 11:16. The people often carried things through the temple court, coming in at the East Gate and going out at the West, or vice versa. In fact, the temple was used as a shortcut between the city and the Mount of Olives.
The Jewish authorities had condemned this practice, according to some scholars. They had said that a sign of reverence for the temple was that no one went up into the Mountain of the temple, with his staff, or shoes, or purse, or dust of the road on his feet; and that no one made it a common thoroughfare.

But it seems that they had not enforced this ruling, and so the people were defiling the temple and showing disrespect for it. So, Jesus took the unpleasant action that the authorities neglected to take.

Notice the quotation Jesus uses to cover His actions, Luke 19:46 / Mark 11:17. 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations', Isaiah 56:7. This is because the only place that the Gentiles were allowed to enter, the only part of the temple open to them and the only place where they were allowed to pray, was the 'Court of the Gentiles.' But how could they pray in a place which had been turned into an open cattle market, a money exchange and a public thoroughfare? John 2:14. So, Jesus points out that in allowing these things, the priests were defeating the fulfilment of Scripture.
Notice the strong language He uses, 'A den of robbers', Jeremiah 7:11 / Mark 11:17 / Luke 19:46. Remember that Jesus had just travelled to Jerusalem from Jericho, coming along that notorious Jericho road, where the man fell along with thieves and was helped by a Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37.
Judea in those days was full of thieves and robbers, and they occupied the limestone caves in the hills. But Jesus says that what went on in the temple was every bit as bad as what went on outside. So, He quotes from Jeremiah's temple sermon, Jeremiah 7:11.
Notice first the reaction of the people, they gathered for Jesus to teach them, Mark 11:17. In fact, these last words were spoken to the people during that teaching, 'you have made it a den of robbers', Mark 11:17 / Luke 19:46. Certainly, the priests were to blame for permitting this traffic to go on, but the people were also to blame for encouraging it by 'buying', and they were to blame for using the temple as a shortcut. But there was also healing; the blind and lame came to Him, Matthew 21:14.
These poor, sick people usually remained outside the temple altogether, because many of them would not be permitted to enter. But they were emboldened by the presence of Jesus, and they came to Him, and He healed them, Matthew 14:14.
And notice the shouts of the children in the temple gates. Hosanna! Matthew 21:15. When the leaders asked Jesus if He heard what the children were saying, Matthew 21:16, Jesus quotes Psalm 8:2. Jesus allowed the people to exalt Him to the status of king. So, the reaction to Jesus was favourable, at least from the people.

The reaction to Jesus was favourable, at least from the people, but the reactions from the authorities were violent, 'that they might kill Him', Luke 19:47 / Mark 11:18.

In any case, they would not stone Him in the temple itself, so they had to plan to put Him to death elsewhere, Luke 20:1-6. However, the priests had to exercise caution, 'for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching,' Luke 19:48 / Mark 11:18.

Any of those who had come with Jesus to the city had also come with Him to the temple. In other words, there were many good Galileans present, not just people from the city, who would be under the thumb of the priests and with such enthusiasm being shown for Jesus, it might be dangerous for the priests themselves if they dared to lay hands on Jesus, Luke 20:1-6.

Any of those who had come with Jesus to the city had also come with Him to the temple. In other words, there were many good Galileans present, not just people from the city, who would be under the thumb of the priests and with such enthusiasm being shown for Jesus, it might be dangerous for the priests themselves if they dared to lay hands on Jesus.

Jesus then goes to Bethany to spend the night. He possibly stayed with Lazarus, Martha and Mary, Matthew 21:17 / Mark 11:19 / John 11:1 / John 11:18 / John 12:1.

JESUS CURSES A FIG TREE

'Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, 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. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.'
Matthew 21:18-20

Early in the morning, as Jesus was heading towards Jerusalem, He was hungry, Matthew 21:18 / Mark 11:12, and He saw a fig tree, Matthew 21:19 / Mark 11:12. There were a variety of fig trees in and around Jerusalem in Jesus' day, but this particular fig tree grew leaves first and then produced fruit.

I don't believe we are to think that this was the only fig tree in the orchard, but it was certainly a tree which stood out, and the reason it stood out to Jesus was that this fig tree had leaves on it but no fruit, although it wasn't fig season, Mark 11:13.

WHY DID JESUS CURSE THE TREE?

Out of all the miracles Christ did, this is the only miracle which involved a curse, but why curse the tree? Certainly not for the fun of it! He cursed the fig tree and used it as an object lesson for the disciples.

The lesson was simple enough; Israel as a nation was producing an outward show of righteousness, Matthew 15:1-9 / Mark 7:1-9. It was all pretence, and the religious leaders didn't produce fruit by accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus is telling us that Israel would no longer produce fruit because they had rejected the Son of God, and so God is going to reject them as a nation. Jerusalem and the Jewish nation would come to an end in A.D. 70.

The disciples were amazed at how quickly the fig tree withered, Matthew 21:20. Peter remembers what Jesus did to the fig tree the day before, Mark 11:20-21. It appears that the tree was cursed on Monday morning as Christ was on the way to the cleansing of the temple.

Matthew indicates that it withered immediately, Matthew 21:19, but the following morning Peter noticed that it was withered completely from its roots upward and totally dried up, Matthew 21:20. They probably didn't notice this on Monday evening as they returned to Bethany because it was evening time, and it would have been dark.

'Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, 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.' Matthew 21:21-22

In Matthew 21:21-22, Jesus replies to His disciples and teaches them a lesson on faith. We must remember that faith isn't the source of power; God is the source of that power, and the disciples had to learn to trust their source, who is God, Matthew 17:21-22 / James 1:6 / James 5:16.
When Christians pray in faith, we need to trust that God will answer our prayers. There may be times our prayers aren't answered in a way which we would like or as quickly as we would like, but we must trust that He will answer them.

We must also remember that there are times our prayers won't be answered simply because we don't ask, or we don't believe God can do what we request of Him, and there are times our prayers aren't in line with God's will, 1 John 5:14 / James 4:3.

MOUNTAIN MOVING FAITH

If these words of Jesus concerning 'a faith which can move mountains', Matthew 21:21, are to be taken literally, then they literally have to apply to His disciples, not Christians today.
This kind of faith was of the miraculous kind; this wouldn't be the faith of Romans 5:1. This is a miraculous faith that enabled one to 'remove mountains', 1 Corinthians 13:2 / Matthew 17:20 / James 5:14-15. This kind of faith, along with all the other miraculous gifts, has ceased to exist, 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.
Jesus knew that over the next few days, the disciples would need to have their faith increased because of the great trials and persecution they were about to go through, and they were about to face some huge obstacles of their own, and it was going to take great faith to overcome them.

CONCLUSION

The whole purpose of a fig tree was to produce fruit, and as Christians, we too must produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, Galatians 5:22-23 / John 16:16 / James 3:17-18.
But if we don't produce the Spirit's fruit in our lives, we too will end up like the fig tree Jesus used as an object lesson; we become useless, Matthew 7:19 / John 15:1-2.
We may not have the miraculous faith which can move mountains today, but we certainly should have a faith which trusts that God can remove any giant obstacles which come our way.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS QUESTIONED

‘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?” 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 of human origin?” 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, ‘Of human origin’—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.’ Matthew 21:23-27

Remember that at this time, it was the aggression of the religious leaders that developed the confrontation between themselves and Jesus, Luke 20:1-19 / Mark 11:27-12:12.
Jesus had violated their system of religious regulations. He didn’t conform to their system of institutional religiosity. He didn’t fit in with their idea of who the Messiah should be.

Jesus’ bold actions in clearing out the temple stirred opposition, Matthew 21:12-16 / Luke 19:45-48 / Mark 11:15-18.
The Jewish leaders thought that the temple belonged to them, so they questioned Jesus’ right to come into it and make such drastic revisions, Matthew 21:23 / Mark 11:27-28 / Luke 20:1-2 / Matthew 7:28-29.
Jesus replied to their challenge with a question. He asked whether John’s baptism came from God or men, Matthew 21:24-25 / Luke 20:3-4 / Mark 11:29-30. John had confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, John 1:34, and by doing so, he confessed that Jesus was greater than he was, Matthew 3:11-15.
They consulted among themselves and decided that it would be politically unwise to answer, Matthew 21:25-27 / Luke 20:5-7 / Mark 11:31-33. Their refusal demonstrated that they were not sincerely seeking the truth.
Therefore, Jesus refused to answer their question, Matthew 21:27 / Luke 20:8 / Mark 11:33.

JESUS’ QUESTION IS A MODEL

Anyone can ask questions, but Jesus was the Master at asking THE question. Jesus asked the Jewish leaders an outstanding question, ‘Did John’s baptism come from God or man?’

This is the question that we should ask about every religious practice. Anything that originates in man should be rejected; all that God commands should be carefully observed.

There is an easy way for us to determine whether a given teaching or activity comes from God or man. Everything that comes from God is in the Bible. If a particular doctrine or practice is not in the Bible, it is not from God. We should verify everything we do by this simple test: Does it come from God or from man?

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

“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.’” Matthew 21:28

I want to break this parable into three points.

1. ‘The call’.

Jesus asks the Jewish leaders a question. One of the first things that strikes you when you read this parable is the direct way the father approaches his sons. He feels he has the right to ask them both to go and work in his vineyard, and He speaks to both sons in the kindest of terms and says, ‘Son, go work,’ Matthew 21:28.

Jesus says, 'then the father went to the other son and said the same thing,' Matthew 21:30. And it's in this way that God, as the Father, gently calls all men, and that's because it's God who is ever seeking workers. It's God who takes the initiative to bring the inactive and indifferent into His vineyard.
It's God who draws people to the Saviour, and how does He do that? John 6:44. Not through a weird dream, not through a fascinating vision, not through an Ouija board, not through a crystal ball.
So what is His drawing power? God draws people to the Saviour through teaching John 6:45 / 2 Thessalonians 2:14. People are brought near to the fountain of grace when they learn, receive and submit to the Gospel of Christ.
The father, who had only two sons, asked each of them to work. He didn't say it was easy work, but they were called to work. And listen, God's call goes out to all His children. It's as worldwide as human flesh, it's as all-pervading as human needs.

God's call to His children and speaks to the cheerless and the downtrodden, Matthew 11:28. He summons each and every one of us to preach the Gospel in all nations. Not a single soul is to be left out, and that's because the call is universal and individual.
He wants all His children to enter His vineyard, and when a person refuses to go in, then they are flatly refusing to acknowledge His authority. Now, does God call us to become Christians, and then for us to just sit around and enjoy the blessings of a Christian life? No! Of course, He doesn't.

2. The call from God is a call to work.

If you're for Jesus, then you will work for Jesus, Matthew 12:30. When God calls you, it's not to rest and ease. The father's desire was for his sons to work; that's why he called them. Now it's true that there's a certain measure of safety and security in the church.
But the church, like a vineyard, is a place of work, and all those inside the vineyard should engage in its programme of work. The father's call had a sense of urgency about it. He says, 'Son, go and work today,' Matthew 21:28. In other words, there was work which needed to be done, and it needed to be done that day.

'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.' Matthew 21:29

So Christ's call is for men and women to work for Him today. That's all the time that there is; it's our one chance, our opportunity to serve, 2 Corinthians 6:2. If we hold back and put off, if we wait until tomorrow to do the work of today. The chances are the work won't get done, and so in effect we're like the son who bluntly said to his father, 'I will not,' Matthew 21:29.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.' Matthew 21:30

3. The workers.

The first son refused his father and rudely said, 'I will not go', Matthew 21:29. This son offered no reason or no excuse; he simply wasn't going. The first son made a change for the better; he remembered his ugly mood and the blatant discourtesy he had shown his father.
The first son began his day badly, but that didn't mean he had to carry on the rest of the day with the same attitude. He saw no reason to continue in the wrong, so what did he do? He repented.

And what did his repentance consist of? Not just a twinge of sorrow, he could have grieved much without repenting. He repented when he changed his mind and when he went to work in the vineyard, 'The son said, 'I will not go,' but later he changed his mind and went,' Matthew 21:29.

Let's look at the second son now and notice how polite and respectful he replies to his father's request, 'I will go, sir', Matthew 21:30. Although his brother might refuse his father, he would go. How courteous he is, how sure of success he is.
But why then did he fail his father? 'He did not go.' It's not that he deliberately deceived his father. He's not worked out some plot of intrigue by which he hoped to bankrupt his father.

He may not have even been trying to purposely lie to his father. He failed his father because, in his father's presence, he probably intended to go. But in his father's absence, he found that the doing of the task was more difficult than the saying of the words, James 1:22-25.
This son represents the large host of Christ's would-be followers who profess much but practice little. Many people pledge their loyalty to the Master, and then they fall down on their pledge.

They praise love but don't practise love. It's like a profession without practice, a promise without performance. And when people have this type of attitude, they continue to be the greatest enemy of the cause of Christ.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered.' Matthew 21:31

Jesus asks the Jews which of the two did the will of the Father? Matthew 21:31. There's a lot of emphasis on the word 'did' in that verse, it's the Greek word 'poyeh'o', and it means 'to agree or make a deal'.
It's the idea of doing something without any delay. In other words, Jesus asked the Jews, 'Which of the two, without any delay, did what the father wanted them to do?'

Out of all the questions, Jesus could have asked them, He asked them the most important question of all, 'Which one did the will of their father?' They said, 'the first,' and answered correctly, Matthew 21:31.
All else is of no consequence, no matter how good the intentions, no matter how many the promises, the simple fact is that one son did and one son didn't. Fine words can never take the place of fine deeds, and it's now that Jesus tells them they have just condemned themselves.

"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." Matthew 21:31-32

The tax collectors and sinners had turned from their ways, but the Jewish authorities had made no amends and had cast aside the heavenly kingdom. What an insult this must have been for them. Imagine the anger and rage in their hearts as Jesus tells them that these so-called unclean people, Matthew 21:31-32.
The people that the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law hated so much were now in a better spiritual condition than they had ever been. I would imagine them fuming. No wonder they wanted to kill Him and get Him out of the way.

Now the meaning of this parable is crystal clear. The first son who wouldn't work but later decided to work represents the tax collectors and prostitutes or sinners, as some translations have it.

All their lives, by their wicked deeds, they had been saying 'no' to God. But when Jesus comes along, they could no longer continue in their sin but pressed on to enter the kingdom, Luke 12:35-40.
The second son represents the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And they were always making the pretence of serving God, but when Jesus came along, they didn't accept Him as the tax collectors and prostitutes did.

They despised His teachings, and they hated Him so much that they would eventually crucify Him on a cross. They had rejected John the baptiser and they had rejected Jesus as the Christ and wouldn't accept His authority.

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following concerning Matthew 21:32.

'The Pharisees had no excuse for neglecting the preaching of John, for it was based on the Law which they idolised, and ran counter to none of their cherished convictions. The preaching of Christ was different, and could not easily be received by strict Jews, unless they had first passed through the preliminary baptism of John.'

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

Some people like to say that this is a parable about 'The wicked tenants', but by the time we have finished, you'll see that it's more like the parable of 'The rejected Son'.

We all know what the Pharisees and Sadducees were like; they hated Jesus, and they were always plotting for a way to get rid of Him. And there were many reasons for this, but one of the main reasons they wanted Jesus out of the way was because they couldn't or wouldn't accept who Jesus was. They were always questioning His authority, Mark 1:21-22 / Mark 11:27-33.
They wouldn't answer Him because they feared the people. And it's with this final rejection of the source of the Lord's authority that Jesus goes on to tell them the parable.

This parable tells us a lot about our God, mankind and Jesus Himself. First, let's look at what it says about our God. This parable tells us four things about our God.

'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 moved to another place.' Matthew 21:33

1. Our God is a gracious God.

The Jewish leaders forgot to look back into their history and recognise just exactly who they were and where they came from. In Ezekiel 16, we find a very graphic picture of what the nation of Israel was like when God took them under His care, Ezekiel 16:4-7. And then God goes on to describe how they grew up into something beautiful and how they were like a queen.
But what a pathetic, helpless and hopeless picture this is. These religious leaders had forgotten just who they were and where they came from. They were God's people, and God owned them. It was God who made them into the nation that they were. It was God who cared for them when they were lying by the side of the road, hopeless.

And when Jesus says that a man planted a vineyard, Matthew 21:33 / Luke 20:9 / Mark 12:1, He's telling us that man was God, it was God who planted the vineyard.
And notice that the vineyard was given everything it needed to do its work. It was given a wall around it to mark out its boundaries, to keep out robbers and to defend it from wild boars, Matthew 21:33 / Mark 12:1. There was also a winepress in the vineyard where people would trample all over the grapes with their feet, Matthew 21:33 / Mark 12:1. And underneath the winepress, there was a wine vat, and that's where all the juice from the grapes would flow. And they were given a tower, Matthew 21:33 / Mark 12:1, and it's in this tower that the wine would be stored, and the people would also live there.
And it's from there that they could look out for robbers at harvest time, that's why it's called a watchtower, Isaiah 5:2. The vineyard owner gave the vineyard everything it needed to make their work easy and profitable.
And notice that God didn't just give them a task to do, He also gave them the means by which to do those tasks, 1 Peter 4:10. When Jesus is talking about those who were given talents, He said one had five talents, another had two talents, and yet another had one talent.

But Jesus clearly tells us in Matthew 25 that all were given a talent. But He says, we have a talent, and we need to use and develop that talent the best we can because if we don't, He will give it to someone else who will use it, Matthew 25:28.

2. God trusts us enough to do the work at hand.

The owner of the vineyard went away on a journey, Luke 20:9. God trusted the tenants to run the vineyard by themselves while He was away. The responsibility of sharing the good news about Jesus Christ with people is in our hands, Matthew 28:19-20.

God trusts us enough to do that, and He trusts us enough to give us freedom of choice about how we do that and how we live our lives. God has entrusted us to look after His work here on earth, but unlike those tenants, we don't have any rights. We don't have any right to abuse the Word of God.

We don't have any right to compromise the Word of God. We don't have any right to abuse any of the gifts He has given us. But God trusts us enough to allow us to make mistakes and do so much for ourselves.

'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.' Matthew 21:34-36

3. Our God is patient.

Notice how the master sent servant after servant, Matthew 21:34-37 / Luke 20:10-12 / Mark 12:2-5. We know that Jeremiah was a prophet of God who was beaten up time and time again by the so-called leaders of God's people, Jeremiah 37:15.

Uriah is another prophet who was killed by the so-called leaders, Jeremiah 26:23. Zechariah was another prophet who was killed by the so-called leaders, 2 Chronicles 24:21.

Hebrews 11:37 tells us that many of God's servants were stoned; they were sawn in two, they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated.'

These servants of God were God's holy prophets who were treated like this. And even after the first one was abused and ill-treated, God still didn't get angry with them and come after them with vengeance. Oh no! He gave those tenants chance after chance to respond to His appeals.

And He does the same with people today. He doesn't cast us away after we sin as Christians. He gives us chance after chance to live holy lives and gives those who aren't Christians time to become Christians, 2 Peter 3:9.

'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.' Matthew 21:37-39

Notice that Jesus doesn't call Himself a servant here, Matthew 21:37-38 / Luke 20:13-15 / Mark 12:6-8. He deliberately removes himself from the succession of prophets.

He says they were servants, but He is the Son. And so, because Jesus was always being questioned about His authority, He tells them right to their face that He is the Messiah.

They knew that He was the heir, they knew they were going to kill Him, Matthew 21:38-39 / Luke 20:14-15 / Mark 12:7-8. He says they were servants, but He is the Son, Matthew 28:18 / John 13:3 / John 17:2 / Hebrews 1:2.

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" "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." Matthew 21:40-41

4. God will serve justice.

These tenants pushed their luck; they pushed God's patience, 2 Peter 3:10. And as this parable tells us, the world can push its luck with its disobedience and rebellion, but there's a time coming when justice will be done. People will either be born again or wish they hadn't been born at all, Hebrews 9:27.
And unlike what the world believes, our God has the right to judge the world. Our God is a patient God, and He, as the owner of our souls, has the right to expect us to work in the field with the gifts He has given us.

He has given us everything we need for life and godliness, 2 Peter 1:3. It's because of their lack of faithfulness to God that Jesus asks these leaders the question, Matthew 21:40 / Luke 20:15 / Mark 12:9.
These tenants pushed their luck; they pushed God's patience. And as this parable tells us, the world can push its luck with its disobedience and rebellion, but there's a time coming when justice will be done, 2 Peter 3:10 / Hebrews 9:27.
Our God is a patient God, and He, as the owner of our souls, has the right to expect us to work in the field with the gifts He has given us. He has given us everything we need for life and godliness, 2 Peter 1:3.
This parable also tells us two things about mankind.

1. Mankind thinks it can get away with sin.

Sometimes in the world's judicial system, people fall through the cracks and get away with their crimes, but God's justice system doesn't have any cracks. Remember, God's people hadn't heard a word from God for four hundred years; they hadn't heard a word from any prophet until John the baptiser came along. Out of sight, out of mind, is the phrase they might have used.

They must have thought that God was too far away to do anything about the situation. Luke tells us in his account in Luke 20:9, that He was away for a 'long time'.
And so, because of that silence, they may have thought that God was dead and out of the picture. Oh, but how wrong they were and how wrong people are today who think that there's no God or He's a dead God.

People today think they can get away with their sinful behaviour, but our God is very much alive, Acts 14:15 / Revelation 1:18. We don't come together every week to remember a dead God; our God is alive and well today, and when He returns, the whole world is going to know about it.
2. We can lose our privileges.

This parable has the story of what was still to come. The Jews had all the privileges of being God's chosen people. They also had many responsibilities, which went along with those privileges. But these people enjoyed all the blessings from God.

He looked after them, He provided their everyday needs, He provided wisdom and guidance, food and shelter. He took care of all their needs as we looked at earlier.

And as soon as Jesus mentioned a vineyard, the Jews would know exactly what it meant. They would cast their minds back to Isaiah 5, where Isaiah is talking about the vineyard.
The problem is this parable doesn't mean much to us today, but to a Jew, Isaiah 5:1-7 was a very important part of Israel's history, which they couldn't ignore or forget.
Have you ever sat and listened to a sermon and thought to yourself, Is that preacher speaking about me? Is God speaking to me through that preacher? Sometimes we think maybe He's not speaking about us, but there are times when it's so much in our face that we know that God is speaking to us.

The religious leaders knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. These tenants or Jewish leaders knew Jesus was speaking about them, but as usual, they failed to listen and do their job.

In Matthew 23, we find Jesus talking about the so-called spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation, and he says in Matthew 23:16, 'Woe to you, blind guides!' He calls them 'Blind fools!' in Matthew 23:17.
In Matthew 23:19, He calls them 'Blind men!' In Matthew 23:23, He says, 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!' And on and on He goes. But the point is that the Jewish leaders were supposed to produce the fruit, Matthew 21:34 / Luke 20:10 / Mark 12:2, and they were supposed to protect the rest of the vineyard. They were supposed to watch out for robbers, but they didn't because they didn't do their job properly. And it's because of their lack of faithfulness to God that Jesus asks these leaders 'What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others,' Matthew 21:40 / Matthew 21:43 / Luke 20:15 / Mark 12:9.
In other words, all the privileges, all the responsibilities of being a child of God were going to be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who would be grateful for everything He has done and will do for them, Matthew 21:41 / Luke 20:16 / Mark 12:9.
The Jewish nation will be done away with, and another nation will be raised. A nation of people who will obey His words and take their responsibilities seriously, a nation of Christians.

And that would have hurt, 'the Gentiles being a part of the kingdom of God. Never!' A Jew would say. All the privileges the Jews had with God were now going to be available to all who would be obedient to the Gospel of Christ, Ephesians 3:4-6.

'Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?' Matthew 21:42

Those listening to Jesus are clearly shocked by His words and say, 'God forbid!' Luke 20:16. And so, it's then that Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23 / Matthew 21:42 / Luke 20:17 / Mark 12:10-11. This stone, which was the keystone for the building, the most important stone of all, was being rejected, Matthew 21:44 / Luke 20:18.
The Jewish leaders rejected the Christ, their long-awaited Messiah, Isaiah 8:14-15 / Isaiah 28:16 / Daniel 2:44-45 / Zechariah 12:3 / Romans 9:33 / 1 Peter 2:8. The Jewish leaders rejected Christ, their long-awaited Messiah. Despite knowing this, they didn't want to accept Him, Matthew 21:45-46 / Luke 20:19 / Mark 12:12. This was a right in your face parable.
The stone the Jewish leaders rejected has now become the cornerstone of a new building, the church, Acts 4:8-12. In other words, the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the very words and the teachings of Christ are the very foundation that Christianity is built.

"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. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." Matthew 21:43-44

All the privileges, all the responsibilities of being a child of God were going to be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who will be grateful for everything He has done and will do for them, Matthew 21:43-44.
Jesus was the stone of Daniel 2, which broke into pieces and consumed all the power that was exerted by world kingdoms, Daniel 2:24-25 / Daniel 2:44-45. The Jewish nation will be done away with, and another nation will be raised. A nation of people who will obey His words and take their responsibilities seriously, a nation of Christians.
And that would have hurt, 'the Gentiles being a part of the kingdom of God. Never!' a Jew would say, Ephesians 3:4-6. All the privileges the Jews had with God were now going to be available to all who would be obedient to the Gospel of Christ.

‘When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.’ Matthew 21:45-46

They understood what Jesus was talking about with the parable; the chief priests and Pharisees didn’t want to accept Him, Matthew 21:45-46 / Luke 20:19 / Mark 12:12.
Instead, they looked for a way to arrest Him, but because of fear of the people, they couldn’t at this time. They knew that even the people believed that he was a prophet.

And so, because Jesus was always being questioned about His authority, He tells them right to their face that He is the Messiah. They knew that He was the heir; they knew they were going to kill Him, Luke 20:18.
In Matthew, we find Jesus talking about the so-called spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation, and he calls them ‘blind guides! Matthew 23:16. He calls them ‘Blind fools!’ Matthew 23:17. He calls them ‘Blind men!’ Matthew 23:19, and He calls ‘hypocrites!’ Matthew 23:23.
But the point is that the Jewish leaders were supposed to produce the fruit, and they were supposed to protect the rest of the vineyard. They were supposed to watch out for robbers, but they didn’t because they didn’t do their job properly. They rejected Him, John 1:11 / John 3:16, and they crucified Him outside the city, 1 Corinthians 2:8 / Hebrews 13:12-13.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to dying, most of us don’t know how or when that’s going to happen. But Jesus knew when and how He was going to die. The cross of Christ didn’t come as a surprise to Jesus, but it was still a brutal and shameful way to die, Hebrews 10:5-10.
Jesus Christ was born to die, that’s why He came to earth in the first place. He knew He was going to have to suffer and be mocked both physically and mentally.

But it’s because of His willingness to go to the cross that we can come together and worship Him every week. The stone the Jewish leaders rejected has now become the cornerstone of a new building, the church, Acts 4:8-12. In other words, the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the very words and the teachings of Christ are the very foundation that Christianity is built upon.
And what a privilege that is, to be a part of God’s kingdom. The question is, what are we going to do with Him? Are we going to reject Him as our Saviour, or are we going to accept Him as our Saviour?

The Jews were awaiting their Messiah; He came, and they missed it. If you’re not a Christian today, then like we said earlier, God is patient with you, not wanting you to perish, 1 Peter 3:9. But He offers you salvation today, He wants to be your personal Saviour, so don’t be like the Jews and miss out.

CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION

‘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. “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.’ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.’ Matthew 22:1-5

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET

Before we get into the parable, I need to mention Luke’s account. In Luke 14:16-24, we find a similar parable by Jesus to the one we have here in Matthew. And many people interpret them both as variations of one original story. However, when you read the backgrounds and the details of both parables, you will find that they’re both very different.

The parable in Matthew’s account is in close succession with the parable of ‘The Tenants’ and sounds a warning note to the Jews who would reject their Messiah. The parable in Luke’s account, however, isn’t as severe in tone, yet it stands as a warning to all men that they shouldn’t take the kingdom for granted. And so the two parables are independent of each other, but the obvious similarities are due to their common origin, Jesus Christ.

This parable is a response to the Pharisees, who were looking for an excuse to kill Jesus, Matthew 21:45-46. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son, Matthew 22:1. The king mentioned here obviously represents God providing for the salvation of the world, and the son represents Christ.

He says a king sent his servants out with invitations to a wedding feast, Matthew 22:2-3. This was an invitation for the Pharisees and Sadducees to submit to Jesus as King, Matthew 11:11 / Matthew 11:28-29 / Revelation 3:21. These servants were God’s messengers of old, Mark 1:1-4.

Trench, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This second summons I take to represent the invitation to the Jewish people, as it was renewed to them at the second epoch of the kingdom, that is, after the resurrection and ascension.’

1. God was willing to overlook the first blunt rejection of Christ, even his crucifixion, attributing it to ignorance, Acts 3:17.
2. Also, the Jews continued to have a priority in hearing the gospel for a long while after Pentecost, as indicated by Paul’s motto, ‘To the Jew first and also to the Greek,’ Romans 1:16.

Not only did the Jews reject the invitation, Matthew 22:3, despite everything being prepared for the feast, Matthew 22:4, and pay no attention to it, Matthew 22:5, but they also belittled it and made light of it; they carried on with life as usual, Matthew 22:5.

‘The rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.’ Matthew 22:6-7

Although they rejected God, He had warned them and disciplined them, but still, they refused to repent. The Jews had been invited but refused to come, John 1:11 / Matthew 21:38-39.

God sent prophets to warn them of their punishment, but the Israelites tortured and killed these messengers, Matthew 22:6. Through the armies of Babylon and Rome, God punished the Jewish nation, Matthew 22:7 / Matthew 24:1-34.

‘Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So 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, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.’ Matthew 22:8-11

The original guests were not worthy because they disregarded the king's invitations, Matthew 22:8. They failed to respond to his invitation to come freely. The Jews judged themselves unworthy, and so, it was needful that the message of the kingdom reign be preached to them in order that they have their chance to obey, despite not deserving the invite, Matthew 22:9 / Acts 13:46-48 / Acts 18:6.
The servants are commanded to go to the street corners with an invitation; it didn't matter if they were good or bad, all were invited, Matthew 22:9-10 / Matthew 13:3-9 / Matthew 13:36-43 / Matthew 13:47-48.
When the king arrived, he spotted someone who wasn't wearing wedding clothes, Matthew 22:11. In other words, they weren't clothed with the righteousness that comes from God, but with their own righteousness, Ephesians 2:8-10.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The garments worn on festival occasions were chiefly long white robes, and it was the custom of the person who made the feast to prepare such robes to be worn by the guests. This renders the conduct of this man more inexcusable. He came in his common and ordinary dress, as he was taken from the highway, and though he had not a garment of his own suitable for the occasion, yet one had been provided for him if he had applied for it. His not doing it was expressive of the highest disrespect for the king.'

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This stands for the final inspection of all men in the judgment. To be sure, the King is constantly beholding the men of his kingdom and continually observing the conduct of all his servants; but this coming in of the king on a formal and stated occasion to view the guests indicates a far more auspicious examination. It is the judgment of the great day when the King shall suddenly appear and review the credentials of those who have accepted his invitation. Judgment shall indeed begin at the house of God, 1 Peter 4:17.'

'He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' 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." Matthew 22:12-14

The guest who wasn't wearing wedding clothes was there, whether evil or good, Matthew 22:10, because he had accepted the king's gracious invitation. However, he was subject to the king's scrutiny.
The king addressed his guest as a 'friend', Matthew 22:12, but asked how he got in without the proper wedding clothes. The man obviously represents the Pharisees, who had a righteousness of their own, Matthew 5:20.
He wasn't clothed with the righteousness that comes from God, but with his own righteousness, Luke 18:9-14 / Ephesians 2:8-10. Notice the man was speechless, Matthew 22:12, possibly due to embarrassment. He couldn't defend himself or offer any kind of excuse.
The king commands his attendant to tie the man up and throw him outside, Matthew 22:13 / Matthew 8:12 / Galatians 4:30, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, Matthew 8:12 / Matthew 23:23-33 / Matthew 24:51 / Matthew 25:30.
Jesus is emphasising His message of Matthew 21:43, which is that the rebellious of His generation will be cast out because they wouldn't choose to accept Him as their king.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This does not bestow inquisitorial rights on God's ministers in this dispensation. The exposure and punishment of that offender occurred at the arraignment before the king, not before. The servants in this verse therefore, cannot be the apostles or ministers of the word, but the angels of God, Matthew 13:47-52. The punishment refers to hell, Matthew 25:46.'

Jesus openly declares that many are invited but few are chosen, Matthew 22:14 / Matthew 20:16. Remember, even though the man was at the wedding feast, it didn't mean that the king favoured him being there. As Christians, we too must be careful that we may well be in the church, but that doesn't necessarily mean we will receive eternal life, Revelation 3:18.

PAYING THE IMPERIAL TAX TO CAESAR

This is yet another example of a group of people who are trying to trap Jesus to find any excuse to have Him put to death. What's interesting is that we also find an example of others giving someone else a loaded gun to shoot, whilst the people who gave them the loaded gun remain in the background because they're not brave enough to do it themselves.

'Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.' Matthew 22:15

It's obvious that the parables, Matthew 22:33-45 / Luke 20:9-19 / Mark 12:1-12, which Jesus had just finished teaching hit a nerve with the Pharisees, and as a result of this, in order to save their own skin and find an excuse to put Him to death, they wanted to find a way to humiliate Jesus in front of everyone else, Matthew 22:15 / Luke 20:20 / Mark 12:13.

'They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.' Matthew 22:16

THE HERODIANS

The Pharisees send their disciples along with the Herodians, Matthew 22:16. The Herodians were a political group that supported the Roman leader, King Herod Antipas, who reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. They wanted everyone to submit to the rule of Herod and they did so purely because of the financial gain they may receive and so they would be left alone in peace.
The Pharisees and others wanted Israel to follow the teachings of the Law, but not with any Roman input, whilst the Herodians were willing to work with the Romans. They were the absolute opposite of those who believed that God and God alone should lead Israel.

When we read the New Testament, we see that when two opposing groups have a common enemy, despite their beliefs, they will come together and unite against the enemy. In this case, the common enemy was Jesus, Mark 3:6, but of course, Jesus knew their hearts too and warned against their teaching, Mark 8:15.

FLATTERY

The Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus and use flattery as a trap, Matthew 22:16 / Luke 20:21 / Mark 12:14. Remember that the Herodians themselves taught that taxes must be paid to Rome. The ironic thing is that they spoke the truth about Jesus; everything they described Jesus to be was true, Matthew 22:16 / Luke 20:21 / Mark 12:14.

They knew Jesus was straight-talking, they knew that He didn't worry if people were offended when He spoke the truth and because they knew Jesus spoke against them and their teachings, they knew they had to get rid of Him because He was exposing their own hypocrisy, Matthew 21:28.
Obviously, they are trying to set the trap, they're trying to set Jesus up for the question to come but as Anne Bradstreet once said, 'Sweet words are like honey, a little may refresh, but too much gluts the stomach.'

THE QUESTION ABOUT PAYING TAX TO CAESAR

'Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?' Matthew 22:17

In simple terms, they were asking Jesus this question based on the law of Moses, Matthew 22:17 / Luke 21:22 / Mark 12:14-15. In other words, does the law of Moses teach that one should pay taxes to a foreign state?
In their theology, if Jesus said they shouldn't pay the taxes, He would be in violation of Roman law because Israel at the time was under the rule of Rome. But if Jesus said to pay the taxes, then they believed that He would be in violation of Old Testament law as stated in Deuteronomy 17:14-15, which was given to Israel as a self-governing nation.

ROMAN TAX

According to history, the Roman taxes made up one per cent of a man's income. Much like today, the more money you earn, the more tax you pay. But we must also remember the Romans had other taxes, customs taxes, import and export taxes, toll bridges, crop taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, and special taxes when there was a war. They had building projects or campaigns to finance.

THE TRAP

If Jesus had said it was unlawful to give to Caesar, there's no doubt they would have dragged Him away to face the courts, charged with treason, which, of course, was punishable by death.

If Jesus had said, It is right to pay tax to Caesar, this wouldn't go down well with the people who were listening because they had longed to get out of the Roman bondage.

It's almost amusing that they actually believed they had come up with a question that Jesus had no way out of, Matthew 22:17 / Luke 20:22 / Mark 12:15, but instead of them humiliating Jesus, Jesus will end up humiliating them.

'But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then he said to them, 'So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed. So, they left him and went away.' Matthew 22:18-22

Notice how Jesus knew what they were up to and knew what their intent really was, Matthew 22:18 / Luke 20:23 / Mark 12:15 / John 2:24-25. Interestingly, those who are in positions of leadership always seem to be

hypocritical of other religious leaders who hold a different view. The very fact that they set out to trap Jesus in the first place, Matthew 22:18, tells us a lot about the condition of their hearts.
The coin in question, Matthew 22:19-21 / Luke 20:24 / Mark 12:15-16, was a silver denarius, which was worth around a day's wages and engraved on it was the image of Caesar, who was the Emperor of Rome.
The second commandment of the ten commandments prohibited the Jews from making any graven image in order to symbolise the worship of gods in an idolatrous manner, Exodus 20:4.

JESUS' RESPONSE

Jesus tells them to pay the taxes regardless of whose image is on the coin, Matthew 22:21 / Luke 20:25 / Mark 12:17. In other words, the money belongs to Caesar, therefore pay to him that which belongs to him, Romans 13:7. They needed to learn that just because they pay tax to Caesar, doesn't mean that they are worshipping Caesar.
On the other hand, they needed to learn that everything ultimately belongs to God, Matthew 22:21 / Luke 20:25 / Mark 12:17; therefore, our lives are given to God who created all men in His image, Genesis 1:26-27.
Remember, the Jews weren't to pay respect to images like that on the Roman coin, and when they realised this, they actually trapped themselves concerning paying taxes to a foreign government. Jesus says they must give their lives to God and give Caesar his taxes, Matthew 22:21.

HUMILIATED

Jesus answered the Pharisees and the Herodians' questions, but not in the way they were expecting. Their trap failed, and Jesus ended up trapping them. They came to humiliate Him, but He humiliated them.

They were amazed and left, Matthew 22:22 / Luke 20:26 / Mark 12:17 / John 8:1-11, because they knew they didn't get one single thing from Jesus that they could use against Him.

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we must obey our government and pay our taxes, whilst at the same time obeying our God in whose image we are made. There are genuine people out there who have genuine questions in their hearts which need to be answered honestly.

However, there will also be those among us, even today, who try to trap us with double-edged questions; may we be wise enough to recognise the trap and answer with wisdom, Proverbs 15:1-2 / Proverbs 26:4.

MARRIAGE AT THE RESURRECTION

'That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.' Matthew 22:23

THE SADDUCEES

The Sadducees were a religious sect in the time of Jesus, Matthew 22:23 / Luke 20:27 / Mark 12:18. Their origin is not known for sure. Some think they date back to Zadock, a high priest during the time of David and Solomon, 1 Kings 2:26-27. However, in all probability, they came into existence during the period between the Old and New Testaments.
We do know that they came from the leading families of the nation, such as the priests, merchants, and the rich. They can well be described as aristocrats. The high priests, the most powerful members of the priesthood, were mainly Sadducees, Acts 5:17.
One of the distinguishing marks of the Sadducees was their rejection of the 'traditions of the elders' advocated by the Pharisees. They claimed that God not only gave Moses a written law, but also an oral law, which was passed down and given to the elders.

They, in turn, passed these oral laws on down to their successors. The Pharisees claimed the oral law was needed to interpret the written Law of Moses. They regarded these traditions as important as the Law of Moses itself.

By contrast, the Sadducees insisted that only the laws written by Moses, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, were the only binding laws.

In short, the main difference between the two parties was confined, on the whole, to this general rejection of Pharisaic traditions. With the Sadducees, little value was placed on the writings of the Prophets or the Psalms. They didn't outright reject them, but they didn't feel they were on an equal par with the Pentateuch.

The most prominent doctrine of the Sadducees was the denial of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. They believed that the soul dies with the body, thus the extinction of life.

The Sadducees said that Moses nowhere mentions anything about a soul or a resurrection, Acts 23:8. From this passage, we learn that they didn't believe in either angels or spirits.
However, angels are mentioned several times in the writings of Moses. In view of this, it's difficult to see how they could harmonise this with their denial of angels. They may have regarded angels as simply God appearing in some kind of visible form.

The Sadducees also believed in the free will of man, that is, man is responsible for his own prosperity or misfortune. They interpreted the law literally and tended to support strict justice as opposed to mercy toward the offender.

Considering their concept of no life after death, it seems strange to us that they were so intent on punishing those who violated the law. Stranger yet, why would they want to be priests and religious leaders if there is no resurrection? The answer may lie in their belief that God prospered the righteous.

THE UNREALISTIC QUESTION

'Teacher,' they said, 'Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring 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?' Matthew 22:24-28

Just like the Pharisees before them, the Sadducees' question was all about trying to trap Jesus, Matthew 22:24-28 / Luke 20:28-33 / Mark 12:19-23. They say that Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him, Matthew 22:24 / Luke 20:28 / Mark 12:19, and then they give an example of a woman being widowed seven times, Matthew 22:25-27 / Luke 20:29-32 / Mark 12:20-22. When you think about the actual question, the woman being widowed seven times, the possibility of this actually happening in real life is almost none, which tells us that this wasn't a sincere question, it was a question asked to try and support their idea that there is no resurrection, Matthew 22:23 / Matthew 22:28 / Luke 20:27 / Mark 12:18 / Mark 12:24.
The law, which is referred to as the 'levirate law', was based on the principle that the family name of the dead brother is carried on throughout history, Genesis 38:8 / Ruth 3:5-6 / Deuteronomy 25:5-10.
Moses said that if the older brother, who had a legal right to continue the family name and the birthright, died, leaving his wife without children, his brother must raise up children by the dead brother's wife.

They asked a question designed to show that the doctrine of the resurrection was absurd. It involved the invented case of a woman who was married to seven brothers in succession. They asked Jesus to tell them whose wife she would be in the resurrection since all of them had been married to her, Matthew 22:28 / Luke 20:33 / Mark 12:23.

JESUS' RESPONSE

'Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.' Matthew 22:29

Their question was meant to show a supposed contradiction in the teaching of Jesus, but they didn't know the Old Testament Scriptures or the power of God, Matthew 22:29 / Mark 12:24-27.

'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.' Matthew 22:30-31

In Luke 20:34-37, notice how Jesus speaks of two ages, 'this age' and 'the age to come', Luke 20:35. If this doesn't tell us that there's definitely life after death, I don't know what will. It's interesting that Jesus just goes with their thought process.
Despite the chances of this happening, the woman being widowed seven times previously, Christ resolved the issue, not based on what Moses said but on what God said, Matthew 22:31. In other words, Christ tells them, it isn't Moses they are quoting but God, Matthew 22:31-32 / Luke 20:37 / Mark 12:26.
The Old Testament Scriptures do teach about the resurrection, Matthew 22:31 / Luke 20:37 / Mark 12:26, whether the Jews understood this or not, they couldn't deny what the Scriptures actually said concerning resurrection, Job 19:25-27 / Isaiah 26:19 / Daniel 12:2.
It's clear that the Sadducees didn't understand that there is life after death and they certainly didn't believe in the power of God, Matthew 22:29 / Mark 12:24. This was simply because of their ignorance of what the Scriptures actually teach.
Jesus confirms there will be a resurrection, Matthew 22:30 / Luke 20:36 / Mark 12:25, but He also tells them there will be no marriage at the resurrection, just like angels don't marry, Matthew 22:30 / Luke 20:35-36 / Mark 12:25.
There will be no marriage or procreation in heaven, for the purpose of procreation would have fulfilled its purpose. Procreation was for the purpose of populating the world. Heaven, however, will be populated by those who were born again in this world, John 1:13-14.

We also know there will be no death in heaven, Luke 20:35-36 / 1 Corinthians 15:26 / Revelation 20:13-14. Our earthly relationships will be superseded by a state wherein we will be like angels who now exist, Luke 20:36 / Hebrews 1:14 / 1 John 3:2.
Even though the Sadducees didn't ask Him about angels, I believe Jesus mentioned the angels on purpose, as we looked at earlier, they didn't believe in angels, Acts 23:8.
And so we could say, they came asking one question, but Jesus actually answers two questions, and He tells them their thinking and doctrine are wrong on both counts. There is a resurrection, and angels do exist.

The phrases 'God's children' and 'children of the resurrection', Luke 20:24, are used to mean the same thing. It's God's pledge for His children, Romans 8:21 / Romans 8:23, and as we know, the resurrection is absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith, Hebrews 6:1-2.
It's important to point out that Jesus uses the Greek present progressive tense here, and in doing so, He's pointing out the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still living at the time God made this statement and at the time Jesus referred to it, Genesis 17:2 / Genesis 26:24 / Genesis 28:21 / Exodus 3:6 / Exodus 3:15.

THE GOD OF THE LIVING

''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."
Matthew 22:32

It's important to point out that Jesus uses the Greek present progressive tense here, and in doing so, He's pointing out the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still living at the time God made this statement and at the time Jesus referred to it, Genesis 17:2 / Genesis 26:24 / Genesis 28:21 / Exodus 3:6 / Exodus 3:15.
Jesus is saying that when a person dies, God doesn't stop being their God and because He doesn't stop being their God, this tells us that the righteous don't cease to exist when they die, Matthew 22:32 / Luke 20:38 / Mark 12:27.
In other words, the souls of righteous people are kept by God in heaven until the resurrection, after which we all will receive our new resurrected bodies which are made for eternal purposes in heaven, John 5:28-29 / 1 Corinthians 15:35-55 / 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

'When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.' Matthew 22:33

Notice it was 'the teachers of the law' who responded to Jesus' teaching, Luke 20:39-40. You can hear them say, 'Bravo, bravo, teacher,' and sniggering amongst themselves as Jesus seems to side with their theology about the resurrection and angels.
It's also interesting that Matthew doesn't tell us that the Sadducees were astonished at Jesus' teaching, but he says 'the crowds' were astonished, Matthew 22:33.
It appears the crowds had heard the Sadducees' theology for years, but no one really seemed to question their beliefs. The Sadducees, like the Pharisees before them, seem to disappear off the scene, no doubt feeling embarrassed and ashamed, and no one else dared to ask Jesus any more questions, Luke 20:40.
As with the Pharisees, their whole religion was one of pretence. In other words, they pretended to know the Scriptures when in fact they didn't know the Scriptures. And so, when Jesus comes along and shows how far off their understanding of the Scriptures actually was, the crowd were astonished, Matthew 22:13.
We can almost hear the relief in the crowd, 'at last', they cry, 'Someone who knows what they're talking about, Someone who actually knows and understands the Scriptures correctly'.

CONCLUSION

If we learn anything from Jesus' dealings with the Sadducees, it's simply this: we must know the Scriptures. You'll be amazed at how many Christians misquote Scripture, maybe in ignorance, as I've done in the past, but there are others who deliberately misquote Scripture to defend their personal beliefs.

If you listen carefully, you will hear it from the pulpit, you will hear it on the TV, and everyone says the 'amen' without realising that they have just been lied to, 2 Timothy 4:3-4.
I was reading a 'Christian' survey just the other week and found it shocking that many Christians don't even possess a Bible. I was even more shocked that those who do own one don't read it, and some only read it on a Sunday morning.

No wonder people are being led astray and come to believe all kinds of erroneous teachings! It's a sad fact that many churches don't have any Bible study time, and those that do, don't have many members in attendance.

I'm not saying that others don't study at home or by themselves, but one of the best ways to know the Scriptures is by sitting in a Bible class, where you are encouraged to read the Bible for yourself. A Bible class where you are encouraged to ask questions and share your opinion, whilst learning from others, Acts 2:42 / 2 Timothy 2:15.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

'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?" 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 neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:34-40

The religious leaders are around trying to trap Him, Matthew 22:34-35. The Herodians came to Jesus and tried to catch Him out. As soon as they are silenced, the Sadducees come along, and they too try to trick Jesus. And finally, we have the Pharisees, the teachers of the nation.
It seems as though one young man, an expert in the law, Matthew 22:35 / Mark 12:28 / Luke 7:30 / Luke 10:25, pushed his way forward to ask Jesus another trick question to try and trap Him, Matthew 22:36 / Mark 12:28.
And Jesus looks at this young man and I wonder if there wasn't a look of sympathy on His face! This man had been so wrongly informed about Jesus; I don't think he would believe anything that Jesus would tell him anyway.

But we can imagine that man standing back and waiting for the answer from Jesus. And Jesus deliberately quotes from the Old Testament, Matthew 22:37 / Mark 12:29-31. A passage of scripture that every faithful Jew would recite twice every day.
It's known as 'The Schema', from Deuteronomy 6:4-6. Jesus says we are to love God with all our heart, our soul and our mind, Matthew 6:33 / 1 John 14:15, and we are to love our neighbours as yourself, Matthew 19:19 / Leviticus 19:18 / Galatians 5:14 / Galatians 5:22-23. Love is the motivation by which law is put into action in our lives, Romans 3:31.
Poole, in his commentary, says the following about the law and the prophets, Matthew 22:40.
'Moses summed up all in the ten commandments, to which, truly interpreted, all the precepts of Scripture are reducible. Christ here brings the ten to two.'

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART

We all know how much God loves us because the Bible clearly tells us, John 3:16 / 1 John 3:16. And so, there is no questioning God's love for us, but how do we love God?
C. S. Lewis once said the following.

'On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him.'

God never commands us to do something without first telling us how to do it. And so, after telling Israel that the LORD God is one, Moses goes on to explain to us how we are to love God. The Hebrew word for love is the word 'ahab', and it carries with it the idea of having the ultimate love that we can express or feel.

In other words, when we say we love the Lord, we're saying we have loved, and we do love and will continue to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength.

Do you love God with all of your heart? If we're honest with ourselves, we will admit that we all love God to a certain extent, but the truth is, sometimes He's not always the one we love most.

Sometimes we love our spouses more or our families more. Sometimes we love our jobs or hobbies more. We have many other things in this world that are pulling for our affection.

So how can we obey the Lord's command to love Him with all our hearts? We have to acknowledge that we can't really love Him or anyone else without His help.

In other words, He doesn't ask us to do anything which didn't first originate from Him, 1 John 4:19. God is the actual source of our love for Him. He loved us first, and He infused us with His love. To infuse means to fill, to soak; we're being soaked with the love of God. The love of God in us is the love with which we can love Him in return.
When most people think about love, they think of the warm, fluffy feeling they get when they meet someone. But love isn't merely a feeling; it's an attribute, hence why God is love, 1 John 4:8 / 1 John 4:16. We can't claim to love anyone if we don't know God because God is love. The reason we know and rely on the love of God is simply because God is love.
So what is the heart? You would be forgiven for thinking it is an organ in your body which keeps you alive. That's just a pump that keeps the blood flowing through your body.

We have to remember that in the Old Testament, the word 'heart' didn't carry the same deep meaning in Hebrew as it does in the Greek New Testament. This is one reason why the New Testament gives a deeper meaning to the word 'mind'. In other words, the Hebrew concept of 'heart' included both feelings and thoughts, Genesis 6:5.
Thinking is an activity of the mind, but Jesus asked the scribes why they were thinking those thoughts in their hearts, Matthew 9:4. This shows that our mind is part of our heart.
In Acts 11:23, we read that when we exercise our will, our will is part of our heart. Rejoicing is related to our emotions, but in John 16:22, we see that our hearts rejoice. This shows us that our emotions are also part of our heart. Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, Hebrews 10:22, indicates that our conscience is also part of our heart. Our hearts do much more than we might have thought.
In addition to sensing the wide range of human emotions, our hearts think, decide, and perceive right from wrong. If we didn't have a heart, we couldn't sense love or love in return, Mark 12:30.
God created us with a heart so we could have a loving relationship with Him. So in a very real sense, our heart is at the centre of our relationship with God. We were created by God in such a marvellous way. We have a spirit to contact, receive, and contain Him as life, and a heart to love Him.

He wants to be our life, and He wants us to love Him with our whole heart. And if we're truthful with ourselves, it's easy to love God when things are going well, when we enjoy one blessing after another.

But what about those difficult times? What about when challenges come our way? Israel had to learn the lesson which we still have to learn today. Loving God with ALL of our heart means loving God at ALL times, even when God seems quiet. Even when He says wait, even when He says no.

And, yes, even when bad things happen and challenges come our way. Loving God at all times is a day-to-day learning process. We learn more and more how to do it and keep on doing it a little each day. And we do that until we can say what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:11-13.
Notice that word 'courage', in Philippians 4:11-13, the root word for courage is 'cor', which is Latin for 'heart'. Living with courage in our hearts is a good way to remind ourselves to love God. Living with courage in our hearts is a good way to remind ourselves not to trust in our own feelings or understanding, Proverbs 3:5.
Martin Luther once said in a poem.

'For feelings come and feelings go, And feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the Word of God: Naught else is worth believing. Though all my heart should feel condemned For want of some sweet token, There is One greater than my heart Whose Word cannot be broken. I'll trust in God's unchanging Word Till soul and body sever: For, though all things shall pass away, His Word shall stand forever.'

When we depend on our own feelings and understanding, we end up confused. God doesn't love me anymore! God has abandoned me in my time of need! Loving God with our mind means renewing our mind daily so that we think more of His thoughts instead of our own, Romans 12:2.
God's will and thoughts are good, pleasing, and perfect, and we need as much of them as possible to fill and renew our minds. Renewing our minds in God's Word is an important way of loving God.

God is a loving God, and He created us with a heart so that we would love Him wholly and absolutely. But as I mentioned earlier, we know our hearts love many other things besides God.

So what do we do to make sure we continue to love God with all of our hearts? Simply trying not to love those things doesn't work. When our heart is turned away from the Lord and set on things such as sins, selfish preoccupations, and worldly pleasures, it has a veil on it, 2 Corinthians 3:15-16.
In other words, they stop us from seeing the Lord. But when we turn our hearts to Him, the veil is removed, and we can see the Lord again. We see His beauty, His virtues, and how wonderful He is.

Then He infuses more of what He is, including love, into us, and it's in this way that our love for Him grows. We can turn our hearts to the Lord Jesus at any time by praying to Him, calling on His name, confessing our sins to Him, and spending time in His Word.

These simple practices can remove the veil from our hearts, restore our fellowship with the Lord, and rekindle our love for Him. When Sir Walter Raleigh was led to the block, his executioner asked him if his head lay right. Raleigh answered, 'It matters little, my friend, how the head lies, provided the heart is right.'

Let me finish by asking you, what does your heart speak? How does your heart lie? Are you loving God with all your heart?

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR SOUL

Before we look at what it means to love God with all of our soul, I think we first need to ask the question, what is the soul? All human beings are triune beings. The Godhead is made up of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. And Paul says human beings are also triune beings because we have a body, soul and spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

OUR BODY IS EARTH CONSCIOUS

The body is of the earth and for the earth. We might describe the body as 'Earth-conscious', since it is the physical tool or instrument, by means of which a person's 'soul' or 'self', by its very nature, is invisible, is able to function in a physical world.

Although the Son existed 'in the beginning with God', John 1:1-2, it was necessary that 'the Word' should 'become flesh' and 'dwell' or 'tabernacle' among us, John 1:14.
The Lord needed a physical body. Paul says in Philippians 2:6-8, without the human form that Jesus took on Himself, it would have been impossible for Him to fulfil the unique purpose for which He came.
And so, the Word must become flesh. This was the divine plan, that's why we find the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, placing the words of the Psalmist from Psalm 40:6-8, into the Lord's mouth. Notice that the 'body' was prepared for 'me,' Hebrews 10:5.
In other words, man is more than just a bunch of chemicals. Man is housed in a physical body, and since his body is designed for earthly life, at death, the body returns to the earth, Genesis 3:19.

OUR SPIRIT IS GOD CONSCIOUS

If we consider the body to be 'Earth-conscious', we may think of the spirit as being 'God-conscious', Job 32:8. In other words, it's that part of man's nature which enables him to reach out to, and communicate with God. It's the spiritual dimension in man's character, and here again, we see the difference between man and other creatures.
It's only man who can say, 'My soul thirsts for God, for the living God', Psalm 42:2. It's only man who is encouraged to 'Seek after Him, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him.' Acts 17:27.
It's only man who is given the assurance that 'He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being,' Acts 17:28. And as Solomon reminds us at death, 'The spirit returns to God Who gave it,' Ecclesiastes 12:7,

OUR SOUL IS SELF-CONSCIOUS

The 'soul' is man's unique self. It is the part of his being which, because it is rational and moral, determines the actions performed by his body, and which, therefore, renders him personally accountable for what he does.

And so, it is man's 'soul' which will ultimately be either saved or lost, depending on a person's response to the offer of salvation which was made first possible by the coming of the Christ into the world.

The Greeks thought of the soul as the thing that integrates the whole inside. In other words, if something is messed up in our soul, our whole life is messed up. If we have bitterness or unforgiveness in our souls, it saturates everything in

our lives. To the Greeks, the soul is the thing that ties heart, mind and strength together. Loving God with all our souls means to love Him with our entire inner being.

To love God with all my soul means loving God with all I am, Psalm 62:5 / Psalm 103:1. My will, my attitudes, my intentions, my emotions, my thoughts and feelings, and my body. To love God with all your soul is to love God with your entire inner life.
Have you ever asked yourself why you are here? Why does my life feel empty at times? We all have a God-shaped space within us which can only be satisfied by Him.

People turn to all kinds of things to fill in that space: drugs, alcohol, affairs, work, etc. But that space can only be filled by God because He is the One who fits perfectly into it.

C. S. Lewis once said the following.

'The mould in which a key is made would be a strange thing if you had never seen a key, and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it, made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand.'

When we allow ourselves to go beyond just believing that God exists, our souls take us much farther than our hearts can. Your soul takes you to a solid relationship with the living Lord, and as a bonus, heaven. Loving God with all your soul means evaluating yourself and working to be everything God calls you to be.

Let me ask you some tough questions, 2 Corinthians 3:18. Do you look more like Jesus than you did last week? What characteristics, gifts, and talents set you apart? How is God leading you to use your uniqueness to serve Him and to draw others closer to Him?
Are you using your resources like time, money, talent, and energy wisely and for His good purposes? Do you represent Christ with your life? Understanding ourselves and our own special qualities, through the help of others and the Holy Spirit, teaches us how to fulfil God's purpose in our lives.

How valuable is your soul? Are you prepared for eternity? What's more important to you, your life or your soul? Matthew 16:24-26. Your family, your job, your wealth or your soul?
In spite of whatever circumstances you face or will face in this life, is it not your deep desire to be able to find your way to the place where you can truly say that no matter what, 'it is well with my soul', that no matter what, I love God with all of my soul.

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF OUR STRENGTH

The Hebrew word for strength is the word 'Me'od', but it doesn't mean strength in terms of muscle power. The word literally means 'muchness'. In other words, the Israelites were to love God with all their 'muchness'. They are to love God with all their substance, all their possessions, everything which God has given them. They are to love him with all of their might, all their being, all of their energy, Ecclesiastes 9:10.
And as Christians we too are to love God with all of our might, all of our actions, all of our energy. We're to love Him not just with a portion of our life but all of our life. There shouldn't be any part of our lives which is kept back from loving God.

When we turn our hearts to the Lord, when we turn our souls to the Lord, our strength will naturally follow. The outward actions that our bodies perform will naturally follow. Loving God with all of our strength will be seen in the way we spend our time. Loving God with all of our strength will be seen in the way we use our energy.

In other words, there's a change which takes place, and that change is demonstrated in the way we use our physical strength to pursue the Lord. It's the idea of loving God more and more and wanting to please Him more and more with every aspect of our lives.

Remember when God commands anything of us, He doesn't force us to do anything against our will. The Israelites had a choice whether to love God with all their heart, soul and strength or not.

Let me ask you, does anyone force you to love your husband or wife? Of course not, you love them because you choose to love them. Does anyone force you to love your children or grandchildren? Of course not, you love them because you choose to love them.

Love goes way beyond our feelings. God doesn't force us to love Him; loving God is a choice. And if we choose to love Him with all of our heart, soul and strength, He will help us to do just that.

Isaiah says that God will give us the strength to do whatever He asks of us, Isaiah 40:29-31. We all have times when we don't feel strong, we all have times when we feel weary and weak.
We all go through times when we feel hurt, broken-hearted, physically or emotionally tired, and sometimes even spiritually exhausted. But it's during those times of weakness that we should be asking God to give us that supernatural strength to keep us going.

And when He does, you too will be able to soar like the eagle. You, too, will be able to run and walk without feeling exhausted. In other words, God will give you the strength which you need to keep moving forward.

How do we love God with all of our strength? We need to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, if we're going to keep moving forward, Ephesians 6:10. When we get tired and weak and feel like we can't move forward any more, then ask God to give us strength. Pray that He will give you the power to fly hundreds of miles on the wings of Christ.
Loving God with all of our strength means asking God to remind us that our present troubles are only temporary, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Loving God with all of our strength is going to help us to fix our eyes on what is eternal and not on our physical weakness.
Loving God with all of our strength means we remember that He will deliver us in our times of trouble, Psalm 34:17-18. Loving God with all of our strength is going to help us to remember that God is with us when we feel like we can't go on.
Loving God with all of our strength means we remember not to give up when we're weary, Galatians 6:9. Loving God with all of our strength is going to help us to keep on sharing the Good News with others, even when it looks like nothing is happening.
The point I'm making is simply this: if we want to love God with all of our strength, then we really need to get out of our comfort zones. In other words, we need to get to the point when we've used up all of our own strength, and we start to rely on His strength.

It's easy to talk about our love for God with like-minded people. It's easy to talk about our love for God in a religious setting. But what about outside our church circle?

Loving God with all my strength means stepping out in faith. Loving God with all my strength means going out of my way, even when I'm tired and exhausted, to share the Good News with others outside of our circle. We're called to go and share that Good News with others, and we're called to serve and care for the needs of others.

But all that this requires is a degree of physical strength. The point I'm getting at is that loving God with all my strength is simple to say, but it's not always easy to do.

It takes a degree of strength to visit someone who is sick in the hospital. It takes a degree of strength to sit down and listen to someone's problems. It takes a degree of strength to help someone who has a physical or financial need. And if we want to love God with all of our strength, then we must acknowledge that we can't do anything without His strength working in us.

Don't tell me you don't have the strength to share the Good News with a stranger. Don't tell me you don't have the strength to visit someone who is sick in the hospital.

Don't tell me you don't have the strength to sit down and listen to someone's problems. Don't tell me you don't have the strength to help someone who has a physical or financial need.

Tell me you won't, because Paul says that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you, Philippians 4:13. And so, we have to remember that we can't do any of these things by ourselves.
Paul tells us we have a strength working within us that enables us to keep on going forward, Ephesians 3:20. All the strength we have comes from God, and He gives us the strength to serve Him and serve others.
If your life is anything like mine, you have a hundred things to juggle, like being involved in church work, work, school, a social life, hobbies, and being a husband or wife. At the end of the day, you may be left feeling drained, weak and insufficient because you can't seem to keep up with it all.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, we can hear Paul crying out for his challenging situation to be taken away. He felt like we sometimes feel, but God has a better plan for him. Instead of removing difficult circumstances from Paul's life, God provides a way to overcome them through strengthening him.
God always has a perfect solution, and He makes that clear when He says, 'My power is made perfect in weakness,' 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Because of God's grace, we can find our strength and contentment in our shortcomings. Grace meets our needs and Paul's needs because it expresses God's acceptance and pleasure in us.
Let me encourage you to ask God to give you the strength to do everything He requires of you, Psalm 68:35. Let me encourage you to then go and do it with the strength He gives you. Let me encourage you to love the Lord with all your strength, all your muchness, all your substance, all your possessions, everything which God has given you.
Let me finish this part with the words of John Wesley, 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.'

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF OUR MIND

Remember, although the word 'mind' isn't used in the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, it is implied in the word 'heart'. It's not until we get to the New Testament that we get a deeper meaning to the word 'mind'.
And as we know in today's society, there is an even greater understanding of the mind. Hence, why mental health issues have risen over the years, and there's a big focus on mental wellbeing.

1. The state of our mind.

The human mind is one of the most incredible aspects of creation. It's more powerful than the largest supercomputer and can solve great problems and make great discoveries.

However, if a person begins their thinking by refusing to acknowledge what they know to be true. That is, if they refuse to acknowledge there is a God, then the further away from God their reasoning will lead them.

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them with a mind to be able to choose wisely. However, as soon as Satan entered the scene, he corrupted their minds by placing doubts in their minds concerning God's will for them, Genesis 3:1-5. And mankind has struggled in their minds ever since concerning God's will.
In the New Testament, we find various words which describe the state of our minds. Because of sin, people's minds have become futile, depraved, deluded and darkened, Romans 1:21 / Romans 1:28 / Colossians 2:4 / Ephesians 4:18. Paul tells us that the effects of sin in our minds have consequences for how people view God and the world around them, Romans 8:5-7.
2. The cure for our mind.

If people's minds have become futile, depraved, deluded and darkened, there's only one option, and that's to renew our minds. That word 'transformed' in Romans 12:2 is the word 'metamorphoo', and it simply means to change, to morph.
And if we want to renew our minds, we must fill our minds with the things of God. If we want to renew our minds we must set our hearts and minds on things above, Colossians 3:1-2.
In the Christian's spiritual battle, the key element that is being fought over is the mind, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Just as Satan appealed to Eve's mind to get her to disobey God, he wants to deceive Christian minds, 2 Corinthians 11:3. And so, our minds need to be renewed daily by God's Word so that we aren't conformed to the world and don't adopt the world's thinking patterns.
3. To have the mind of Christ.

Paul told the Corinthian church, which loved the wisdom of the world, that Christians are to 'have the mind of Christ', 1 Corinthians 2:16. Although it may be a very easy thing to say, it will be a daily challenge for us all to have the mind of Christ in our lives.
Loving God with all of our minds means focusing our thoughts on Him. We think about His holiness, His goodness, His awesome works and creation. Whatever is going on in your heart will be reflected in your life, Proverbs 23:7. We are to love God with our thinking and reasoning, not just our emotions.
4. Train your mind.

Paul says we need to think about good things, not evil things, Romans 8:6. We're to focus our entire mind on the things that please God. To love God with our minds is to hold Him in high esteem, to think about Him with reverence and with adoration. The more we love God with our minds, the more we'll be driven to worship Him for who He is.
In the Book of Philippians, there are sixteen references to a person's mind or their thoughts. I believe that most Christians are much too indiscriminate about what they allow in their minds, Philippians 4:8. In other words, what we think about is our choice, and we need to choose wisely what we're going to focus on.
What ought to dominate the thoughts of people who are on their way to heaven? The Bible says, if you reap negative thoughts and gossip and criticism, if that's what you sow in your mind, you're going to reap a negative and bitter spirit, Proverbs 4:23.
Have you ever watched Satan attack a church through negative and critical thinkers? That's one of his favourite strategies, and we don't even think it's Satan, we don't even know he's doing it.

Satan loves to plant negative, critical thinkers in church, and they suck the joy right out of that place. We could all think about something ugly about everybody else, but that's not what you're going to do if you're going to love the Lord with all of your mind, Philippians 4:8.

If we're going to love God with all of our mind, then we need to think about those things which are good and fine about other people and think about all you can praise God for and be glad about it.

Can I give you some advice about how you can battle against Satan on this one? Don't let your mind be a vacuum; don't let Satan decide what you're going to think about.

Remember that worldly thinking is something you used to do before you became a Christian, Ephesians 4:22-24. Start your day in the Word and put the Scripture in your heart. Start your day praying to God, asking for His Spirit to control your thoughts, Psalm 143:5.

And when you find yourself tempted and listening to some gossip or thinking something ugly about somebody, say a prayer for that person at that specific moment, and God will start to work on your heart too, Isaiah 26:3 / Colossians 4:2.

God wants us to love Him completely, and if we claim to love Him completely, then we must obey Him completely. We must love Him with everything we've got, Jeremiah 17:10.

Let's ask you, what will history write about us concerning our love for Him? I hope and pray that history will write something similar to what it wrote about King Josiah. Josiah gave it his all, in line with God's law, 2 Kings 23:25. Let me encourage you to do the same.

I want you to notice something in Mark's account because it looks like the scribe was surprised at the answer, Mark 12:32-33. Also notice when Jesus SAW, that he answered wisely, Jesus didn't just hear that young man speaking to Him, He SAW on his face an honest expression when Jesus SAW that he answered wisely. Jesus said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God', Mark 12:34.

I believe that Jesus saw in that man's face, faith and honesty. Here is a man who many might call a rationalist, or a ritualist. But there, standing before Jesus, was a man who seemed to have more understanding than those who had been trying to trap Jesus.

And Jesus can bless a person like this abundantly. And notice that after this, no one dared to ask Him any more questions, Mark 12:34. They stopped their schemes to trap Jesus in some argument since they had failed to win any of their arguments. The schemes of entrapment thus stopped, and they moved to scheme how they might physically take Him.

WHOSE SON IS THE MESSIAH?

'While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. 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?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on, no one dared to ask him any more questions.' Matthew 22:41-46

After weathering their barrage of questions, Jesus asked His opponents a question: how could the Christ be both David's son and David's Lord? Matthew 22:41-46 / Luke 20:41-44 / Mark 12:35-37.

This question was crucial because the scribes' objection to Jesus was that He, a mere man, they thought claimed divine authority. Jesus showed by His question that the Old Testament had predicted that the Messiah would be both David's son, human and David's Lord, divine, Psalm 132:11 / Matthew 1:1 / Matthew 21:9.

The dilemma is how could David, call one of his descendants Lord, Psalm 110:1, when, according to Jewish practice, the descendant king should refer to his father or ancestor king as lord.

What Jesus argued is that Psalm 110:1 is a prophecy by David of the Christ. David didn't make the statement concerning himself, Acts 2:34 / Hebrews 1:13. David in the psalm begins by telling us what the LORD, that is, Yahweh, said to the lord, that is, Adonia, that is, Jesus, David's lord.

Please note the word 'lord,' used in the NIV, should have a capital 'L'. Jesus quotes these words in Matthew 22:43-45 / Luke 20:42, and Mark 12:36-37, to show how David called the Messiah lord, which means that the Messiah was greater than David.

Peter quoted these words from Psalm 110:1, in Acts 2:34-35, to show how David prophesied the deity and accession of Jesus. Paul quotes these words in 1 Corinthians 15:25 to demonstrate the rule and dominion of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews quotes these words, Hebrews 1:13, to explain how Jesus is superior to any angel. Later, in Hebrews 10:13, the writer quotes these words again to explain the rule and dominion of Jesus.

The LORD, that is, God the Father, spoke to the Messiah, that is, Jesus the Son, and told Him He would sit at His right hand until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet, Matthew 22:44 / Luke 20:42-43 / Mark 12:36 / Ephesians 1:20 / Hebrews 8:1. In other words, Jesus would remain there until the Father provided the victory, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 / Hebrews 2:8.

An important point in Mark, in the context of these events, is that the common people received Jesus, Mark 12:37. They weren't part of the religious hierarchy of the religious establishment. They weren't puffed up by their religious training or the positions they held.

They weren't part of the religious politics that constantly intimidated the religious leaders into conformity with the accepted traditions and practices of Judaism. They didn't stumble over their pride but accepted Jesus for who He was. They were the true Israel by faith who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus used religious leaders to take Himself to the cross since the leaders had fallen from God. Though the Jews could not actually carry out the death sentence, they were the ones who called on the Romans to crucify Jesus.

Peter later identified them as the ones who had to carry the blame for crucifying the Son of God, Acts 2:36 / Acts 4:5-12. Leaders would do well to continually check their motives by the word of God.

God's leaders must continually caution themselves with God's word in order to guard themselves from working against Him. The Pharisees were left speechless, and from that day on, no one dared to ask Jesus any more questions, Matthew 22:46 / Mark 12:34 / Luke 14:6 / Luke 20:40.

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION

'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 be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.' Matthew 23:1-4

A WARNING AGAINST HYPOCRISY

Jesus speaks to the crowds and the disciples and tells them that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, Matthew 23:1-2, that is, they enjoy the position of authority and were supposed to teach the law according to Moses. They sat there, but they didn't have any authority, and they certainly didn't practise what they preached. They didn't lead by example but rather led by command, Matthew 23:3. Interestingly, Jesus tells the people to do whatever they tell them, but don't do what they do; this again implies they didn't practise what they preached.
The teachers of the law and the Pharisees' ideas of religion and their traditions became very heavy, Matthew 23:4 / Acts 15:10, that is, they made it almost impossible for people to obey their legalistic traditions, Mark 7:1-9. Their hypocrisy was that they didn't preach 'justice, mercy and faith,' Matthew 23:23. They kept binding non-essential burdens on the people that couldn't be perfectly obeyed in order to accomplish justification before God, Matthew 23:4 / Romans 3:20 / Galatians 2:16.

'Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.' But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, 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 instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.' Matthew 23:5-12

Everything they did was only for public show, Matthew 23:5-7 / Luke 20:46 / Mark 12:38-39 / 3 John 9-10. They make their phylacteries wide. Phylacteries were small leather boxes that contained Scriptures.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'In Exodus 13:16 / Deuteronomy 6:8 / Deuteronomy 11:18, it was said to Israel concerning the teachings of the law, that they should be bound, 'for a token upon thy head, and for frontlets between thine eyes'. In the inter-biblical period, we find the Jews converting this figure into an outward fact. They took four passages adjacent to the thrice-repeated injunction, namely, Exodus 13:2-10 / Exodus 13:11-17 / Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Deuteronomy 11:13-22, and writing them on strips of parchment, encased the folded strips in minute leather boxes. These four boxes were set on edge and fastened upon one leather base, which was placed in the middle of the forehead, and held there by a string tied round the head with peculiar knots which had a mystical meaning. Borders of the garments were considered sacred by the Jews, and the enlargement of the border was another device for ostentation and gratification of the pride of its wearer.'
We also read of how much they loved their authority, as they loved to sit in places of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogue, Matthew 23:6 / Luke 20:46 / Mark 12:39. This was all about the show, 'look how important we are!'
We can almost imagine them becoming upset with people if no one greeted them at the marketplace or even took the time to call them 'Rabbi', which means teacher, Matthew 23:8. Oh, how they loved to be seen by people, sit in positions of authority and liked to have a title.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the word 'Rabbi'.

'This word literally signifies great. It was a title given to eminent teachers of the law among the Jews, a title of honour and dignity, denoting authority and ability to teach. They were gratified with such titles and wished it given to themselves as denoting superiority. Every time it was given to them it implied their superiority to the persons who used it, and they were fond, therefore, of hearing it often applied to them. There were three titles in use among the Jews, Rab, Rabbi, and Rabban, denoting different degrees of learning and ability, as literary degrees do among us.'

Jesus turns and speaks to His disciples and tells them three things they were not to do, Matthew 23:8-10.
1. Do not be called 'Rabbi', Matthew 23:8.

They weren't to receive such a title of distinction. Jesus says the reason for not doing so was simply that He was their Teacher, and all the disciples were equal, that is, they were equal in authority.

2. Do not call anyone on earth 'father', Matthew 23:9.
This obviously doesn't apply to calling our physical fathers, father. The word used here implies someone with authority, someone who is superior and has the right to command.

The reason Jesus gives is that they have one Father, who is in heaven, Matthew 6:9-13. He is the One with all authority, He is superior, and He certainly has the right to command.
3. Do not be called 'instructors', Matthew 23:10.
The word instructor implies a teacher, someone who was considered a leader in Bible times because of their position, James 3:1. The word refers to those who go before others, those who claim the right to direct and control others. The reason Jesus gives for this is simply that they have an instructor, the Messiah, Jesus Himself.
Notice how Jesus tells them the greatest among them will be their servant, Matthew 23:11 / Matthew 20:26. They don't need any titles; they just need an attitude which is willing to serve others, Mark 10:43-44.
Leadership doesn't begin at the top, it begins at the bottom, it begins by serving others and putting their needs first, Philippians 2:4. Whoever exalts themselves will be humbled, that is, brought down, but whoever humbles themselves will be exalted, that is, raised up, Matthew 23:12. It's always wise to humble ourselves, otherwise, God will do it for us, Luke 14:11 / James 4:10.
Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

'Now having declared that to His disciples, these are the rules for His disciples. He now turns and addresses Himself to these scribes and the Pharisees. And He has an eightfold denunciation against them, pronouncing an eightfold woe. To my disciples, don't follow their example. They say, but they don't do. They exalt themselves. They draw attention to themselves. They love to be exalted and elevated above people, but you are brothers. If you're going to be the chief, be the servant. Humble yourself, and God will exalt you. But exalt yourself and God will abase you.'

No one knows how they went about 'devouring widow's houses', Matthew 23:14 / Luke 20:47 / Mark 12:40. Note that the footnote in Matthew 23:14, says, 'some manuscripts include here words similar to Mark 12:40, and Luke 20:47.
Maybe when we think of the parable which Jesus taught about 'Unjust Judge' in Luke 18:1-8, we can get a glimpse of what they were doing. Maybe they were charging a huge amount of money when some widows were seeking justice, maybe they abused the widows' hospitality and took advantage of their kind generosity, Mark 12:41-44.
There's nothing more impressive in some people's eyes than a long-winded prayer, Luke 20:47 / Mark 12:40. Even today, this still happens where Christians treat prayer like a sermon, and they remind God of what He wrote in His Word.
Because of their hypocrisy, Jesus tells them they will be judged and punished with a harsher punishment, Luke 20:47 / Mark 12:40. Why? As 'God's spiritual leaders', they should have known better; they were full of arrogance and pride, and they pretended to be something they weren't.
And if this isn't a lesson for the churches' spiritual leaders today, I don't know what is. We need to be careful that opinion and tradition don't become law, 1 Corinthians 4:6; we need to be careful how we treat the venerable among us, James 1:27, and, more importantly, we should pretend to be something we're not.
Jesus used religious leaders to take Himself to the cross since the leaders had fallen from God. Though the Jews could not actually carry out the death sentence, they were the ones who called on the Romans to crucify Jesus.

Peter later identified them as the ones who had to carry the blame for crucifying the Son of God, Acts 2:36 / Acts 4:5-12. Leaders would do well to continually check their motives by the word of God. God's leaders must continually caution themselves with God's word in order to guard themselves against working against Him.

THE FIRST WOE

'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.' Matthew 23:13

In Matthew 23:13-36, we find some of the fiercest words ever spoken by Jesus. This text contains what is commonly called 'The Seven Woes.' The seven woes are judgments against the so-called spiritual leaders of the time who failed in their leadership roles and responsibilities. I'm sure as we go through this study, we will learn from the many mistakes that these 'spiritual leaders' continued to make, at least I pray we do.
In the following verses, Jesus calls them 'blind guides' twice, Matthew 23:16 / Matthew 23:34. 'Blind fools', Matthew 23:17, 'blind men', Matthew 23:19, and 'blind Pharisee', Matthew 23:26, which tells us a lot about their spiritual condition.
The teachers of the law and the Pharisees were 'hypocrites', Matthew 23:13 / Matthew 3:7. In other words, they were stage actors under an assumed character; they pretended to be someone or something, but they weren't.
The teachers of the law were scribes who caused a whole load of trouble for others because of the way they interpreted the Law; they were much like our politicians of today, always debating with others, always debating among themselves. Much like some Christians today, they believed that they were the only ones who correctly interpreted the Scriptures.

As hard as it is to believe, these religious 'hard-liners' got a lot of respect from the people because of the great responsibility they had for sticking to the letter of the law and its interpretations. They also got a lot of respect because most of them were members of the Sanhedrin, Matthew 22:35 / Mark 14:43 / Mark 14:53 / Luke 22:66 / Acts 4:5.
Their main problem was they were so obsessed with the details of the Law, they missed the simplicity of the Law, Matthew 23:23, they got to the stage where they demanded that their interpretation was right, their opinion carried more weight than anyone else's opinion and it got to the point where the joy was just sucked out of the people who simply wanted to serve God.
The teachers of the law, along with the Pharisees, should have recognised Christ as the Messiah; they should have freely accepted Him as the Son of God, but they didn't, they did the opposite, they hated Him, they rejected Him and did everything within their power to get rid of Him.

But what they were guiltier of was turning the people against Jesus, instead of turning the people towards Jesus, and it's in this way they were 'shutting the door of the kingdom of heaven', Matthew 23:13 / Luke 11:52.
We could say they were the 'spiritual bouncers' who were closing the door in people's faces. Honest, sincere people who wanted to serve God and do His will were being prevented from entering in.

Imagine being told that if you go through a certain door, you will witness the most beautiful place you've ever been, and you'll experience the most wonderful things you've ever had!

But as you approach the door, the 'spiritual bouncers' are present, and you ask them what it's like inside, and they say, 'We don't know, we've never been inside'.

This is what Jesus is saying: the teachers of the law and the Pharisees are stopping people from entering the kingdom of God, but they themselves have never been inside.

It's obvious that anyone who truly has entered the kingdom of God and seen its beauty and experienced the love of God would never stop people from entering but would encourage people to enter. There's no sitting on the fence here; people are either for Christ or against Him.

THE SECOND WOE

'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and make long prayers just for show. This is why you will receive a harsher punishment.' Matthew 23:14

I'm sure I don't need to point out that not all translations have this verse included in the text; this isn't a problem, though, because the actual text itself is in perfect harmony with other texts of Jesus when He speaks to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, Mark 12:40 / Luke 20:47.
No one knows how they went about 'devouring widow's houses', Matthew 23:14, but maybe when we think of the parable which Jesus taught about 'Unjust Judge' in Luke 18:1-8, we can get a glimpse of what they were doing. Maybe they were charging a huge amount of money when some widows were seeking justice, maybe they abused the widows' hospitality and took advantage of their kind generosity, Mark 12:41-44.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

1. They claimed a very exact knowledge of the law and a perfect observance of it.

They pretended to extraordinary justice toward the poor, friendship for the distressed, and willingness to aid those who were in embarrassed circumstances. They thus induced "widows" and poor people to commit the management of their property to them as guardians and executors, and then took advantage of them and defrauded them.

2. They put on the appearance of great sanctity and induced many conscientious but credulous women to give them much, under the pretence of devoting it to religious purposes.

There's nothing more impressive in some people's eyes than a long-winded prayer, Matthew 23:14. Even today, this still happens where Christians treat a prayer like a sermon, and they remind God of what He wrote in His Word. This was all for the show, Matthew 5:5, was about impressing the people around them, 'look how spiritual I am, look how connected to God I am!'
Because of their hypocrisy, Jesus tells them they will be judged and punished with a harsher punishment, Matthew 23:14. Why? As 'God's spiritual leaders', they should have known better; they were full of arrogance and pride, and they pretended to be something they weren't.
And if this isn't a lesson for the churches' spiritual leaders today, I don't know what is. We need to be careful that opinion and tradition don't become law, 1 Corinthians 4:6. We need to be careful how we treat the vulnerable among us, James 1:27, and more importantly, we shouldn't pretend to be something we're not.

THE THIRD WOE

'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are. 'Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is

bound by that 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 anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.'
Matthew 23:15-22

There's no mistaking the point here; the teachers of the law and the Pharisees were hypocrites because they were going everywhere not to win people over to God but to win people over to their traditions and interpretations of the law, Matthew 23:15. They wanted to convert people to their word instead of God's Word.
In Bible times, there were two kinds of converts: those who were circumcised and accepted only parts of Judaism, and then there were those who were converts to righteousness and became true converts, Matthew 8:5-13.
We must remember that there was nothing wrong with someone converting to Judaism; the problem was that they were converting people to their way of thinking about what the law actually says. In other words, it was all about converting people to the traditions of the fathers, Mark 7:6-9 / Acts 26:5.
By the time Jesus came on the scene, it was no longer about God's laws but about the traditions, and this is what they were converting the Gentiles to: they converted them to a bunch of rules and regulations. No wonder Jesus rebukes them and tells them that they, 'make coverts twice as much a child of hell as they are,' Matthew 23:15.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'To be a child of hell was a Hebrew phrase, signifying to be deserving of hell, to be awfully wicked.'

In other words, Jesus is telling them they are children of the devil because their religion isn't God's religion, John 8:44-45. Their whole theology was off base, and so Jesus points out just how off base they really are.
He calls them 'blind guides' and 'blind fools', Matthew 23:16-17 / Matthew 15:14, why? They believed that a person's oath was binding if he swore by the gold of the temple, Matthew 23:16, or gift at the altar, Matthew 23:17.
The problem was that they actually taught the people that if a person swore by the temple or altar, then that oath wasn't binding; no wonder they are hypocrites, Matthew 5:33-37.

I CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES!

Someone once said, 'I can't see the forest for the trees.' The scribes and Pharisees were much like that when it came to the temple and its contents. The temple is much greater than the gold ornaments within it, Matthew 23:17, and the altar is of more significance than the sacrificial gifts laid upon it, Matthew 23:18.
In their theology they had this back to front, they thought that the gold was more important than the temple and the gifts were more important than the altar, Matthew 23:19. In other words, their priorities were all wrong.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The gold had no holiness but what it derived from the temple. If in any other place, it would be no more holy than any other gold. It was foolish, then, to suppose that that was more holy than the temple, from which it received all the sanctity which it possessed.'

Whenever a Jew took an oath, he connected it in some way with God. All their oaths were therefore binding. Jesus disallowed all evasive oaths and viewed them as untruthful speech, Matthew 23:20-22 / Matthew 5:33-37.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The big point in the whole passage is that the whole is greater than any of its parts, and that the whole is equal to the sum of its parts. In spite of truth so plain as to be considered axiomatic, the scribes and Pharisees had become champions of small distinctions such as those regarding oaths. Their thinking on such matters was foolish.'

When we lose focus on what really matters, we end up debating amongst ourselves over matters of opinion. Opinions are good and healthy, but they must never become law, and we must strive to separate the two. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, John 3:1-2. That's a fact, but why did Nicodemus come to Jesus at night? Whatever the reason for his coming is, it has to be an opinion because the Bible doesn't tell us.

THE FOURTH WOE

'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.' Matthew 23:23-24

Jesus once again calls them hypocrites, Matthew 23:23, but also notice that Jesus says that giving a tenth of their spices was right, Deuteronomy 14:22-29; the problem was these religious leaders were only emphasising the giving because they were living off the contributions of the people. And so, in doing so, they totally neglected the more important matters of the law like justice, mercy and faithfulness, Matthew 23:23 / Micah 6:8.
This was all about the outward appearance of religion and had nothing to do with being holy within our hearts. I guess if they focused so much on their outward appearance, they wouldn't have to deal with the conditions of their own hearts.

Jesus is basically saying that there are some aspects of the law which are more important than others; justice, mercy, and faithfulness are more important in the law than tithing mint, dill and cumin, Matthew 23:23 / Luke 11:42.
They shouldn't have practised or emphasised the lesser principles of the law in order to neglect the more important principles of the law, Matthew 23:23. Remember, David! Matthew 12:1-8 / 1 Samuel 21:1-6 / Leviticus 24:5-9 / Matthew 9:9-13.
By the time Jesus came on the scene, if the Jews found any kind of small insect in a glass of milk or water, it would have been filtered out, and here Jesus contrasts this with the picture of straining a gnat out of a glass of water with swallowing a camel, Matthew 23:24.
This is probably foreign to us today because when we find any kind of insect in our drinks, we would probably throw the entire contents of the glass out, but in the days when milk was expensive, we can understand why they would just remove the insect and carry on drinking.

Just as a side note, the KJV translates Matthew 23:24 as follows, 'ye blind guides, which strain AT a gnat, and swallow a camel.' Notice the word 'at', which makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. The word should be 'out', you strain out a gnat, not 'strain at a gnat'.

THE FIFTH WOE

'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.' Matthew 23:25-26

Once again, Jesus calls them hypocrites, and we see that the leaders focused a lot on their ceremonial washing of cups and dishes, Matthew 23:25 / Mark 7:1-9, and here, Jesus points out their hypocrisy.
He tells them that they were greedy, Matthew 23:25, because they are extorting from the people what they actually put in those containers, and in doing so, they became self-indulgent, Matthew 23:25.
Jesus calls them 'blind Pharisee', Matthew 23:26 / Matthew 15:14, and the point is clear. The ceremonial purification of the cups and dishes was more important to them than how they acquired the contents in the first place, Mark 7:4.
In other words, even though they sinfully obtained and ate the contents, they thought they could still be justified because they cleaned the cups and dishes. Jesus, they must first clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean, Matthew 23:26.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'Let them be filled with the fruits of honest industry, and then the outside and the inside will be really 'clean.' By this allusion to the cup and platter, he taught them that it was necessary to cleanse the heart first, that the external conduct might be really pure and holy.'

Jewish tradition says the following.

'A hollow container made of pottery could contract uncleanness inside but not on the outside. If it became unclean, it must be broken, and no unbroken piece must remain in your house, which was big enough to hold enough oil to anoint the little toe.'

In other words, it doesn't matter who or what touched the outside, but it does become a problem when the inside is involved. It was these ceremonial washings which were commanded by tradition, not by Scripture.

THE SIXTH WOE

'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 the bones of the dead 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.'
Matthew 23:27-28

Once again Jesus calls them hypocrites, Matthew 23:27. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees liked to keep their tombs in order and look good to the eye and here Jesus uses this practice to show their hypocrisy, Matthew 23:27.
They whitewashed graves in order to make them more easily visible and to prevent people from stepping on one of them accidentally or unknowingly. They were whitewashed once a year to prevent the people from accidentally coming in contact with them as they went up to Jerusalem.

Jesus tells them they are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean, Matthew 23:27. A dead body was classed as unclean and anyone touching a dead body would then be classed as unclean, Numbers 19:16.
Jesus says these religious leaders on the outside appeared to be righteous because of their 'religious' behaviour, but inwardly their hearts were full of hypocrisy and wickedness, Matthew 23:28. Although they thought they thought they were alive, Jesus tells them they were very much dead, they were dead spiritually and morally.

THE SEVENTH 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 ancestors, 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. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!’ Matthew 23:29-32

In the seventh and final woe, we find Jesus calling them hypocrites once again, Matthew 23:29 / Luke 11:47. I’m sure this must have enraged them by this time, and I’m sure the plot to kill Jesus was already underway. In fact, it’s less than a week away; they would eventually have their way and have Him crucified.
Here Jesus continues with the theme of tombs and says they were building beautiful tombs and wonderfully decorated graves, Matthew 23:29. The problem was they were doing all this as if they were showing a lot of respect for the righteous prophets of God, Matthew 23:29.
However, at the same time they were claiming to be superior to those dead prophets, Matthew 23:30, this is shown because they murdered them, Matthew 21:33-41.
The Pulpit Commentary says the following.

‘They boasted that they were better than their fathers; they disavowed their crimes, and endeavoured, by honouring the prophets’ graves, to deliver themselves from the guilt of those who persecuted them. Fair show, with no reality! They professed to venerate the dead but would not receive the living; they reverenced Abraham and Moses but were about to murder the Christ to whom patriarch and prophet bore witness.’

Jesus tells them they have testified against themselves that they are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets, Matthew 23:31. He tells them to go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started, Matthew 23:32. In other words, Jesus is telling them go ahead kill the greatest Prophet, Jesus Himself, Deuteronomy 18:18 / Matthew 21:38-39 / Matthew 21:46. They were at the point of no return, John 13:27.

‘You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore, I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.’ Matthew 23:33-34

Jesus calls them ‘snakes and vipers’, Matthew 23:33 / Matthew 12:34-37. This is metaphorical, but don’t miss the point, snakes and vipers were the most detestable creatures which roamed the ground, some of which were full of poison.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘At the heart, with all their pretensions, they were filled with evil designs, as the serpent was, Genesis 3:1-5.’
Jesus tells them they won’t escape being condemned to hell, Matthew 23:33, which is the place of eternal punishment, Matthew 5:22 / Matthew 23:15. Notice that Jesus says He’s ‘sending them prophets and sages and teachers,’ Matthew 23:34.
The KJV says, these are prophets, wise men, and scribes. They were the ones who would be killed, crucified, flogged and chased all over the place, Matthew 23:34 / Matthew 5:10 / Matthew 10:17.
We only have to turn to the Book of Acts for this to be fulfilled; we read about Stephen being stoned to death, Acts 7:54-60. We read about James being put to death by the sword, Acts 12:2, and we read about the apostles being flogged and put in prison, Acts 12:4-5 / Acts 16:22-24 / Acts 22:19-24 / 2 Corinthians 11:24-25.
I’m sure when Jesus mentioned that word, ‘crucify’, Matthew 23:34, they would be thinking that that’s what they plan to do to Him.

‘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.’ Matthew 23:35

Now we know all about the account of Cain murdering his brother Abel, Matthew 23:35 / Genesis 4:8, and we have an account of the death of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, but we have no record of the murdering of 'Zechariah the son of Berekiah', Matthew 23:35.

Whatever and whosever Jesus is referring to here seems to indicate that they themselves, that is, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees were responsible for murdering him. Just because we have no record of this event doesn't mean it didn't happen, Matthew 26:1-4.

Jesus said it did, and He openly said it happened when they were around, in their lifetime and openly blamed them for it. It's as though Jesus started from the first murder, Abel, Genesis 4:8 / 1 John 3:12, and went straight to the last murder, Zechariah, before He Himself was to be murdered by them.

As I mentioned earlier, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees outwardly showed great respect for God's prophets who stood up for righteousness, but inwardly, they were murderers.

In fact, even as they were listening to Jesus, they were plotting to murder Him. Remember, it wasn't the Romans who were against Jesus; it was these self-righteous leaders, Luke 23:21.

Plumptre, in his commentary, says the following.

'Men make the guilt of past ages their own, reproduce its atrocities, identify themselves with it, and so, what seems at first an arbitrary decree, visiting on the children the sins of their fathers, becomes in such cases a righteous judgment.

If they repent, they cut off the terrible entail of sin and punishment; but, if they harden themselves in their evil, they inherit the delayed punishment of their father's sins as well as their own.'

'Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.' Matthew 23:36

There's no mistaking what Jesus is saying here; the whole Jewish nation was going to be held accountable, and as we know, destruction came upon Jerusalem, and the temple was destroyed, and so the Jewish nation, along with its religion, came to an end in A.D. 70, Matthew 24:1-35.

CONCLUSION

Someone once said, 'The church is full of hypocrites, but there's always room for one more.' I understand what they're trying to say here, in terms of there being no one 'perfect' within the Lord's church.

The problem with that phrase is that it almost implies that hypocrisy is accepted within the Lord's church, but after reading Jesus' word here in Matthew 23, we know this clearly isn't the case.

The Bible is full of warnings about living a double life, and we're told over and over again that we must practice what we preach. If people are to see Jesus in us, Galatians 2:20, and our lives are to reflect His glory, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, and our lives are to display the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23, then we have to come to the conclusion that there is absolutely no room for a hypocrite in the Lord's church.

I'm not saying everyone should be 'perfect', but what I am saying is that we all should be striving to do our best, to live right for God.

"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, and 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.'" Matthew 23:37-39

Notice that Jesus speaks of Jerusalem as if it were a person. You can almost feel the heartache in His words; the heartache wasn't about Himself, it wasn't about them rejecting Him, the heartache was all about the people, Luke 19:41.

Jesus looks to the future of Jerusalem and sees its destruction, which was coming at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70, Matthew 24:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31. We can almost hear the pain and frustration in Jesus' words as He emphasises Jerusalem, the city of David and the city of peace, Matthew 23:37 / Luke 13:34 / Luke 19:41-42.

They had killed God's prophets and stoned them too, Matthew 23:37 / Luke 13:34 / Matthew 5:12 / Hebrews 11:32-40. God had longed to gather His children as a hen gathers her chicks, Matthew 23:37 / Luke 13:34.

What a beautiful picture of love and protection this is, Deuteronomy 32:11 / Psalms 17:8 / Psalms 36:7 / Psalms 91:4 / Jeremiah 48:40. Sadly, they were unwilling, Matthew 23:37.

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

'Here, indeed, if ever, we have thoughts that breathe and burn. One can almost feel the withering force of his strong and mighty indignation, indignation directed, not against the people, but against their false guides. And yet behind it, all is his heart, and the woes merge into a wail of agony, the cry of a mother over her lost child.'

Because of their unwillingness to accept Jesus, Jesus says, 'your house is left desolate', Matthew 23:38 / Luke 13:35. Notice He uses the word 'your', it had become their house, not Gods, Matthew 23:38 / Luke 13:35 / Matthew 21:13. In other words, God's house, the temple, had become desolate, that is, a symbol of everything opposite to God, 1 Kings 9:7-8 / Jeremiah 12:7 / Jeremiah 22:5.

Jesus tells them they will not see Him again, until they say blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Matthew 23:39 / Luke 13:35 / Psalm 118:26 / Romans 11:26. These are the words which had greeted Jesus' triumphal entry a few days before, Matthew 21:9.

Is Jesus speaking about the day of judgment or the time when the Jews will be converted? Commentators are all over the place with this, so I guess it could be both.

Expositor's Greek Testament says the following.

'He will not trouble them any more till their mood changes, and they be ready to receive Him with a Messianic salutation.'

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'This has not been yet accomplished, but the days will come when the Jews, long cast out and rejected, will hail Jesus as the Messiah, and receive him whom their fathers killed as the merciful Saviour, Romans 11:25-32.'

The Pulpit Commentary says the following.

'The clause, 'till ye shall say,' does not shut the door of hope forever; it looks forward to a happier prospect. The time intended is that when Israel shall repent of its rejection of the Messiah, and in bitter contrition look on him whom it pierced, owning and receiving Jesus with glad 'Hosannahs!' Then shall they behold him coming in power and glory and shall regain their old position as beloved of God, Hosea 3:4-5 / Zechariah 12:10. Then 'all Israel shall be saved', Romans 11:26. Thus this terrible chapter, so dark and menacing, closes with a glow of hope and a promise, indefinite but certain, of final restoration.'

CHAPTER 24

INTRODUCTION

‘Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ‘Do you see all these things?’ he asked. ‘Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.’ 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?” Matthew 24:1-3

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE, THE CITY, AND THE SIGN OF HIS COMING

In the previous chapter, Jesus declared judgment on the city of Jerusalem, Matthew 23:38. He also said that this would happen in the generation of those He was speaking to, Matthew 23:36.
The apostles here, are obviously impressed with the physical structure, that is, the temple that Herod the Great had built and probably wondered why God was going to destroy the temple. Jesus tells them that not one stone here will be left on another, and everyone will be thrown down, which I’m sure would have shocked the disciples.

Jesus was preparing the disciples for the final pronounced judgment upon Israel, Jerusalem and the temple, Matthew 13:3-9 / Matthew 13:36-43 / Matthew 21:33-46 / Matthew 22:1-14 / Matthew 23:29-39.
The destruction would be great and final, Deuteronomy 28:15-68. It’s at this point that Peter, James, John and Andrew later came to Jesus privately while He was on the Mount of Olives, Matthew 24:1-3 / Mark 13:1-4 / Luke 21:5-7.

THE DISCIPLES QUESTION

In Matthew 24:3, we see that His disciples asked three questions.
1. There was a question concerning the destruction of the Temple and the City.

2. A question concerning ‘the sign of His coming’.

3. A question concerning ‘the end of the world’.

In Mark 13:4, we see the disciples asking two questions.
1. When will these things happen?

2. What will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?

But in Luke 21:7, Luke only records Jesus’ response to the first two questions. Luke doesn’t record Jesus’ response concerning the end of the world. The AV has ‘the end of the world’, the primary meaning of the word translated ‘world’ is age, era, ‘aion’.
What Jesus is doing in Matthew 25:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31 / Luke 21:5-36 is predicting the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. After hearing Jesus’ harsh sermon, in Matthew 23, a long chapter where He just criticises and gives woe one after the other to the Jewish people.

And right after that, He's just walked out of the temple, the last time He'll be there, He was leaving the temple forever. The disciples may be concerned that He has been so harsh to the Jewish people lately, and they're trying to find some kind of positive response. They say, 'Look at how impressive these buildings are,' Mark 13:1 / Luke 21:5. But we need to understand that there has been, all the way through the Gospel of Matthew, a theme that a coming judgment against Israel is near. John the baptiser is preaching, the Pharisees and Sadducees come out to see him, Matthew 3:7. So we have wrath that's coming.

In Matthew 8, Jesus meets a Gentile soldier who wants Him to heal his servant, Matthew 8:7-10. And look what he said next, 'Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?' Matthew 8:11-12. He spoke about judgment.

Another example is where He tells this parable of tenants in Matthew 21. And the father sends servants to the vineyard, but the tenants kill him, then he sends his own son, and they kill him too.

And so, the father says, 'I am going to punish those wicked tenants,' Matthew 21:41. And look what he says, '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,' Matthew 21:43. He speaks about judgment.

We begin to understand why the Jews were so angry with Jesus; they couldn't have missed the point of His sermon.

One more example, Matthew 23, this whole chapter is just one woe after the other to the Jews, and again He speaks about judgment, Matthew 23:32-36.

What was the judgement that was to come on this generation of Jews? And how was Jesus going to prepare His church to escape the coming judgment upon Israel? Before the end of the world, Jesus tells them the following.

'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours 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 beginning of birth pains.' Matthew 24:4-8

1. Before the siege of Jerusalem, there would be many disturbing events.

False messiahs, false prophets, battles in various countries, widespread anarchy, earthquakes, famine, and plagues, Matthew 24:4-8 / Matthew 24:23-26 / Mark 13:5-8 / Mark 13:21-22 / Luke 21:8-11. These would be only the beginning of the many troubles that would all happen before the destruction of the temple, Matthew 24:8 / Mark 13:8.

'Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 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 the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.' Matthew 24:9-13

2. The disciples to whom he was speaking would be persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders, be betrayed even by their close relatives, and killed.

They would be hated everywhere, Matthew 24:9-13 / Mark 12:12-19 / Luke 21:12-19. All this had to happen before the temple was destroyed, Luke 21:9. They were required to remain faithful throughout all those traumatic experiences, Matthew 24:13 / Mark 13:13 / Luke 21:18.

'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.' Matthew 24:14

3. The Gospel will be preached throughout the earth.

In Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10, we learn that the Gospel has to be preached to all nations before Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed. The word 'end' in Matthew 24:14 refers to the destruction of the Temple. The apostles

preached the Gospel 'in all the world', to 'all nations', Acts 1:2 / Acts 1:4 / Acts 1:8, to 'every creature,' Colossians 1:23.

Now there are about forty years between the death of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem. And I believe this was because Jesus was going to give the Gospel a chance to be preached all over the world to prepare Jews and Gentiles for what was coming.

Such a proclamation was going to let the world know of God's justification for the destruction of Jerusalem. The Gospel is going to go into all the world; the story of how the Jews rejected and killed their own Messiah is going to go into all the world.

Now did that happen? I believe it did Acts 2:5 / Romans 1:8 / Colossians 1:6 / Colossians 1:23. And so in one generation's time, everywhere, especially in the cities where Jews live, the Gospel was preached, and people were prepared for what God was about to do.

I believe that Jerusalem's destruction signalled that the fuller dispensation was over and would never return. God was going to raise up a new Israel, consisting of the elect of every nation on earth.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

'So, when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand.' Matthew 24:15

The abomination of desolation, Matthew 24:15 / Mark 13:14, is a phrase out of the Book of Daniel that refers to a sacrilege that would be so detestable that it would cause the temple to be abandoned by the people of God. Daniel mentions three different desolations.

1. That was previously caused by Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 9:17.
2. That was eventually caused by Antiochus Epiphanes, Daniel 8:13 / Daniel 12:11.
3. The series of desolations that would occur at the time of the Roman siege, from AD 68 to AD 70, Daniel 9:26-27.

Antiochus Epiphanies had come to Jerusalem and took a pig into the temple and sacrificed it on the holy altar, Daniel 8:13 / Daniel 12:11. And all the Jews said, 'that was the abomination of desolation,' but Jesus comes along and says, 'that's not its complete fulfilment.'

There is still an abomination of desolation to come, predicted by Daniel. Now, what is that? People have gone everywhere suggesting what that will be, and many think it will happen in this tribulation period.

But I think the Bible tells us very, very clearly what Jesus is talking about. In the Jewish Gospel, Matthew says the abomination of desolation, Matthew 24:15-16, so does the Gospel of Mark, Mark 13:14.

But in the Gospel of Luke, you have the exact words right until those verses, and you have the same exact words after those verses. But in Luke, he doesn't say watch out for the abomination of desolation.

He says, 'when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near,' Luke 21:20.

Now there's Luke's interpretation of what abomination of desolation means.

And the present tense is used here, 'when you see Jerusalem in the process of being surrounded,' Luke 21:20. So this clearly isn't speaking about His second coming, as those in Jesus' time would see this happening.

'Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their 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. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again.' Matthew 24:16-21

So, what is the warning of Jesus? It's very clear. They were to flee, Matthew 24:16-20 / Mark 13:15-17 / Luke 21:21-24. Jesus basically says, 'You get out of that city before it becomes encircled by that Roman ring of steel.
Run across the rooftops, don't go back down to get your cloak, help the pregnant women, pray it's not in winter, and hope it's not a Sabbath day. 'You get yourself out of that town, the moment you see that army and don't waste time doing it.'

If these verses are referring to Christ's second coming, then why would He tell them to flee? Why tell them to pray that they would not have to flee on the Sabbath? These verses, Matthew 24:16-20 / Mark 13:15-17 / Luke 21:21-24, confirm that these predictions are to do with the Jews living then.
Josephus, who was a Jewish historian and Eusebius, a Christian historian, tell us that's exactly what happened. What did most of the Jews do when the Roman army under Titus came? They did the exact opposite of what Jesus said.

When the Roman army showed up, they all gathered their belongings and ran into Jerusalem for safety. And what followed was one of the most horrific accounts of suffering and desolation ever recorded.

Josephus writes about things that happened when that city was surrounded, that are so abominable, it's hard to put in writing, it's hard to describe how gruesome the suffering was, as one million Jews eventually lost their lives.

The Romans came in and, literally like Jesus said, the gold in the temple was burned and melted into the cracks. They took stone by stone of that temple and that city apart, and then they totally blazed the place. Josephus said, 'When they were through, you couldn't believe that anybody had ever lived there.'

But the Christians, according to Eusebius, when they saw that army, they remembered Jesus' words and they ran quickly out of town. Remember, Jesus said, 'run to the mountains'? Matthew 24:16 / Mark 13:14 / Luke 21:21. They ran through the city up to the Transjordan Mountains called 'Pella', and the Christians were saved.
We can't imagine how the fall of Jerusalem was to Jews and Christians all over the world; it made all the headlines. I mean to a Jew, the fall of Jerusalem, that's like the end of an age; if Jerusalem falls, God must be dead.

The horrors that would ensue would exceed anything else in history, either in the past or in the future, Matthew 24:19-22 / Mark 13:17-19 / Luke 21:26. They have nothing to do with the end of the world.

'If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. "So, if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.' Matthew 24:22-26

Jesus again reminds them that, before the siege of Jerusalem, there would be many disturbing events. False messiahs, false prophets, battles in various countries, widespread anarchy, earthquakes, famine, and plagues, Matthew 24:23-26 / Matthew 24:4-8 / Mark 13:5-8 / Mark 13:21-22 / Luke 21:8-11.
These would be only the beginning of the many troubles that would happen before the destruction of the temple, Matthew 24:8 / Mark 13:8.

'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.' Matthew 24:27-28

The Lord gives a reason why they must ignore the false messiahs. They are to ignore them because when the Lord does come, it will not be in the desert or some obscure place, Matthew 24:27. He will appear instantaneously and will be seen by everyone who has ever lived, Revelation 1:7.
Jesus says that when he comes to bring judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple, it will be clearly visible, as visible as lightning, Matthew 24:27. Matthew 24:28 is a proverb: the wicked, wherever they are, will not escape the

administration of God's justice. Wherever the dead body is, there will the 'vultures' be gathered together. Some translations use the word 'eagles', but it probably refers to vultures, Luke 17:37.

'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.' Matthew 24:29

The sign language in Matthew 24:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31 / Luke 21:5-36 is actually Old Testament judgement language. Jesus is using a language which some call apocalyptic, and it was very familiar to students of the Old Testament. We're not familiar with it because we're Gentiles, and so sometimes we think they're talking about the second coming when they aren't necessarily doing so.
For example, in the apocalyptic language, you often announced judgement by saying the whole cosmic structure, sun, moon, stars, were going to be shaken, Matthew 24:29 / Mark 13:24-25 / Luke 21:25. In fact, that was just an Old Testament way of saying God was about to judge a nation.

THREE EXAMPLES

In Isaiah 13:10, we read about a judgement against Babylon, which is not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Babylon.
In Isaiah 34:4, we read about a judgement against Edom, again, that's not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Edom.
In Ezekiel 32:7-8, we read about a judgement against Egypt, again, that's not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing, saying that God is going to judge Egypt.
What I'm saying is, when a Jew heard language like, the stars are going to be darkened, the moon is going to turn dark, the sun is going to fall. When they heard talk like that, they didn't think that the 'end of the world,' they thought, 'what nation is God judging now?'

And when Jesus uses that kind of language in His sermon, He's saying that God is sending judgement upon Israel. Just like He did on Egypt, just like He did on Edom and Babylon.

'Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 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.' Matthew 24:30-31

People say, 'Well, what about Matthew 24:30-31 / Mark 13:26-26, where Jesus says, 'He is going to come on the clouds of the sky'. Again, I'm going to say that's judgement language.
Let me give you an example from Isaiah 19:1, 'An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.'
Remember Jesus said, 'all these things will happen in this generation', Matthew 23:36. He also said, 'truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened,' Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30 / Luke 21:32.
What I believe He did, He used the judgement language that the Jews understood to say this, 'all those things that have happened to Babylon, all those things that have happened to Egypt and Edom, now its Israel's turn.'

Look at Matthew 26:64. I used to think this referred to the second coming of Christ, but I'm not too sure now. Remember when Jesus was before Caiaphas, the high priest, on trial, and Caiaphas says, 'You tell me if you are the Son of God?'

And Jesus says this, 'Yes, it is as you say,' 'But I say to all of you, in the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven,' Matthew 26:64.
Now, is that a reference to the second coming? Notice it says, 'He's sitting at the right hand.' It doesn't say He's standing or He's riding a horse; it says, He's sitting.

I think what Jesus is saying there is, "Caiaphas, this day you are my judge, you and your people are judging me, but the day is coming, and you're going to see it when I'm sitting at the right hand of God, and I'm sending my judgement to you." And Caiaphas' generation saw that prophecy come true.

In Matthew's text, Jesus is bringing the news of the passing of one era and the establishment of another in which the glory of God isn't going to be in the temple made by hands anymore. We're so far removed from this text at this time that we don't understand why this text is so important.

In the 1st century world, before you could ever preach the Gospel of Jesus, you had to explain what happened to Israel. Why is the dispensation of Israel the way God is working? What is all this, Gentiles are included in the kingdom? What is all this the Messiah has come, and they crucified Him, but He rose again?

You had to explain that God had ended an era and judged Israel, and now the kingdom is going to be made up of the elect of every nation. Because most Jews saw the end of the temple as the end of the world. Jesus is using the language that they understood, and He was trying to explain to them, 'Listen, the destruction of Jerusalem is really the work of God.'

What Jesus was trying to prepare the church for was this: 'something is about to happen in about forty years that is going to shake your world, the holy city is going to be wiped out, the temple is going to be gone, but God is behind it, God is doing it, and God is in control.'

Notice, 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, Matthew 24:31 / Mark 13:27. This sounds like the final coming of Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:52 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16 / 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9, but not necessarily. The word 'angel' means messenger, and it can refer to angelic beings or human beings.
In the context here, I believe Jesus is referring to human messengers, Luke 7:24 / Luke 9:52, that is, His apostles, the ministers and preachers of the Gospel who would deliver the Gospel message after them.
Notice the Lord and the use of angels during Daniel's time, Daniel 10:20-11:2, and so, once again, we're reminded that the Lord coming in judgment doesn't automatically mean the last judgment.
Notice also, we have the trumpet call, which isn't always a reference to the final coming of Christ. Here it is, the call of the Gospel of peace, life and salvation. When we look back at Leviticus 25:9-12, we find the trumpet being blown in the year of Jubilee, in which every fiftieth year, the Israelites sounded a ram's horn all through the land and proclaimed the year as a year of release or freedom.
In Revelation 8:6-12, we read of seven angels blowing their trumpets in relation to the judgment which was coming upon the Roman Empire. In other words, the trumpet call isn't always in relation to the final judgment.
The gathering together is a reference to the Gentiles, Luke 21:24, who were now chosen or elected in place of the Jews according to Jesus' prediction, Matthew 8:11-12 / Luke 13:28-29. This verse is all about protection, the gathering up of those under someone's care so they are close by and shielded, Isaiah 11:12 / Matthew 23:37.
However we interpret these verses, we must remember that Jesus says these things will happen within this generation, not in the future of His second coming, Matthew 24:34 / Matthew 23:36 / Mark 13:30 / Luke 21:32. No longer were Israel God's chosen people, now salvation will be offered to everyone on the earth, Matthew 24:31 / Mark 13:27.

‘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. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.’ Matthew 24:32-35

The sign events of Matthew 24:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31 / Luke 21:5-36 have already been fulfilled. And I think the key to understanding Matthew 24:1-35 / Mark 13:1-37 / Luke 21:5-36 is in Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30 / Luke 21:32, where Jesus says, ‘I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.’

‘These things’ is an interesting phrase. We will never understand sign language unless we ask someone what it means. And that’s what Mark and Luke did in their Gospels, where we have the parallel passages with this particular sermon, the disciples ask Jesus, ‘Tell us what the signs of these things are?’ Matthew 24:3 / Mark 13:4 / Luke 21:7. At the end of all three Gospels, He says, ‘This generation will not pass away until these things happen,’ Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30 / Luke 21:32. The real question is, what does Jesus mean by the word ‘generation’?

There are different views, and one view says, ‘Well, that’s talking about Israel, Israel the nation will not pass away until this happens.’ Or it’s talking about the race of the Hebrews, or it means the generation that’s alive when the tribulation starts, they won’t pass away until this happens.

I’m going to challenge that view, even though it’s very popular. It became very popular among the dispensationalists when Israel became a state in 1948. They said, ‘Well, that’s a sign,’ the fig tree is budding, and, in this generation, Jesus has to come back.

And so, when this didn’t happen, they changed their mind and said that Jesus would definitely come back before 2048. And that’s a common view among a lot of people, let me challenge that view.

I don’t think the mention of the fig tree is talking about a re-established state of Israel. Sometimes the fig tree in the Bible refers to Israel, but he said in Luke, ‘Look at all the trees,’ Luke 21:29.

And the point I think He’s making is, ‘you know when trees begin to bud, you know summer is near.’ Summer is on its way when the trees start to bud. So, the thing that Jesus is predicting is, ‘when you see those signs, you know it’s near,’ Matthew 24:32-33 / Mark 13:38-39 / Luke 21:29-31.

Remember when Jesus, after the triumphant entry, went to the temple and cleansed the temple, and He came out of the temple, and He saw a fig tree. It had lots of leaves, and He went to get some fruit, but it didn’t have any, and He cursed it, and said, ‘May you never bear fruit again,’ Matthew 21:19 / Mark 11:14.

Now, almost all scholars see that as an allusion to Israel. I don’t think that three chapters later, he’s talking about Israel. If you look at the word ‘generation’ in Matthew, Mark and Luke, every single time it’s used, it’s talking about the current hearer. I don’t see a reason to make it mean something different in Matthew 24:32-33 / Mark 13:38-39 / Luke 21:29-31.

I think what Jesus is saying is, ‘everything that I have just told you is going to happen, is going to happen in this generation’s lifetime.’ What Jesus was saying was going to happen in the lifetime of that generation.

I think it would be useful to point out some important truths. When it comes to Matthew 25:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31 / Luke 21:5-36, it’s clear they are interesting and obviously a difficult passage of text, and people have had many different extreme views of it.

For example, liberal theologians use this text as proof that Jesus was mistaken. They say, ‘See, he says quite clearly that He would come back in this generation, and He didn’t, so he was mistaken.’ And so, they detract from the Deity of Jesus using this text.

Others say this is talking about ‘a tremendous seven-year tribulation, still to come, that we haven’t seen yet, but these signs are going to let us know when it’s near’.

Let me share with you three arguments against those ideas. Many of the signs that people use to predict His return aren't signs at all. In troubled times, people are very eagerly looking for the signs of the last days. I believe we have been in the last days ever since the coming of Jesus.

In Acts 2:17, Peter said what happened with the outpouring of the Spirit happened, 'in these last days.' In Hebrews 1:1-2, it says, 'in the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.'
We're in the last days, but people talk about all the wars that are going on, but these wars haven't been any worse than they have been before. Famines aren't new; a famine was recorded in Acts 11, and there were famines before the destruction of Jerusalem. Earthquakes aren't new things.
We need to be very careful that you aren't convinced by all these signs that people are talking about that prove the very end is near. 'These things', Matthew 24:6-7 / Mark 13:7 / Luke 21:10-11, have been going on since the days of creation, and they will continue to go on until Jesus returns.
When people get into an end-of-time frenzy, they hunger for someone who will stand up and say, 'I can make sense out of it.' Jesus said before the fall of Jerusalem that people are going to do that.

They're going to stand up, and He said, 'for false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect', Matthew 24:24 / Mark 13:5 / Luke 21:8.
And they're going to say, 'I've got it all figured out, come follow me and I'll explain it all to you.' Jesus says to be careful about that, be suspicious of people who have inside information about the end that the rest of the church doesn't have.

Do the world's catastrophes and problems indicate the imminence of the Lord's return? Are these 'Signs of the Times'? We've all been in this situation, haven't we?

There's a knock at the door, and two people are standing with tracts in their hands. The moment I opened the front door and saw the two men who stood before me, I knew who and what they were, as surely as if they had their identity branded on their foreheads.

They were 'servants' of the 'Watchtower Organisation', that religious body which, in 1931, became guilty of the offence of 'Identity Theft' when it took upon itself the name that God had used to describe His 'unfaithful' ancient people, Israel, Isaiah 43:9-10 / Isaiah 44:8-9. In other words, these two men were so-called 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. They were smartly dressed and very friendly, and it came as no surprise to me when, in an affable, conversational style, one of them asked me what I thought of the current world situation.

Tsunami, earthquakes, volcanic action, flooding, epidemics, global warming, destruction of the ozone layer and the collapse of the world's financial system. Did I think that we are living in the 'end times'? Also, did I think that all the world's catastrophes and problems indicate the imminence of the Lord's return? Are they 'signs of the times'?

I don't claim to be well-versed in what 'The Watchtower' organisation teaches, and I am aware of the fact that its 'servants' have been instructed by their leaders to radically change their approach when they go 'door to door'.

They are no longer to present themselves in the old, uncompromising, and rather superior manner, which often left people feeling angry and antagonistic towards them. Instead, they must seek to engage their contacts in friendly discussion.

Some of us remember years ago, they met with wide resentment, because of their manner of approach, but they accepted the resentment and the rejection of their message quite happily, because they regarded themselves as being 'persecuted for righteousness' sake', and, therefore, they went on their way rejoicing!

But, these days, they adopt a more diplomatic, conciliatory tone, and ask such questions as those to which I have already referred, ready, when the opening presented itself, to introduce their 'gospel' of a Renovated Earth, dry cleaned and sanitised, free of all problems, and providing a Paradisiacal life for the 'great multitude' who accept the 'Watchtower's' message when Christ returns.

So, in these days, they constantly look for 'signs of the times', a phrase, the definition of which is given as, 'Evidence of the imminence of the Return of Christ and the End of the World'.

The 'Watchtower' isn't alone in its search for 'signs'. Throughout the centuries of 'church history', men have preached and made predictions concerning the Lord's return, but we don't have the space here to deal with that aspect of the subject.

Let me give you a few examples of misguided predictions from more modern times. Ellen. G. White was converted by William Miller in 1842, the year when he was attracting popular attention, predicting that the Return of the Lord would occur in 1843.

Within a year, he claimed one hundred thousand followers, and, when his prediction failed, he said there had been a slight miscalculation, and Christ would return in 1844.

Some believed him, but when Christ didn't return, Millerism went to pieces, and it was later, in 1863, that Mrs White established the Seventh Day Adventist Church on the remnants of the Miller movement by simply adding the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

'Chambers' Biographical Dictionary' confirms the dates, and, if I took the time to examine my notes or my library, I am sure that I could supply you with other statements in the same vein.

The information relating to Joseph Smith comes from the Mormon official 'Doctrine and Covenants Commentary' Section 130, which begins on p.1001 and which is headed, 'Important Items of Instruction, given by Joseph, the Prophet. April 2nd, 1843.

The commentary on this 'revelation' tells us that on the 2nd of April, Smith had heard Orson Hyde, one of the first 'Apostles' of Mormon, refer to the return of the Lord when speaking at a meeting. Later, at dinner, Smith called the attention of Hyde to his statements and said he would 'offer some words of correction'.

Verse 14 and following of this 'revelation' records Smith saying, 'I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the Coming of the Son of Man when I heard a voice repeat the following.

'Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore, let this suffice and trouble me no more on this matter'. 'I was left thus, without being able to decide whether this coming referred to the beginning of the millennium or some previous appearing, or whether I should die and thus see his face'.

Smith was thirty-eight years old, born in 1805 at this time. Verse 13 in the same 'revelation' says that it was received when he was 'praying earnestly' eleven years earlier, on December 25th, 1832. Had he lived, he would have reached the magical age of eighty-five in 1890, but he died in 1844, shot whilst attempting to escape from the jail in Carthage.

Then Charles Taze Russell came along, in 1874 he published a pamphlet entitles, 'The Object and Manner of the Lord's Return' and according to the 'official history' of the Watchtower movement, the same year he came down to breakfast and announced to those present, 'The Lord is now present, although His presence has been graciously veiled from mortal view'.

Russell continued to say that the Lord had been on earth for three and a half years, but invisibly. In 1918, the year following the death of Russell, His successor, the so-called Judge Rutherford, published a book, which declared that 'The world has ended. Millions now living will never die!'

And, one final example of this religious folly, fifty years ago, there appeared a monthly religious magazine bearing the name, 'The Signs of the Times', and, as the title indicates, it was dedicated to identifying any event on earth, that might be seen as a 'sign of the times', and, therefore, as a sign that the Second Coming was at hand. In fact, I think that this magazine is still published in parts of the world where 'Seventh Day Adventism' seem strong, for example, in Australia and the U.S.A.

Furthermore, although they do not share the views of the 'Watchtower' concerning what will happen before or after the return of the Lord, there are other religious groups who also love to talk about 'the signs of the times' and whose ideas are just as erroneous as those of the self-styled 'Witnesses'.

These groups are also convinced that His return will be preceded by the 'signs.' Indeed, the teaching of certain denominations on the subject of the 'Second Coming' is the foundation that underpins everything else that they believe and teach, so that it has become nothing short of an obsession. It is recorded that on one occasion, C.H. Spurgeon said, 'Ye men of Plymouth, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? Get on with your work!'

It's sad, therefore, that it seems never to occur to these people that they may not be on biblical ground when they look for such 'signs' or that they may be guilty of teaching error when they claim that the Lord's return will be preceded by 'signs'.

I say this because, when we examine the particular passage of Scripture in which the phrase 'signs of the times' is mentioned, it becomes quite clear that the 'signs' to which the passage refers have nothing whatsoever to do with the end of the World, or to the Lord's return.

Let me state this simply: there is not a single verse in the Word of God that instructs, or encourages believers to look for 'signs of the times' in connection with the Lord's return, or with the end of the Age. The expression, 'signs of the times', occurs only once in the New Testament scriptures.

It is found in Matthew, where we read about an unlikely alliance of traditional enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who came to Jesus, 'tempting' Him, that is, 'testing Him'.

They asked Him for a 'sign from heaven,' Matthew 16:1-4. They had already raised the issue earlier, when they said, 'Master, we would see a sign from you,' Matthew 12:38. Incidentally, it is significant that they didn't treat him with anything more than mild politeness. They merely called Him 'didaskale', which means 'teacher'.
In John 3:2, Nicodemus also called Jesus 'Master', using the title 'Rabbi', which also means 'teacher', but which is a much more respectful and honourable title. But notice what the Jewish leaders asked for.
They asked for a 'sign', but a sign of what? There's no mention of His 'Return' or the end of the World. Why not? The reason is surely obvious; it would never have occurred to them to ask such questions, and they would even have regarded any suggestion that He may be the Messiah as outrageous and blasphemous. Only those who believe Him to be the Christ would talk about such subjects.

So, what sort of 'sign' were they seeking? And why did they want a sign? They demanded a sign because the issue was one of authority. They were challenging His authority because His authority depended on His identity. Had He, in fact, appeared on the scene with a message from God?

In other words, was He a true prophet? This was something that Nicodemus, himself a Pharisee, had already settled for himself and which he acknowledged when he said to Jesus, 'We know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do the signs you do unless God is with him', John 3:2.
Notice that although the 'A.V.' uses the word 'miracles', John consistently uses the word 'signs'. Later, when the faith of Nicodemus had grown stronger, he appears to have become a true 'believer', John 19:38-39.
When the Jewish leaders asked for a 'sign from heaven', they thought they were setting Him a test that they were confident He would fail. They were demanding a demonstration of miraculous power as proof that He was a true prophet of God.

We need to bear in mind that, because the Jews were a Theocracy, a people governed by God, at least, in theory! They were never surprised when men came claiming to be prophets sent by God.

But they invariably demand that anyone claiming to be divinely commissioned should give proof of his heavenly calling by performing a miraculous act. Such an act would be accepted as the 'sign from heaven', that is, of 'heavenly' endorsement.

So, they said to Jesus, 'What sign do you show?' 'We would see a sign from heaven.' Yes! You and I know that the Lord had already performed enough wonderful deeds to have convinced unbiased people that He had come from God, but, behind their opposition to Him, we must see the fact that these religious leaders were actually concerned about their own authority, which they felt He was undermining.

They were resentful of His growing influence among the ordinary people who 'heard Him gladly', and they wilfully, and quite deliberately, refused to recognise and acknowledge the miracles He had already performed.

Matthew 12:34-43 tells us that He had performed a miracle of healing which had amazed the common people, but the Pharisees dismissed the miracle, saying, 'He casts out devils because he is in league with the Devil!'
This is why He called them, 'a wicked and adulterous generation' when they asked for a sign. He accused them of refusing to see the 'signs of the times', that is, the signs of those times, and warned them that no special sign would be given to them.

The ultimate proof of His identity and His authority was one which had already been determined by 'heaven'. It was the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now, we know that he was speaking about His death, burial, and resurrection on the third day. Romans 1:4 states that He was 'declared to be the Son of God, by the resurrection from the dead', and it is this, the ultimate sign, which Jesus describes as 'the sign of the prophet Jonah'.
He declared that the acts of power that He had already performed endorsed His identity and proved that He had come to do the will of the Father. But these men shut their eyes against the evidence.

More than this, they wickedly described His 'signs', performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, as the work of the Devil, and in so doing, they were actually committing the unforgivable sin.

This wasn't the only occasion when the Jewish leaders showed they were dishonest men. On another occasion, when Jesus was in the Temple teaching the people, the Jewish leaders descended on him in full force, Matthew 21:23-27.
The chief priests and elders of the people, backed, no doubt, by members of the Temple Guard who had the responsibility of maintaining order in the Temple courts, came and demanded to know 'By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?'

They knew that the previous day He had cleansed the Temple for the second time, and the words, 'these things' refer to the events of that day, that is, to His cleansing of the Temple court and His teaching of the people. The priests were indignant.

Firstly, because He had disrupted the business of buying and selling that went on in the Court of the Gentiles, an enterprise which they allowed, and of which they approved because it made them a great deal of money, Matthew 21:12.
Secondly, because He frequently taught the people in the Courts of the Temple, without first acknowledging their authority and obtaining their permission, Matthew 21:23.
In their view, Jesus was not a qualified and authorised teacher, and they, therefore, concluded that He acted with an authority He did not possess, Mark 11:27-33 / Matthew 21:23-27 / Luke 20:1-8.
Hence, their challenge, 'By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?' We see, then, that nothing in these Scriptures concerns 'signs of the times' such as those for which my two 'Watchtower' visitors were looking.

When the Priests and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, they were concerned about His identity and authority at that time, during His earthly ministry. They were concerned about His First Coming, not about His Second, concerning which they knew nothing and understood nothing.

THE DAY AND HOUR UNKNOWN

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.' Matthew 24:36

IF JESUS WAS GOD, WHY DIDN'T HE KNOW WHEN HE WAS GOING TO RETURN?

Many Christians acknowledge that Jesus is God, but wrestle with the question, if Jesus was God, why didn't He know when He was going to return? If Jesus really was God in the flesh and all-knowing, 1 John 3:20, then surely, He would have known when He was going to return! There are two views when it comes to answering this question.
1. Jesus didn't know the hour because of His humanity.

It shouldn't surprise us that the angels in heaven don't know when Christ is to return, Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32, because they are not all-knowing. They are created beings, Colossians 1:16, but not all-knowing. Remember, these created beings didn't even understand the Gospel, 1 Peter 1:3-12, never mind knowing the date when Christ will return.
Many people make the mistake of forgetting that Jesus was also human. Throughout His life, we see glimpses of both natures. Because He was human, He got thirsty, John 19:28, but because He was God's Son, He could turn water into wine, John 2:1-13.
Because He was human, He got hungry, Mark 11:12, but because He was God's Son, He could feed five thousand hungry people, Mark 6:30-44. Because He was human, He became weary, John 4:6, but because He was God's Son, He was raised from the dead, Matthew 28:1-15.
Jesus was fully God but also fully man, John 1:1-3 / John 1:14. When He came to earth as man, He voluntarily chose to restrict some of His divine attributes, Philippians 2:6-8.
Paul tells us that Jesus 'emptied Himself and humbled Himself.' He emptied Himself so that He could serve, 'He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.'

When the Bible says, 'that he emptied himself', it doesn't mean He became less than God; when He was on earth, it means He became more than God. He was God, but now He was also a man. He didn't get rid of deity; He emptied deity into humanity. He could never stop being God because God is His nature.

But do you know what He did? He relinquished His glory; He concealed it in human flesh. Now and then, we get a glimpse of it. He was up on a mountain one time, with three disciples, and He was transfigured, and they saw his glory, Mark 9:2-3.
Paul saw it on the Damascus road, Acts 9:3, and John saw it in his vision, Revelation 1:12-16. And someday we're going to see the bright, brilliant glory of Jesus. But when He was on earth as a man, He concealed that glory.
In other words, Jesus didn't manifest His divine attributes unless the Father told Him to do so, John 4:34 / John 5:30 / John 6:38. He displayed His all-knowingness on many occasions, John 2:25 / John 3:13, but He voluntarily restricted that all-knowingness to only those things which God wanted Him to know during Jesus' earthly life as a man, John 15:15.
This is the reason why Jesus said, only the Father knew about the date and time when Jesus would return, Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32. We must also remember that He voluntarily 'humbled Himself', Philippians 2:8. In other words, Jesus lived a life which was in complete submission to the Father, so He set us the supreme example of what sacrifice is all about.
When we read of Jesus doing things that only God can do and knowing things that only God can know, it's because, at those moments, the Father was telling Him what to say and showing Him what to do.

He submitted to the Father but still remained One with the Father, Matthew 26:39 / Matthew 26:42 / John 5:30 / John 6:38 / John 8:28-29 / John 10:30 / John 12:49 / John 14:28 / John 14:31.
Jesus was indeed God in the flesh, but He voluntarily chose to restrict some of His divine attributes, Philippians 2:6-8, which include His all-knowingness, while He was a man.
When He declared that only the Father knew the time of His coming to His disciples, Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32, He didn't know when that time was because the Father hadn't revealed that to Him. However, after He was resurrected, He resumed His full divine status, which includes His all-knowingness, Matthew 28:18 / Acts 1:7.
Jesus didn't know at the time He spoke to His apostles when He was going to return, but now that He has been exalted in heaven, Philippians 2:9-11, He will certainly know, He knows when He will return, Titus 2:13.
2. Jesus did know the hour.

Many people have come to the conclusion that Jesus is speaking literally in these verses, Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32, but what if He isn't? What if He's speaking metaphorically? The key to understanding Jesus's words is found in the word 'know'.
Although the word 'know' can mean knowledge, as in knowing something, Jesus uses the word in a different way, with a different meaning. The word 'know' Jesus uses is the Greek word 'oiden', which means to declare or to make known. Look at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:2.

> 'For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.' 1 Corinthians 2:2

We know that Paul didn't literally mean he forgot everything and only had knowledge of Christ Jesus and Him crucified. Paul is referring to the only thing that he taught and proclaimed among them.

The word 'know' which Paul uses here is the same word which we find Jesus using in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, which carries with it the idea of knowing and remembering.
But Paul is using it in a figurative sense to proclaim in knowing one thing, and so it's possible that Jesus could be using the word in the same way. In that He didn't know the hour in a literal sense. In other words, the Father will be the one who will proclaim when the 'hour' will be. In other words, no one has the authority to do this but the Father.

Notice the use of the word 'know' in Matthew 11:27. Obviously, Jesus isn't being literal because many 'know' the Son, but they do not share in the intimate way the Father and the Son know each other.
Nor is He excluding the Holy Spirit; this is just an expression in saying that the Father and the Son have an intimate relationship. In other words, Jesus is saying no one knows my Father as I do.

Remember, Jesus has the power and wisdom of God, 1 Corinthians 1:24 / Acts 1:24 / Colossians 2:9, which tells us that Jesus was omniscient. And so when we read other passages like Mark 2:6-8, we read that Jesus had the ability to read hearts.
In John 2:24-25 / John 16:29-30 / John 18:4, we are told that Jesus indeed does 'know' all things. The reason we know these are not simply expressions is because of what the disciples said to Jesus in John 16:29-32.
The disciples came to understand that Jesus was speaking plainly, not figuratively, and they came to the conclusion that He knew all things. Notice also that Jesus predicts their future, John 16:32, implying that He does know all things.
Jesus knew the Samaritan woman's past concerning her many husbands, John 4:17-18. He knew all about Nathaniel before they met, John 1:47-48. He knew Judas would betray him, John 6:64, and He knew His disciples' secret thoughts, Luke 9:47.
And so when Jesus says He doesn't 'know' the hour, He is using figurative language, which is clearly evident in the context of Mark 13:33-37. When we read Mark 13:33-37, notice He shares a parable about a master who went away and his servants didn't know when he would return, Mark 13:35.
Everyone knows that the Master in the parable is a reference to Jesus and the servants are His followers. His servants don't know when their master will return, but the question is, does the Master know when He will return? Of course, he does, hence why the servants are to keep busy and keep watching, Mark 13:37.
Jesus is saying it's not for any humans or any angels or the Son to make known the hour; the Father makes it known, Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32. Jesus is aware of the hour, but only the Father will declare the hour.
Jesus is not saying that he doesn't have cognitive knowledge of the hour, but it's not for Him to make it known to them; that is for the Father alone. This fits in with Jesus' answer to His disciples concerning the restoration of Israel, Acts 1:6.

'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.' Acts 1:7

CONCLUSION

For many years, I used to teach that Jesus didn't know the hour because He suppressed His all-knowingness while He was a human. Although the first view is still good, I now, however, after digging a little deeper, believe that the second view is a stronger argument, as it doesn't contradict other Scriptures where Jesus clearly knows all things.

Jesus is comparing His coming with a Jewish wedding, in accordance with tradition. It's the father who announces the day of the wedding; it's not the groom or the bride.

The groom and the bride know, but they are not the ones who declare it, Matthew 22:1-14 / John 14:1-3. The point is that Jesus isn't speaking about ignorance; He's speaking about declaration.

THE END OF THE WORLD

From Matthew 25:36-51 / Mark 13:32-37, Jesus discusses the end of the world. In response to their first question, the Lord gave them detailed information and instruction from Matthew 24:4-35 / Mark 13:5-31.
Then, we read Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32, we find this unmistakable statement, 'but about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.'
The main sign of His return is the absence sign. Notice how Jesus shifts gears starting in Matthew 24:36, and Mark 13:32. In Matthew 24:1-35, He keeps talking about 'those days' in Matthew 24:19 / Matthew 24:22 / Matthew 24:29, and from Matthew 13:5-31, He keeps talking about 'those days', Mark 13:17 / Mark 13:19 / Mark 13:20 / Mark 13:24.
But from Matthew 24:36, and Mark 13:32, He starts talking about 'that day'. And in the New Testament, any time you talk about 'that day', singular day, the day, it's talking about the day that Jesus returns. Nothing could be more clearly stated than these warnings, that we cannot know when the Lord will come.

'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." Matthew 24:37-39

The Lord warns that as it was in the time of Noah before the flood came and the people were going about their lives in the usual way, so it will be when He returns, Matthew 24:37-39.
In those days, they neither knew nor suspected that anything unusual was about to happen. They paid no attention to Noah's warnings and were unprepared when the flood came and swept them all away.

Jesus didn't say, 'the days before I come, there's going to be turmoil all over the world, there will be famine and distress.' He said, 'Do you know what is going to characterise the world before I come back?

Normal things, people are going to be planting their fields, people are going to be planning weddings, Matthew 24:38, they will never notice.' If you know someone who is getting married soon, that's a sure sign that Jesus is coming. The only sign before the flood was the preaching of Noah, Genesis 6:5 / Genesis 7:6-23 / Matthew 24:37-39. It's not wrong to have a wedding or to plan a party, that's not what He's saying. What he's saying is, 'the tragedy is going to be that when God comes back, what's going to characterise the world is an exceeding casual world.' And the only warning the world is going to get is the witness of the church.

I guess there would have been some people around in Noah's time thinking to themselves, 'I believe in God, I believe what Noah said is going to happen, but I'll wait just before he finishes building that ark before I step on board.'

We can't do that with God, and the reason we can't do that with God is that, like Noah, we have already been warned about what's going to happen. And just like the people in Noah's time, if you choose to ignore that warning you're going to drown in the flood.

'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.' Matthew 24:40-41

In Matthew 24:40-41, He's telling them that He would arrive unexpectedly, and He would find many people who weren't prepared for it. We must always be prepared for the Lord's sudden appearance.

"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 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." Matthew 24:42-44

Jesus proceeds to teach how believers should behave in view of the fact that there will be nothing to warn that His Coming is imminent, Matthew 24:42-43 / Mark 13:33-37.
He says that it will be unheralded, like the coming of a thief in the night. Jesus gave signs to warn the church of the destruction of Jerusalem, and it saved their lives, Matthew 24:4-35 / Mark 13:5-31.
And it helped the kingdom all over the world to understand that God has judged Israel and now the kingdom is made of Jews and Gentiles, Luke 21:24 / Matthew 8:11-12 / Luke 13:28-29 / Isaiah 11:12 / Matthew 23:37.
He gave signs for that, but He didn't give any signs for His return, He said, 'My return is as a thief,' Matthew 24:42-44 / Mark 13:32-35. Thieves don't give signs, thieves don't send cards saying, 'hope you're not home next Monday night, we're hoping to drop by.'

"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. Truly I tell you, 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." Matthew 24:45-51

To illustrate what is involved in watching and being ready, Jesus contrasted two servants. The first servant is described as 'faithful and wise', Matthew 24:45. He had fulfilled his responsibilities while his master was away, and he would receive a great reward when his master returned, Matthew 24:45-47. So, it is with those disciples who remained faithful and wisely understand their duties to serve the Lord.
The second servant is described as 'wicked', Matthew 24:48. He wasn't faithful, he was not wise, and he didn't fulfil his responsibilities while his master was away, Matthew 24:49. And so, he would be punished when his master returned, Matthew 24:50-51.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The 'weeping and the gnashing of teeth' are expressions used by Jesus to convey some idea of the anguish and despair of the condemned who shall be cast into the outer darkness.'

What does all this mean to us? It means that what Jesus said came true. He said that the temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed. He said that the Christians of that time would live if they followed Jesus' instructions.

He said if they ran back into Jerusalem, they would certainly die, and many people did, Matthew 24:4-35 / Mark 13:5-31. There's a time coming when everyone in heaven and on earth and every demon in hell is going to bow down and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; it's just a question of when, Philippians 2:9-11.
Matthew continues with three parables illustrating the need to always be prepared for the Lord's appearing, Matthew 25, emphasising that we cannot know when He will come, Matthew 25:13. Mark has an additional warning, Mark 13:34-37.
The Lord has not left us 'in the dark' that He will appear suddenly, without warning. So, by always being prepared, we will not be caught out, 1 Thessalonians 5:4.
The Lord Jesus says, 'I am definitely coming suddenly.' Can we, with confidence and with joy, say, 'even so, come, Lord Jesus'? Revelation 22:20. And then He tells these three parables about the servants that were given assignments, about the ten wise and foolish virgins, about the parable of the talents, Matthew 25.
All three parables have two things in common: in all three parables, the master was gone longer than they expected, and in all three, when he came back, everybody was surprised. The people who are ready for Him and the people who weren't ready for Him.

It's not like the wise virgins knew He was coming back, and so they were ready because Matthew 25:5 tells us that they were sleeping too. They were just as surprised as the foolish virgins. When Jesus comes back, we're not going to have a clue that He was coming on that day.
What Jesus isn't giving us are clues to date His return. He said to us, 'You need prepared lives because you don't know the date of My return, so you stay ready.' We talk a lot about what signs we're looking for, but Jesus closes by saying, 'You know I'm looking for a sign too.' The sign Jesus is looking for is 'faithfulness'.

He's attempting to get spiritually long-distance runners. Jesus said, 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' Luke 18:8. That's the sign Jesus is going to look for.
There is no special evidence of His imminent appearance! Instead, a solemn warning which every one of us should take seriously and think about more frequently, 'watch, therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord will come,' Matthew 24:42 / Mark 13:35-37.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. We should not believe anyone who claims to be able to predict the date of the Lord's return.

If Jesus didn't know, surely no mere man does. Anyone who claims to be able to discern the time of Jesus' return by a careful study of prophetic texts is claiming to know more than the Lord Himself and should not be taken seriously.

2. Since we don't know when the Lord will come back, we should always be ready.

If you knew for sure that the Lord would come back today, would you change some things in your life? Then why not just assume that He is returning today, for He might, and make the changes immediately. It is utterly foolish to procrastinate in our repentance.

CHAPTER 25

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we find a series of three parables. The first parable, 'The Parable of the Ten Virgins', is about the importance of Christians being watchful and prepared for Christ's return, Matthew 25:1-13.
The second parable, 'The Parable of the Bags of Gold', is about the importance of Christians using the talents that God has given them, Matthew 25:14-30. The third parable, 'The Sheep and the Goats', is about the importance of Christians actually serving God, Matthew 25:31-46.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

'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 ones, 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. “At midnight, the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “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.’ “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. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.’ Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus says to His followers, ‘Ready or not, I am coming!’ Jesus isn’t talking about how His followers were to be prepared for the Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He’s telling the whole Christian community to be ready because He is coming back sometime in the future. Jesus shares three things that ‘we cannot do’.

1. We cannot neglect preparation and be ready for His coming.

Jesus wastes no time in getting straight to the point after sharing this parable. Now the keyword in Matthew 25:13 is the word ‘watch’. But what does it mean to watch? And in what way are Christians to watch for Christ’s return? Well, it certainly doesn’t mean what His disciples were doing in Acts 1:7-11.
‘Watching’ doesn’t mean intently looking up into the sky twenty-four hours a day, every day, waiting for a first glimpse of His glorious appearance. It also doesn’t mean that we’re to talk about nothing else but His coming.

Christians must ‘watch’ with more than their eyes and their tongues, Colossians 3:1-2. To watch is to have some forethought of the future. It means to make some prior precautions, to make some preliminary preparation, and continue in that preparation. And why is this preparation so important? Well, this was the very thing the foolish virgins failed to do, Matthew 25:1-3.
In other words, they had their lamps, they had their oil, and they began to wait eagerly, but they didn’t have enough oil, Matthew 25:8. It never entered their minds that the bridegroom might delay and it’s because of this that Jesus called them ‘foolish’, Matthew 25:2-3.
And notice they weren’t ungodly or immoral, they weren’t even hypocrites. They were simply foolish because they didn’t allow for the possibility of delay. In short, when the Lord returned, they were unprepared.

One of the most inescapable lessons from life is the necessity of being prepared. Practically everything that is done requires preparation. It’s true of reading, writing and arithmetic. It’s true of buying and selling, sowing, reaping, winning and keeping friends.

There are certain things in life which cannot be done at the last minute. If you ever go on holiday, you will understand just how much preparation is needed before you go.

Preparation is essential for knowledge, just ask any teacher, and they would tell you that if only the children studied and worked as hard throughout the whole year as they do the night before a final exam. In other words, the time of examination is not the time of preparation.

When the foolish virgins realised they didn’t have enough oil, they asked the wise virgins for some of theirs, Matthew 25:8, but they refused because they didn’t have enough, and told them to go and buy some of their own, Matthew 25:9.
It is necessary for everyone to make preparations for the greatest examination and the greatest journey in life. On Judgement Day, it will be too late to make up for any previous neglect of preparation. Because, as we know, it would be foolish of us to think that we can buy oil after the shops are shut.

2. We cannot borrow what must be bought.

When you read this parable, we can't help but sympathise with the foolish virgins, Matthew 25:9. I mean, why didn't the wise virgins give to the foolish virgins? How could they be so heartless and refuse to share their oil with others at a time of distress?
The answer is quite simple: you cannot borrow something which must be bought. How many times do we hear people calling upon the faith of another person? And people talk like this as though they have inherited some of their faith.

What Jesus is teaching us here is that obedience to God is another thing that cannot be borrowed, Matthew 25:10. Each one is accountable individually, Hebrews 9:27. Our submission to God is our submission, our faith needs to be our faith, Romans 14:10-12.
3. We cannot recall lost opportunities.

When the bridegroom came, the foolish maidens were out trying to buy oil for their lamps, Matthew 25:10. What a sad picture this is, isn't it? And so on returning, they found that the marriage feast had already begun, and the door was shut, Matthew 25:10 / Genesis 7:16. They missed their one chance, and they didn't seize their one great moment. Every day brings us opportunities that we must not neglect. Opportunities to help others are all around us. And these opportunities aren't just in India or Africa, they're right here on our doorstep. Today we may well have an opportunity to enter an open door to do good, Galatians 6:10.
And if we fail to go through that door, it will be shut, Genesis 7:16. It will shut us out from the joy of serving and shut us in with a selfish heart. The truth of the parable is that the failure of the foolish virgins was final.
According to Jesus, some others came back even later, Matthew 25:11, and notice to these late comers, Jesus says, I don't know you, Matthew 25:12 / Matthew 7:21-24. The door was shut, and it was shut forever, Genesis 7:16.
How much those girls desired to enter, how long they had looked forward to the marriage. They were near the reception, so near in fact that they could hear the inexpressible joy inside, and yet they were so far.

We shouldn't be asking the question, when will Jesus come again? That's the wrong question. The real question we should be asking ourselves is, 'Are our lamps trimmed and burning?' Matthew 25:7. That's why Jesus says in Matthew 25:13, 'Therefore keep watch.'
Jesus is coming, and I know that some religious groups use His coming as a form of scaremongering to scare people into becoming followers of their ways. But there's no denying the truth, He's coming, and when is His coming going to take place?

Now again, many religious groups have tried time and time again to predict His coming and time and time again they have been made to look foolish, but still, they go on predicting. But Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:13 'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour'.
Nobody knows when He's going to return, so it's not even worth the effort to try and figure out when He's coming back. Because that's not the question of the Bible, the question of the Bible is, are you ready?

Because if you're ready, then you will be willing to be patient and you will be willing and ready to stand firm until He does return, Philippians 1:20-23 / James 5:7-8.
The world began with the Word of God, and when Christ returns, this present world will end with the Word of God. That's the truth, and that's a promise, but it's not my promise; it's God's promise, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18. I guess we all have our own ideas about what Judgement Day will be like, but God tells us there won't be a test, but there will be an examination.
Any examination starts with preparation; it's entirely up to you about how much preparation you're willing to put in, 2 Corinthians 5:10 / Hebrews 9:27. There is really only one way to be sure that we are ready for the Day of Judgement when Christ returns, and that is to be ready every day.

THE PARABLE OF THE BAGS OF GOLD

‘Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. “After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. 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!’ “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; 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!’ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold 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 gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ “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. “‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have, will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ Matthew 25:14-30

‘The parable of the ten virgins’ stresses the duty of constant alertness, and ‘The parable of the talents’ stresses the duty of faithful service. And when we place them together as they should be, they both teach the Christian that as he watches, he must not be idle. So, in short, the best way to be ready for Jesus’ return is to be busy in the Master’s business.

In many ways, Jesus tells us in this parable that He entrusted His property and His money to His servants, Matthew 25:14. Now, there is a similar parable that Jesus shares in Luke 19:11-27, and we need to keep that in mind because some people see ‘The unprofitable servant’ in Matthew’s account as the main character.
They believe that the unprofitable servant represents the Scribes and the Pharisees and the other Jews who wouldn’t run the risk of giving full-pledged allegiance to the Christ.

There’s possibly some truth to this view, but what we need to ask ourselves is to whom was Jesus speaking in Matthew’s account? If we go all the way back to Matthew 24:3, we find the answer.
Matthew tells us quite clearly that the only people present with Jesus were His disciples. In Luke’s account, Jesus is speaking with the Scribes, Pharisees and other Jews who are listening, but not in Matthew’s account.

What’s the point? The point is simply that Jesus is speaking to His disciples, and the focus of attention isn’t on the Scribes and Pharisees and the Jews, but on three scenes.

1. The gifts.

Jesus says that before the master went on his journey, he called all his servants in and gave each of them a definite sum of money, Matthew 25:14-15. The first thing we notice is that the amount of money varied. It varied not because of favouritism but because of ability, and in each case, the kind of money involved was a talent.
As we know, a talent in Biblical times was no small sum of money. It wasn’t £5 to go and buy fish and chips with; in the time of Jesus, a talent was worth around £500.

And remember that these servants were actually slaves, Matthew 25:14. So not only were they placed in charge of their master’s money, Matthew 25:14, but they were also in charge of their master’s property.

But the point is that each man received something. Not a single servant was left out; each one left their master's property with something in their pockets. God still works that way today, not a single person responsible to God is left out in the divine distribution of gifts, Romans 12:6-8. Every one of us receives something, in fact, every one of us receives much, even the one talented man received the large sum of £500.

Remember when we looked at 'The parable of the two sons'? What did Jesus call the two sons to do? Matthew 21:28-30 tells us that Jesus said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' He called them to work, why? Because there's work to be done.

God has work for us all to do, and God gives us enough capital to accomplish the work which He intends for every one of us to do. Peter tells us that we have everything we need, and not just for life but for godliness too, 2 Peter 1:3. And as I mentioned earlier, each man was given a different amount of gifts according to their abilities, 1 Corinthians 12:14-21.

What's the point? The point is that God knows we are not all the foot, or the eye, or the ear. He gave us different gifts, and He doesn't expect us to use a gift which we don't possess. Even in our natural abilities, we're different.

Some people are born with strong and active bodies, while others enter the world in poor health. A few people are gifted with superior intellect, and others are not so intellectual, and it's the exact same with our spiritual gifts.

There are always opportunities to serve, and I understand that the opportunities may not be as many as others. Not all fields at one moment are glowing with a golden harvest, Matthew 9:35-38 / John 4:31-37. In other words, there are some fields where the ground needs preparation, there are some fields that are waiting for the sowing, 1 Corinthians 3:6.

Remember when Jesus taught 'The parable of the Sower.' He says in Matthew 13:8, 'Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop–a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.' We need to realise that not all fields, when sown, are capable of producing the same crop.

Let's look at the way the talents were used in the parable. What was the result of the master's confidence in His servants? To what use did they put His money while He was away? The servants who received the larger amounts of money went to work immediately, Matthew 25:16-17.

They invested their money in profitable enterprises and succeeded in doubling their fortunes. And I think we would be mistaken to assume that these men weren't tempted to do something else with their talents. A little significant incident may cause our downfall simply because we are not looking for it.

I guess that many times they probably thought of spending their master's money recklessly. They probably toiled and teased themselves with the idea of just sitting back and playing it safe.

Temptation came to the five-talent man as well as the one-talent man. Temptation came to the two-talent man as well as the one-talent man and so forth. And we can't put their success down to just pure luck; they were successful because they worked, but they didn't just work, they worked hard.

Let's look at the third man in the parable. Now we know that he failed his duty, Matthew 25:18. I don't think he deliberately set out to fail; he probably left his master's presence with the firm intention to justify the confidence that had been placed in him. So why then did the third man fail? Well, there are a few possibilities.

1. He failed because he didn't have faith in himself.

Maybe the one talented man was unsure of his abilities, and when he compared his gift with the larger gifts, he was afraid that he couldn't do as much as they did, 1 Corinthians 12:22-25. And so, in not wanting to do the least, he did nothing.

It's all about recognising the different talents that each of us has. We all have different talents, and there is no shame in recognising that you can't do certain jobs for the Lord, but it is a shame if you know you have a talent and you don't use it, and so just bury it in the ground, Matthew 25:18.

2. The man failed because he didn't have the courage to work.

Jesus calls him in Matthew 25:26, 'A wicked, lazy servant!' He was afraid to work, and isn't this the cause of most failures in life? If a person doesn't work, if a person isn't willing to pay the price in hard labour, they will never be crowned with success, Proverbs 10:4.

Just as this is true in the physical sense, it's also true in the spiritual sense, Hebrews 6:10-12. God has no room for laziness because He has given each of us a gift to use in His kingdom. And if we just bury those gifts in our hearts, then God's work won't get done as His will wants it done, Matthew 6:10.

3. He failed because he didn't have enough faith in his master.

Maybe he thought he just had a bad deal. Matthew 25:24 tells us that this guy 'knew that his master was a hard man.' And don't many people have a picture of God as a hard man in their minds?

It amazes me how many people see God as this stern power that is either making unreasonable demands or someone who is pushing people around to get His own way.

If this were true, that would be all the more reason why we should all strive to use the talents He has given us. But as we know, this is not true because that's not a clear picture of God. He loves us and pities us and extends His arms to us all in mercy because when He gives us a task, He gives us the means to accomplish the task.

We have more power than we can ever measure available to us to do a task for God; all we need to do is ask Him for it, Ephesians 3:20. Because, according to Paul, that power is already at work within us.

3. The consequences of using and not using our talents.

When the master came home, there was a time of reckoning. Jesus says the exact same thing to the man with the five talents and the man with the two talents, and for them their reward was to be two-fold, Matthew 25:19-23.

They were admitted into the joy of their Lord, Matthew 25:21 / Matthew 25:23. This meant they were granted the right to sit at their Lord's banquet table. This was a privilege that slaves never received, but at the same time, one which perhaps automatically gave them their freedom.

Did you know that an inheritance awaits all Christians who work and do His will? 1 Peter 1:3-5. And did you know that is the very reason why we keep going, even though we go through all kinds of trials in our lives? 1 Peter 1:6-9 / Galatians 6:9.

That's why these guys worked hard because they had a goal and because of their faith in their Lord, they reached that goal, Matthew 25:21 / Matthew 25:23. And what was that goal?

Well, not just an inheritance which will never fade or spoil, 1 Peter 1:4, they received the most important thing of all, the salvation of their souls, 1 Peter 1:8-9. Ultimately, that's why you're a Christian: you want to go to heaven.

And please remember that they didn't work hard for their reward; they worked hard because of their reward. In other words, we don't work for our salvation; we work because of our salvation, Ephesians 2:8-9.

Let's look at the one talented man in the parable. He was forbidden to come in and take part in his master's happiness, and everything he had was taken from him, Matthew 25:24-28.

Let me ask you, is this a picture of a harsh master? I don't think it is. I think it's the inevitable consequence of doing nothing. Too many people question God about the way He deals with people.

In Romans 9, when Paul is describing how God does things the way He wants to do things, and people are questioning this. Paul says that the creator of human life has the right to take human life and use it for His purpose, Romans 9:21.

You've all heard the saying, 'If you don't use it, you'll lose it.' It is a law of life that we will lose what we fail to use. And in the spiritual realms, every gift given by God must be put to work, or else it will be taken from us, Matthew 25:29.

What was the difference between the servants? Why were two profitable and one unprofitable? The answer lies not in the fact that the two from the beginning were more gifted. With all their ability, they still could have been lazy and buried their talents.

It wasn't because they were brilliant or because they had a knack for business that they were commended. They were commended simply because they had been faithful in the service of their absent Lord, Matthew 25:14. Each man with the ability they possessed had done his best.

And we, too, when the day of reckoning comes, and we turn to our eternal home, it may well be that some will come with an arm full of trophies. It may well be that some will come with only a few trophies, but you need to come with something; nobody can come empty-handed.

This is a stern warning for us all because He's speaking about people who profess to follow His ways here. And we need to choose today what God is going to say to you on Judgement Day.

He told the foolish virgins, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Matthew 25:12. He told the goats on His left, 'depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,' Matthew 25:41. The wicked, lazy servant was told he was being thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,' Matthew 25:30.

I don't know about you, but for me, I don't want to hear those words coming from the Father's lips. I would rather hear the words He spoke to these servants who used their talents well, '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!' Matthew 25:21 / Matthew 25:23 / Romans 14:10 / 2 Corinthians 5:10.

And remember it's not a talent contest, it's about reaching our goal, the salvation of our souls, 1 Peter 1:9. It's about using the talents which God has blessed us with to reach others until the day He returns to take us home.

THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. "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? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' "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, 'Truly I tell you, 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." Matthew 25:31-46

This is the last story of Jesus' teaching ministry, and this insight into the final judgment mustn't be missed. So, what have we learned so far? Jesus said, 'When the Son of man comes back, he's going to be looking for faith,' Luke 18:8. He's going to be looking for a faith that was steady for the long haul. He's going to be looking for a faith that actively attempts to increase the master's kingdom assets.

And how is that done? The third thing we learn that matters most of all to the Master is serving people. Real faith possesses a heart for others; faith becomes love, or else it's not real faith. In every one of these stories, there's a big surprise when the Master returns. Judgement day is going to be full of surprises.

I think one of the things that is going to surprise most people is the things that they thought were so important. The things they fought about, the things that split churches all over the place, didn't matter much to the judge.

Because the judge taught there are basically two commandments, 'Love God with all you've got and love His children too,' Mark 12:30-31. He says, 'You're making it way too hard, people, it's not that hard, two things I'm looking for.' We can't keep the first commandment if you don't keep the second commandment, 1 John 4:19-21.
Remember the first two parables were about Christians being watchful, prepared, Matthew 25:1-13, and being found serving God with the gifts He has given us, Matthew 25:14-30.
Although this parable appears to be speaking about the final judgment, Matthew 25:31-32, it's also possible that it continues to address Christians, especially those who proclaim to be serving Him, Matthew 25:40 / Matthew 25:45.
Jesus says when He, the Son of Man, Daniel 7:13-14, returns in His glory, and all the angels with Him, Matthew 24:31 / Mark 13:27, He will sit on His glorious throne, Matthew 25:31 /Luke 1:32.
Jesus says, when He returns 'all the nations will be gathered before him, Philippians 2:10-11, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, Matthew 25:32. That is, those who are serving Christians and those who were Christians by name, Matthew 7:21.
The words 'nation' and 'Gentile' are exactly the same word in the Greek. And so, this should be translated all Gentiles shall be gathered before him, Matthew 25:32 / Matthew 24:31 / Luke 21:24. It's not talking about nations as such or national groups.
Notice also that this is not going to be a judgment between the sheep and the wolves. This is a judgment between the sheep and the goats, and goats are animals which look similar to sheep, especially when they are young. It's talking about the individual Christians of the Gentile nations all over the world, Romans 15:11-12 / Ephesians 2:11.
Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'Christ here speaks of the judgment of Christians alone, because that was the question which most concerned the Apostles and their future converts. That the persons to be judged are described in Matthew 25:32, as 'all the nations,' is in no way inconsistent with this. Jesus foresaw, and frequently prophesied, that His religion would become universal, Matthew 8:11, and therefore appropriately described the Christians who at the Last Day will rise to be judged, as all the nations of the earth.'
Ellicott, in his commentary, says the following.

'We have had in this chapter, 1, in the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the law of judgment for all members of the Church of Christ, 2, in the Talents, that for all who hold any office or ministry in the Church, now we have, 3, the law by which those shall be judged who have lived and died as heathens, not knowing the name of Christ, and knowing God only as revealed in Nature or in the law written in their hearts. Every stage in what follows confirms this interpretation.'

At that time, He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left, Matthew 25:33, which indicates the separation of those who faithfully served and obeyed Him, John 10:14, and those who didn't. Notice two very critical observations about judgement according to Jesus.

1. What the judge expects is within the reach of everyone.

The sheep did what every man can do; their labour of love didn't require a vast amount of money. Their labour of love didn't require a lot of theological instructions. Don't say, 'I'm not a five-talent man, so I can't do that.' Everything the judge wants to see most is something every person can do.

They didn't perform big miracles. Notice, He didn't say, 'you healed the sick.' He didn't say, 'You freed the prisoners.' He didn't say, 'you'll stop world hunger.' He said, 'You visited sick people, you went to a few jails, you shared your food.'

It wasn't big miracles, it was little ministries that we can all do, the necessities of life, food, drink, clothing, shelter, medical care, and comfort in affliction, Matthew 25:35-39 / Matthew 25:42-44 / 1 John 3:17-18. The first thing the Judge is going to look for is something everyone can do.

2. Those whom the Judge called 'good' were quite aware of their goodness.

They didn't do their labour of love to be seen by men, Matthew 23:5, and that's the difference between living by faith and being a legalist. A legalist can always tell you what their acts of goodness are; they keep a record of them. These people weren't keeping records; this wasn't done for merit, Luke 18:9-12.

This was just the unconscious outflow of the heart that was changed by the Master's grace. And even though they didn't know it, every act of kindness they did to another human being, the Master received as a gift to Himself.

Someday, the whole world is going to understand what we've talked about. The whole world is going to understand that what they thought was important wasn't important, but we can understand now.

We have insight now into what the whole world is going to find out then. On that day, a lot of people are going to be shocked, including many believers, to find out that what they thought mattered didn't and what they didn't think mattered does. They're finally going to find out what Paul said, 'The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.' Galatians 5:6.

Jesus makes a point that few people believe. Yes, there is heaven, and the blessed will enjoy it eternally. But just as truly, there is hell, a place of eternal torment, Mark 9:43-48, that is equal in duration to the eternal life in the heaven of the blessed. The terms 'everlasting' and 'eternal', in Matthew 25:46, are both translations of the same Greek word, which means 'without end'.

The best way to wait forwardly for Jesus is to ask yourself every day, 'What am I doing for people that cannot pay me back?' The thing about waiting for Jesus to come back is that we don't have to wait to serve Him; we can serve Him right now by doing for people who can't pay us back.

I believe taking judgment seriously means taking Jesus seriously now. So today is your day to make that judgement but if the Bible is right, tomorrow is His day to make the judgement.

CHAPTER 26

INTRODUCTION

'When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." Then the chief priests and the elders of the people

assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.” Matthew 26:1-5

THE PLOT AGAINST JESUS

After Jesus finished speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and His return, He now prepares His disciples for what was going to happen to Him, Matthew 26:1-5 / Luke 22:1-2 / Mark 14:1-2.
In John 12:1, we find some confusion over the timing. John tells us six days before Passover. Matthew 26:2 and Mark 12:1 suggest that this occurred at different times, two days before Passover. It may have been that Jesus arrived on Friday, but the dinner took place on Tuesday.
Jesus returns from Ephraim to Bethany after spending some time there. This coming Passover, Mark 14:1 / John 12:1, would occur after His death on the cross but before His resurrection.
Jesus is going to be handed over to be crucified, Matthew 26:2. He was going deliberately to His death, Mark 10:32-34. While Jesus spoke about His upcoming death to His disciples, the religious leaders met together at Caiaphas’ palace to discuss how they could secretly arrest and kill Jesus, Matthew 26:3-4 / Mark 14:1-2 / John 10:28.
They did it secretly because under Roman law, they didn’t have the official right to kill Jesus without the consent of the Roman governor, who was at this time Pilate.

However, they couldn’t kill Him during the festival, just in case it caused a riot among the people, Matthew 26:5; those who believed Jesus was who He claimed to be, John 21:46.

JESUS ANOINTED AT BETHANY

‘While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of 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. When 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.” 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. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Matthew 26:6-13

DON’T GET CONFUSED!

As we approach this text, many people make the mistake of mixing this Simon with the Simon we find in Luke’s account in Luke 7:36-50. The Simon referred to in Matthew’s account is the Simon who had been cured of leprosy, Matthew 26:6 / Mark 14:3, and possibly out of thankfulness, hosted a dinner in his home in honour of Jesus. Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This anointing has nothing in common with that given by Luke, except the fact of a woman anointing the Saviour’s feet, and the name Simon, which was common. The former was in Galilee; this is at Bethany near Jerusalem. There, the host despised the woman who anointed; here, her brother is one of the guests, and her sister is an active attendant. There, the woman was a sinner, a notoriously bad woman; here it is the devout Mary who ‘sat at the Lord’s feet and

heard his words,' months before. There, the host thought it strange that Jesus allowed her to touch him; here, the disciples complained of the waste. There the Saviour gave assurance of forgiveness, here of perpetual and worldwide honour. Especially notice that here the woman who anoints is anticipating his speedy death and burial, of which at the former time he had never distinctly spoken. In view of all these differences, it is absurd to represent the two anointings as the same, and outrageous on such slender grounds to cast reproach on Mary of Bethany.'

The 'supper' is the main meal, usually in the evening, and it was a dinner in Jesus' honour, John 12:2. It was in the house of Simon the leper, Matthew 26:6 / Mark 14:1, probably one whom Jesus had healed. Assuming Simon was the host, there were fifteen men present: Simon, Jesus, the twelve, Lazarus, and Martha 'served', John 12:2 / Luke 10:40. Jesus has the opportunity to spend some last moments with the people He loves, His good friends Lazarus and the sisters, John 12:2. These must have been very precious moments for the Lord as He knew His time was drawing closer. It seems likely that a four-day gap occurred between John 12:1 and John 12:2.
Mary is mentioned in John 12:3, but in Matthew and Mark, she isn't named. She took 'a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume,' Matthew 26:7 / Mark 14:3 / John 12:3, its value was around three hundred denarii, which is equal to three-hundred days' wages for a working man, John 12:5 / Matthew 20:2.
The nard that Mary used is better known as spikenard, an expensive perfume imported from India. It was far more expensive than the ordinary man in the street could ever hope to be able to afford, and it is possible that this had been a much-prized possession of the woman. It was highly scented and was normally used on the hair as a perfume and oil together.

She 'anointed the feet of Jesus,' John 12:3. Matthew 26:7, and Mark 14:3, tell us that she anointed His head also. Anointing the head was a way of honouring a special guest, Psalm 23:5 / Luke 7:46. John recalls that Mary's loving act went beyond the customary practice, John 12:3.
A respectable Jewish woman wouldn't let down her hair in public because in doing so, she might be regarded as a woman of loose morality, but Mary was forgetful of propriety under the compulsion of love.

This was the second time something such as this had happened to the Lord, Luke 7:38, and it was a great act of humility for Mary to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair, as the washing of feet was normally done by a servant, Matthew 26:17-35 / John 13:1-17.
The fact that John was present is proven by his remembering the strong scent filling the house, John 12:3. Note that each time we meet Mary in the narrative, we find her at the feet of Jesus; we see that here, and in Luke 10:39 / John 11:32.
In John 12:4-6, we see Judas Iscariot object to the 'wasting' of this expensive perfume. Matthew and Mark both tell us that Judas found some support among the twelve for his objection, Matthew 26:8 / Mark 14:4. It seems that they, too, were more concerned with the value of material things.
At first glance, we may even have some sympathy for Judas, as the poor of the region would have benefited greatly from the money to be made by selling the perfume, Matthew 26:8-9 / Mark 14:4-5.
However, we see that it's clear that Judas was the treasurer, and John tells us that he wasn't really concerned about the poor but more concerned with lining his own pocket, John 12:6. Mary's act is an act of love towards her Master, and she had her priorities right because she could have sold it and given the money to the poor.
She chose instead to use it to anoint Jesus and seized an opportunity she would never have again. It was a personal expression of her true feelings and her thanks for the raising of her brother Lazarus just a few weeks earlier, John 11:38-44.
When we examine the motive behind Judas' apparent indignation, one sees a rather sad picture. Jesus demands total honesty from His followers, and here, amid the group of believers, is this thief. Judas, the man who was to sell the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, was already guilty, Matthew 26:14-16.

The lesson to be learnt here is interesting; anyone given the responsibility of keeping the 'church funds' needs to calculate the spending without error. They must keep an unquestionable account of all entrusted to them, and they must be unscrupulously honest, ready to give account at all times.

A hint toward balance is given in Matthew 26:10-12 / Mark 14:6-8 / John 12:7-8. We must balance our giving as individuals as well as a church, and we need to ensure we don't squander the Lord's money on trivialities such as expensive gardens, excessive buildings and decorations while people around the building are starving either physically or spiritually. Balance in all things is always demanded of the Christian.
Mary was being criticized by Judas, and if we seek the parallel account in the Gospels, by the other disciples present, Jesus comes to her rescue, He tells them to leave her alone, Mark 14:6.
It's clear from John 12:4, that Judas spoke directly to Mary about the waste and I'm sure they would have stepped in to stop her from wasting any more oil on Jesus if Jesus hadn't stopped them.
I love it when Jesus speaks up and defends the innocent as He does here; He even pays her a high compliment. Mary was more concerned about showing her love and appreciation of Jesus than the others were, and Jesus wasn't about to stop her. Nothing was too valuable in her eyes for Jesus.

'It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial', Jesus says, Matthew 26:12 / Mark 14:8 / John 12:7. Mary believed that Jesus was soon to meet His end, and she knew she wouldn't have the opportunity to show her love by being involved with the preparation of His body, so symbolically she did it now. Nothing can take away from the great love that this act expressed to our Lord. Mary had taken her opportunity to express her love. Jesus was soon to depart, the poor were always present to give an expression of love, Matthew 26:11 / Mark 14:7 / John 12:8, but alas, Jesus did not. Jesus said that this act of love would be her memorial wherever the Gospel was preached, Matthew 26:13 / Mark 14:9.
When we think about the disciples, they have been with Jesus for over three and a half years now, but they never seem to understand anything Jesus spoke about to them concerning His upcoming death. Mary, on the other hand, seems to have this great insight as to what is about to happen to Jesus.

I can imagine the heartbreak in Jesus' mind when all this was going on, the disciples didn't get it because they were too busy arguing amongst themselves as to which one of them would be the greatest, Matthew 18:1-4 / Mark 9:33-36 / Mark 10:35-45 / Luke 9:46-47 / Luke 22:24. I believe that men like to look at the facts and the figures, while women seem to be more sensitive to what is going on around them.
What a marvellous acclamation Jesus gives Mary, it's one of those prophecies which is often overlooked and dismissed, Matthew 26:13 / Mark 14:9. This humble act of servitude that Mary performed would become the memorial of her love for Jesus, Hebrews 11:4. She had the right spiritual attitude by giving Jesus the very best she had to offer, which is a lesson we can all learn from.
Her name will go down in history because of this one moment with the Christ, as the Gospel is spread throughout the world, her name and her deed will follow along beside, Matthew 36:13. This is just one of the things she will always be remembered for, but what about us today? What will people remember about us when we go to be with the Lord? I've often said and believe this with all my heart that I could preach a hundred of the best sermons you've ever heard preached, and most people would forget them within a few days or weeks or months. But if I were to do one act of kindness for someone, Matthew 10:42, they would remember that one act of kindness all the days of their lives. Some people will be remembered for their Bible knowledge, some will be remembered because they were great preachers of God's Word, and some will be remembered as great cooks or bakers.

Some as great singers, great hosts, but then there will always be some Mary's around, who lovingly serve the Lord without making a song and dance about it. Those little acts of love speak louder than words. What will you be remembered for doing?

CONCLUSION

You can always tell when it's election time in the UK as the political parties begin to promise many good things to come, especially for the poor. In our world today, there are many countries that are really poverty-stricken.

We read about it in the newspaper and see it in front of our eyes on the TV screen. We only have to walk down our city centres to see the hundreds of homeless people sleeping rough on the streets.

I guess the question is, what are we doing about it? What are we doing to help these people? We will always have the poor among us, which means there will always be an opportunity for us to help meet some of those needs, Deuteronomy 15:11 / Mark 14:7 / John 12:8 / Galatians 2:10.
It's so easy to focus on the negatives in this story; we could focus on Judas and his attitude, and we could focus on why the disciples seem to agree with Judas. But I'm wondering, what will people say about us when we leave this world? What will be written on your gravestone?

It's so easy to focus on the negatives in this story; we could focus on Judas and his attitude, or we could focus on why the disciples seem to agree with Judas. But I'm wondering, what will people say about us when we leave this world?

'Here lies a Christian who loved God so much, they always gave God the very best of what they had to offer.'

'Here lies a Christian who cared for the poor so much, they continually gave food, clothing and drink to the poorest on our streets.'

JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS

'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 deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on, Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.' Matthew 26:14-16

Luke tells us that Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, Luke 22:3. After he entered Judas, John tells us that the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus, John 13:2. How Satan entered Judas we don't know, but the Bible clearly tells us that he is working in Judas to get him to betray Jesus.
And please know that Judas wasn't forced to obey Satan any more than he was forced to follow Jesus. He had free will like you, and I do to choose who he will obey.

Judas now goes to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus, Matthew 26:14 / Luke 22:4 / Mark 14:10.
Judas asks them how much are they willing to give him to deliver Jesus over to them and so they counted out thirty pieces of silver, Matthew 26:15. Notice they were delighted and agreed to give him money, Luke 22:5 / Mark 14:11.
Judas then consents, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present, Matthew 26:16 / Luke 22:6 / Mark 14:11.
Judas Iscariot is probably one of the most memorable disciples of Jesus, but sadly for all the wrong reasons. Now I think Judas could have got a lot more. I mean, this shows how far Jesus has sunk in his eyes. He could have pushed for much more from the chief priests.

Thirty pieces of silver were just the price of a common slave, Matthew 26:15 / Exodus 21:32. The priests were very aware of what Zechariah wrote, Zechariah 11:12-13, but their anger toward Jesus clouded any objectivity they had in applying prophecy to what they were actually doing, Matthew 26:14-16.
By the way, have you ever wondered why they needed Judas? They didn't need Judas to recognise Jesus. They didn't need Judas to find out where Jesus was. Do you know what my theory is? Three times in the Gospel of John, they sent guards to arrest Jesus, and all three times the guards couldn't do it.

I think they were beginning to fear that Jesus was un-arrestable. And they said, "We need someone on the inside, someone that can catch Him when his guard is down, someone that won't surprise Him so that we can get Him before He knows what's going on." And Judas said, "I'm your man." And Judas got his bargain.

And the Jewish leaders got their insider. And Satan got his opportune time to come back and attack Jesus. Because by this point, Judas is now the disciple of Satan. And so he makes his deal.

WAS THE LAST SUPPER A PASSOVER MEAL?

Before we move on to the rest of the text, I think it would be useful to answer the above question. Many people are confused as to whether Jesus actually ate the Passover meal during the Last Supper.

Some say He did, while others suggest that it was just a normal meal. The best way to answer this question is to go back and discover exactly what date and time the Passover was supposed to be kept.

The Hebrew word for evening is 'rev', and it means 'mixture.' It's a mixture of day and night, and it refers to the time when the sun is no longer visible, but the light from the sun is still visible. In other words, it's what we would call sunset or twilight.

When it came to the Day of Atonement, for example, we read the words 'from evening to evening', and we read that the tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement. We read that that day begins at sunset (evening) on the ninth, until the sunset of the tenth day, Leviticus 23:27-32.
When we read Leviticus 23:5, we find the word 'twilight', and in Numbers 9:2-3, we read the words 'twilight' and appointed time'. We see that on the fourteenth day at twilight or sunset is the Passover, which means at the evening ending the fourteenth day, is when you keep the Passover.
The Jews were to keep the Passover at the 'appointed time', Numbers 9:2-3. This obviously means that they weren't supposed to do it any other day, and if they kept the Passover on the evening of the thirteenth, they would be disobeying God's command.
Passover is the meal which begins the feast of unleavened bread, Leviticus 23:5-8, and notice the unleavened bread is to be eaten for seven days, Leviticus 23:6, not eight days.
If the Jews ate the Passover on the evening beginning of the fourteenth, this means on the evening of the thirteenth, they would be eating unleavened bread for eight days.

Also, notice what the Jews had to do with the lamb. They were to keep the lamb until the fourteenth day and then kill it at twilight, Exodus 12:6. If they killed the lamb on the evening ending the thirteenth, then this means they kept it only for three days. And so, to kill the lamb on the fourteenth day at twilight means to kill it at the end of the fourteenth day, that is, day four.

Now let's fast forward to the Last Supper. When we read Luke 22:7 / Matthew 26:17, and Mark 14:12, we see that this event took place on the day that the Passover lamb must be killed. This means it was the fourteenth day of the first month, which is in line with what we read in Exodus 12:6 / Numbers 9:2-3.

Concerning this meal, notice what Jesus told his disciples. He said, 'I will keep the Passover', Matthew 26:18, and He said, 'I may eat the Passover', Mark 14:14. So Jesus clearly intended to eat the Passover with His disciples.

He tells His disciples to 'go and prepare the Passover that we may eat', Luke 22:8, and He tells them to follow a man who enters his house and asks, 'where I may eat the Passover with my disciples,' Luke 22:11.

This is exactly what His disciples did; they went and prepared the room for the Passover meal, Matthew 26:19 / Luke 22:13 / Mark 14:16. Once again, we see that Jesus clearly intended to eat the Passover with His disciples in this man's house.

When they were in the man's house, they sat down and notice it was evening, Matthew 26:20-21 / Luke 22:14-15 / Mark 14:17-18. This was the right time to eat the Passover meal, as we noted earlier, Numbers 9:2-3. Notice Jesus says He eagerly desires to eat THIS Passover with you, Luke 22:14-15.

The reason many people get confused as to whether Jesus celebrated the Passover is because of what John says in his Gospel. John writes, 'then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover,' John 18:28.

Notice they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. This appears to contradict the other Gospel writers because it suggests that Jesus is going to be crucified on the day before the Passover meal. In other words, how can Jesus have eaten the Passover meal if the time for eating the Passover meal hadn't arrived yet?

The answer to this question is fairly straightforward when we remember that the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread is referred to as Passover. We see this in the Old Testament, where Ezekiel refers to the Passover as a feast of seven days, Ezekiel 45:21, and we see this in the New Testament, Luke 22:1.

When we keep this in mind, John 18:28, becomes clearer. The priests didn't want to defile themselves at any point during the feast of Passover because they would be eating sacrifices every night. According to Numbers 28:16-24, they offered sacrifices to God every day, for the entire seven days of the feast.

SUMMARY

Jesus clearly asks the disciples to prepare a place for them to eat the Passover meal, and we see that Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. Since He ate the meal, this also means that He would have eaten unleavened bread, Exodus 12:18-20, not leavened bread as some suggest.

Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples on Thursday, the fourteenth at evening, Leviticus 23:5 / Numbers 9:2-3 / Matthew 26:20-21 / Luke 22:14-15 / Mark 14:17-18. The priests came together, 'straightaway, in the morning,' Mark 15:1, thus on Friday. He was crucified on Friday, the fifteenth and buried before sunset, Mark 15:42-43.

The women rested on the Sabbath on Saturday, the sixteenth, Luke 23:56. The women retuned on Sunday, the seventeenth, early in the morning to find the empty tomb because Jesus had risen from the grave, Matthew 27:62-28:1 / Luke 23:51-24:1 / Mark 16:1-2 / John 19:42-20:21.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAST SUPPER

'On the first day of the Festival 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.' Matthew 26:17-19

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples want to know where they can go make the preparations to the Passover, Matthew 26:17 / Luke 22:7 / Mark 14:12.
Jesus tells His disciples, Peter and John, Luke 22:8, to go into the city and 'man' carrying a water jar will meet them, Matthew 26:18 / Luke 22:10 / Mark 14:13. This would be very unusual indeed because it was mainly women who carried the water jars.
Notice that Jesus tells them to ask the owner of the house, where is 'My' guest room, Luke 22:11 / Mark 14:14, which implies the owner of the house could well have been a disciple of Jesus. The disciples were to tell him that 'the Teacher says, My appointed time is near', Matthew 26:18.
Jesus seems to know that there is a large room upstairs, already furnished and ready, Luke 22:12 / Mark 14:15. The disciples find everything just as Jesus said, and only had to make preparations for the Passover meal, Matthew 26:19 / Luke 22:13 / Mark 14:16.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS BETRAYAL BY JUDAS

'When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "You have said so." Matthew 26:20-25

Luke placed Jesus' announcement of His betrayal after the institution of the Lord's Supper, Luke 22:21-23, whereas Matthew and Mark located it before that event in their Gospels.
Ellicott, in his commentary, says the following.

'On the whole, the order of the first two Gospels seems here the most probable. and agrees better with the fourth. The date before us do not enable us to say with certainty whether Judas partook of the memorial; but, if we follow the first two Gospels, it would seem probable that he did not.'

JUDAS

What kind of man would bargain for Jesus? The man is the man Judas, and although he's not a pleasant person to study, he gets a lot of attention in the Gospels, and so we need to ask ourselves why. I don't believe that anybody suddenly becomes influenced. I don't believe that Judas was ever a second-class disciple.

Remember, he was chosen by Jesus to be numbered among the twelve after Jesus spent a full night in prayer, Luke 6:12-16. Judas was treated, he was taught just the same as all of the other disciples, and he was sent out by Christ to minister by the same apostolic authority.

Yes! Judas went out in the name of Jesus and healed the sick, imagine that? Imagine looking back years later and when you realise that your baby is alive because Judas healed him.

Yes! Judas went out in the name of Jesus and cast demons out of people. And yes, Judas went out and preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven to the multitudes. Judas was just as much a disciple as anyone else.

I think a lot of our portrayals of Judas are way off the mark. Every picture I've ever seen, an artist's portrayal of the disciples, always has Judas off in the corner.

I don't know why, but he's always a skinny-looking guy. Kind of small and thin, he's always got dark hair and a goatee beard, but I don't know what that means. But he's always a sinister-looking guy, and when you take one look at the picture, you will always say, 'That guy is Judas!'

Because if he wasn't Judas, he probably is a gang leader. How do we know that he wasn't a big guy, with a big old smile on his face? How do we know that Judas didn't have the heartiest laugh of any of the disciples?

This man was as zealous as any of the twelve. The other twelve trusted him enough that when they needed someone to take care of the money, they picked Judas.

I think Judas, probably like the others was just as passionate in the beginning as any of them. He was a nationalist just like Peter, John and Simon. He thought Jesus was going to launch the political liberation of Israel, and he was on the ground floor to make it happen.

But what I think happened, I think sooner than the others, Judas was the one who realised that Jesus wasn't willing to be the king, he wanted him to be. I believe that Judas became disillusioned. Imagine that he is the treasurer of a nearly bankrupt movement, following a man that, in Judas' opinion, cannot take advantage of the moment.

I think for Judas, the real turning point is in John 6. Jesus feeds the multitude, and the crowd try to force Him to become king, John 6:15. This is the moment all the twelve have been waiting for. 'Let's crown Jesus, let's round up the troops, let's ride into Jerusalem and let's liberate Israel.'
Do you know what Jesus did? He refused. He withdrew from the multitude when they came to find Him the next day, and He preached one of the fieriest sermons He ever preached.

He says, 'The only reason you're here is for the food.' He started talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and the Bible says that after that, many people turned away, John 6:66. And in Judas' mind, Jesus blew it. And that's when Jesus said something very interesting that he hadn't said yet. He chose the twelve, but one of them would later betray Him, John 6:70-71.
I don't know if, at this moment, Judas plans to betray Jesus; that's still two years away. But at this moment, already in the heart of Judas, is frustration and disillusionment that Satan is going to start to work on. From that moment on, Judas began to live more and more of the life of an impostor.

I think for some time, Judas started to live that way. He started to do the stuff, but did not listen to the music. In fact, at some point, it says that every now and then he would put his hand in the money to get a little out. He was determined to get something out of his association with Jesus. And with every small act of treachery, his heart grew a little bit harder.

When we get towards the last week of Jesus' life, He's anointed at Bethany by Mary. Who opens a bottle of perfume, which is worth a year's wages, her life's savings, and then she just extravagantly pours it on Jesus. And the Bible says Judas wasn't happy about it, because he used to help himself to the money in the money bag, John 12:4-6.
For Judas, the final straw was Jesus giving a blessing to Mary for her extravagance. In Matthew 26:14-16, we find Judas making his agreement with the leaders to hand Jesus over for thirty pieces of silver.

I think Judas could have got a lot more. I mean, this shows how far Jesus has sunk in his eyes. He could have pushed for much more from the chief priests. Thirty pieces of silver were just the price of a common slave.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS BETRAYAL BY JUDAS

And so, we shift now to a few days later, and we go to the upper room. All the disciples are gathered together to have a Passover meal, Exodus 12:18-20. The disciples suggest that they prepare for the Passover by finding a place to have the meal together, Luke 22:15.

Jesus knew His time to go to the cross was nearing, Luke 9:51, but His disciples never really understood what He meant. They didn't understand that Jesus Himself was the Passover lamb, Luke 22:7-13.

As they were getting on with the meal, Jesus interrupts and announces that one of them would betray Him, Matthew 26:21 / Mark 14:18, which sent shockwaves through the disciples.

Jesus hints at the coming events, and He reminds the disciples present of Psalms 41:9, in which it is prophesied that one close to the Lord would betray Him, and so He ensures that the men know when the incident occurs, 'He who ate my bread' etc., Psalm 41:9 / John 13:18-19.

They're introduced to 'even my close friend, someone I trusted', Psalm 41:9 / John 13:18. This is a picture of a close, personal friend, enjoying a relationship of trust, betraying his host. Sharing a meal was more than a social occasion; it guaranteed mutual trust between host and guest.

The disciples now know that one of them will betray Jesus. And John says something very interesting, 'the evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus,' John 13:2.

We have to wonder if the blood money on Judas that night? Were the thirty silver coins in his pocket when he sat down to have supper with Jesus? Something else I think about is this: what was going on in the minds of both men when Jesus washed the feet of Judas? John 13:5 / John 13:11.

Judas knew what he was going to do, and Jesus knew he was going to do it, John 13:11. What were both men thinking when Jesus washed his feet? I think Jesus was about to get really personal with this battle. I think the Lord was about to make one last appeal to His deserting disciple. I want to show you what happened at the Supper because it was a real battle, John 13:18-30.

Notice that Jesus basically said three things. A prediction, an answer and a command. Jesus said, 'one of you is going to betray me', Matthew 26:21 / Mark 14:18.

Can you imagine the gulp that Judas had to restrain when Jesus said that? Can you imagine the shock that he had to try to keep from registering when Jesus said that?

This text makes us face the sovereignty of God and the free will of men. Jesus predicted His betrayal, but predicted doesn't mean predestined. In other words, Jesus' awareness of Judas' betrayal doesn't excuse Judas from responsibility for his actions.

God does not design treachery, but God can design treachery in His plan. God doesn't make men do evil, but God can use evil men. Later, Judas' remorse is evident that betrayal was his choice, Matthew 27:3. He did not have to betray Jesus, but God used that betrayal to save the world.

The reason Jesus made the prediction was to let the other disciples know that He was in control. The situation wasn't out of hand. Later, looking back, the apostles would remember that Jesus' betrayal and death were exactly what He had predicted, John 12:16 / John 13:19.

In other words, later they were going to reflect, they were going to look back on that night. And they are going to realise that Jesus saw that coming, it was all part of a plan, He knew what was about to happen. And they were going

to realise He really is the Son of God, He really is in control, He really is the Lord. That's why Jesus made that prediction.

He wasn't the helpless victim of superior forces; He was totally in control of the situation. One sent by God to effect God's purpose going forward calmly and unafraid, to do what God had planned for him to do.

It will reinforce their conviction that He is the one written about so many years before. He shows that even at this late stage, he is concerned about the spiritual well-being of the men who are to carry the message to all the world. He uses this opportunity to assure the disciples that all who accept the word they are to bring accept Jesus and therefore accept God as well, John 13:20.
Again, in John 13:20 we find the words, 'very truly,' which is solemn assurance, 'and one whom I send', an apostle, Matthew 10:40 / Luke 10:16. These men are to be His inspired representatives, John 14:26 / John 15:26-27 / John 16:13. To receive them, heed their teaching is to receive the Lord Jesus and to receive Him is to receive the Father who sent Him.
Notice that Jesus 'was troubled in spirit,' John 13:21 / John 11:33 / John 12:27. His prediction, 'one of you will betray me,' is His third reference to the betrayer in John 13.
One terrible thing lay in the heart of the Lord, He knew the time was coming close, so He needed to tell of this thing, John 13:21. The Bible says, 'He testified' as opposed to 'He told', John 13:21.
This infers more of a declaration, a speech of significant importance, something that He had seen, or been witness to. Thus, this was a prophecy that, of course, was soon to be seen to be trustworthy.

The words, 'one of you is going to betray me', Matthew 26:21 / Mark 14:18 / John 13:21, must have cut to the heart of this group of men. The disciples were perplexed, 'at a loss to know which of them he meant', John 13:22. They looked at each other, each wondering who was to be guilty of this most hideous crime, Matthew 26:22 / Mark 14:19.
The one whom Jesus loved, John 13:23 / John 19:26 / John 20:2 / John 21:7 / John 21:20, is a reference to John. Tradition has always understood this to be John. All the Gospels describe this event, and all show concern to ensure the individual would not be the guilty party. In his humility, John never names himself in the account and the other accounts describe John as the one Jesus loved.
In John 13:24, we see that each guest was reclining at a low table; John was next to Jesus. When Jesus said, 'one of you will betray me', Matthew 26:21 / Mark 14:18 / John 13:21.
Peter made a sign or gesture to John, asking, 'Who is it he means?' John 13:24. John merely leaned back and asked Jesus, 'Lord, who is it?' John 13:25. The way he recounts the incident with John 13:27-29 suggests that this was a private interchange, question and answer not heard by the others.
Notice that all the other disciples address Jesus as Lord, Matthew 26:22 / John 13:25, but Judas simply addressed Jesus as Rabbi, meaning teacher, Matthew 26:25. Jesus was more than a teacher; He was the Son of God, John 20:30-31. I think the disciple's amazing lack of suspicion about Judas tells us a couple of things.
1. It tells us that Judas hid his dishonesty very well.

You can be a bargainer for Christ, and other people will never know it.

2. Jesus must have treated Judas as well as any of the other disciples.

If they had seen over the years that Jesus had a problem with Judas, they would have suspected Judas, but they didn't. Because there was nothing about the way Jesus loved Judas that gave them any hint that Judas would sell his Lord.

Why do you think Peter wants to know? Peter wanted to take preventive action. Peter's got a sword, Luke 22:49-51 / Matthew 26:51-55 / John 18:10-15. And all he needs to know is who in this room would sell out Jesus.

With the lifting of one finger, Jesus could have saved His life and ended Judas's life like that. Peter would have jumped up and cut off his head so fast that Judas wouldn't know about it until he sneezed. Jesus didn't do that.

Instead, He gave an answer that only Judas could respond to. He said in John 13:26, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' We might ask, well, why didn't they figure it out then?
How many of you have seen a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's famous portrait of 'The Last Supper'? It's a magnificent work, but it's so wrong. They didn't sit at a long table, in chairs, with a white tablecloth. Passover was eaten lying on the floor, John 13:13 / John 13:23.
They would have a U-shaped table, with the host up at the front, in the very middle. There was someone on the right in a special place of honour. And someone on the left in a very special place of honour. And everybody else would be down the sides. They would lie down on their left elbow and eat with their right hand.

That's why the Bible says that 'John was up against the breast of Jesus,' John 13:25. He didn't have bad table manners; John was right here, to the right of Jesus. Right up against His breast as they ate. Now, let me ask you, who would have been right to the left of Jesus in the very special place of honour?
Somebody so close to Jesus could take a piece of bread and hand it to him. Jesus gave Judas the place of honour at the Passover. And all that the disciples thought was happening, in fact, we know later from Matthew that Jesus and Judas were able to have a very private conversation.

We read that although Judas was aware of the decision he had made to betray the Lord, he didn't want to reveal himself, Matthew 26:25. We see a piece of bread or meat dipped in the sauce, which was bitter herbs, Matthew 26:23 / Mark 14:20 / John 13:26.
Giving a piece of bread to a guest was a sign of friendship or special favour, this would mean that Jesus wasn't only identifying the traitor to John but also assuring Judas of His love for him.

It was love's last appeal. He knew what Judas planned, but in the end, he held out the opportunity to turn from the wickedness of his heinous crime. I believe He was making a special appeal to Judas' heart. He was holding that piece of bread there, and He was looking right into his eyes.

And both men knew what He was saying, 'Judas, I know it's you, I know what you're struggling with, I know what you're thinking about doing to me, Judas, can you go through with it? Can you turn on me like that? Can you sell me out?'

Jesus was knocking at the door of his heart, and Judas threw open the door and told Jesus to stay outside, and he invited Satan in, Luke 22:3 / John 13:27. As someone once said, 'it was Judas' Gethsemane.'
Just like in Gethsemane when Jesus made His decision, and the angels came to give Him strength. Judas made his decision, and the dark angel showed up that quickly to make sure he didn't change his mind.

And at that moment, Jesus knew that He had lost him. The whole betrayal of Jesus was foreordained. Jesus would suffer the death of the cross, Isaiah 53 / Psalm 22 / Acts 2:23. Jesus says it would be better for His betrayal to have never been born, Matthew 26:24 / Mark 14:21 / John 17:12.
When we read John 13:28-29, we need to ask, why didn't John expose Judas? He and other disciples knew nothing of Judas' plans, and he may not have thought that the betrayal was imminent. All the apostles said, 'Is it I?', Matthew 26:22, so probably they were thinking not of deliberate, calculated treachery, but involuntary betrayal, e.g. Peter's denial.
Also, the apostles refused to accept that Jesus was going to be crucified. On the other side of Cavalry, it must have seemed incredible that Jesus should urge Judas to do his work of betrayal quickly, John 13:27. This is the only time in

Scripture where God and Satan gave a man the same command. Judas was arranging for Jesus' crucifixion, Luke 12:50 / John 13:27.

Jesus was thinking, 'I have a baptism to undergo, what tension I must suffer, till it is all over! As if He said to Judas, Get on with it. I must get it over with!' Matthew 26:24 / Mark 14:21.

The disciples think Jesus is referring to some act of kindness, John 13:29, but the most extreme opposite is true. He is referring to the most terrible crime ever committed against man or God, Matthew 26:24 / Mark 14:21.

Judas casts aside all hesitation and gives himself up wholly to Satan's work. Up to this point, he had doubts and impulses to do better, but now he plunges headlong into the bottomless pit. Judas rejects Jesus' last plea of mercy, and Judas goes out into the night, John 13:30.

Although it was night, I'm sure that John was referring to more than the obvious: Jesus is the light, John 8:12 / John 12:46. It's always dark when you leave Jesus! The word 'night', John 13:30, marks the time, but probably symbolic also, the forces of darkness were gathering around Jesus, Luke 22:53. Also, Judas deliberately rejected the Light of the World, John 8:12, and went out into total spiritual darkness.

He ceases to follow and loses the light of life. The picture painted is gloomy and intensely sad, Matthew 26:24 / Mark 14:21. He had a chance to repent for his betrayal, but his worldly sorrow led him to hang himself, Matthew 27:5 / 2 Corinthians 7:10.

CONCLUSION

The problem with reading about Judas is that over the centuries, he has been so despised that we can't relate to him, but the disciples could. The question they asked when Jesus said, 'one of you is going to betray me' is 'Is it I?' 'Could it be me?'

I think that's the question we're supposed to ask ourselves because I think if we look deep into our hearts, we will admit that there have been times in our lives when we have made some hard bargains for Jesus. Judas sold out Jesus for thirty pitiful pieces of silver, but I've sold Jesus out for less than that, haven't you?

THE LORD'S 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." 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. 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." Matthew 26:26-29

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is the seventh of nine meal scenes that Luke recorded in his Gospel, Luke 5:29-32 / Luke 7:36-50 / Luke 9:12-17 / Luke 10:38-42 / Luke 11:37-54 / Luke 14:1-24 / Luke 22:14-20 / Luke 24:28-32 / Luke 24:36-42.'

Jesus desired to eat this Passover with His disciples before He suffered, Luke 22:15. Jesus knew exactly what was to come, and He was well aware of the suffering He needed to endure to fulfil the will of the Father. He tells His disciples that He won't eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God, Luke 22:16.

In other words, He won't eat another Passover until His own death happens, 1 Corinthians 5:7. Some believe this means that Jesus won't eat the Passover again until we all get to heaven.

However, I believe it could also have reference to the time when His kingdom was established on earth, that is, the church, Matthew 3:2 / Mark 9:1 / Luke 9:31 / Acts 2. Notice that Luke records that there were two cups, Luke 22:17 / Luke 22:20.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'There were four times that participants in the Passover meal drank together, commonly referred to as four cups. The Passover opened with a prayer of thanksgiving followed by the drinking of the first cup. Then the celebrants ate the bitter herbs and sang Psalms 113-114. Next, they drank the second cup and began eating the lamb and unleavened bread. Then they drank the third cup and sang Psalms 115-118. Finally, they drank the fourth cup. The cup in view in this verse may have been the first of the four. If it was, Jesus evidently did not participate in the drinking of the following three cups, Luke 22:18. The other Gospel writers did not refer to the first cup, so this may have been the third cup, the so-called cup of redemption. This view assumes that Jesus did participate in the drinking of the first and second cups, which would have been normal.'

Jesus takes this first cup, thanks God for it, and then asks the disciples to take it and divide it among themselves, Luke 22:17. He tells them that He won't drink again until the Kingdom of God comes, Luke 22:18 / Matthew 3:2 / Mark 9:1 / Luke 9:31 / Acts 2.

Jesus now institutes His memorial that had more significance than the normal Passover meal that the Jews ate at this time of the year, Exodus 12:11 / Luke 22:14-20 / Mark 14:17-26 / 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Jesus took the bread, Matthew 26:26 / Luke 22:19 / Mark 14:22 / 1 Corinthians 11:23-24, probably unleavened bread, Exodus 12:15 / Exodus 13:3 / Exodus 13:7 / Deuteronomy 16:3, gave thanks to God for the bread and gave it to His disciples.

A traditional Jewish prayer for giving thanks for food was as follows, 'Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.'

Jesus tells His disciples that the bread represents His body, Matthew 26:26 / Luke 22:19 / Mark 14:22 / John 10:7, that is, metaphorically speaking. Paul later tells us that Jesus also spoke about the bread as His spiritual body, the church, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. The 'breaking of bread' is often used in the Scriptures to speak of the Lord's Supper, Acts 2:42 / Acts 20:7 / 1 Corinthians 10:16-18.

After supper, Jesus then took another cup, Matthew 26:27 / Luke 22:20 / Mark 14:23 / 1 Corinthians 11:25, gave thanks to God for the contents of the cup, that is, the fruit of the vine, Mark 14:25, and then passed it to His disciples to drink, each one of them, Mark 14:23 / Acts 20:7.

This was to become a symbol of the blood of Christ, Matthew 26:28 / Luke 22:20 / Mark 14:24, who offered up His own life for others, Leviticus 7:26-27 / Acts 15:20 / Colossians 1:20 / Hebrews 9:12 / Hebrews 9:14 / Hebrews 9:20 / 1 Peter 1:2 / 1 John 1:7.

Jesus' blood of the covenant was poured out for the forgiveness of sins, Jeremiah 31:31-34 / Exodus 24:8 / Acts 2:38. Jesus tells them He won't drink of it again until that day when He drinks it new in His Father's kingdom, Matthew 26:29 / Luke 22:17 / Mark 14:25 / Matthew 3:2 / Mark 9:1 / Luke 9:31 / Acts 2.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'Christ made the Lord's Supper the solemn sign and seal of the covenant for the forgiveness of the sins of his disciples in all ages. Christians who forsake the Lord's Supper are described in the New Testament as having 'trodden underfoot the Son of God' and as having 'counted the blood of the covenant wherewith (they) were sanctified an unholy thing' and as having 'done despite', insulted, unto the Spirit of grace, Hebrews 10:29.'

WHY WAS WINE USED?

Have you ever considered why wine is used in the Passover? God never commanded the use of wine for the Passover; there's no mention of it in Exodus 12.
There are a few reasons for drinking four cups of wine, according to the Jews. When promising to deliver the Jews from Egyptian slavery, God used four terms to describe the redemption, Exodus 6:6-8.
1. 'I shall take you out.'

2. 'I shall rescue you.'

3. 'I shall redeem you.'

4. 'I shall bring you.'

They were freed from Pharaoh's four evil decrees.

1. Slavery.

2. The ordered murder of all male progeny by the Hebrew midwives.

3. The drowning of all Hebrew boys in the Nile by Egyptian thugs.

4. The decree ordered the Israelites to collect their own straw for use in their brick production.

The Jews believe that the four cups symbolise their freedom from our four exiles.

1. The Egyptian.

2. Babylonian.

3. Greek exiles.

4. And their current exile, which they hope to be rid of very soon with the coming of the Messiah.

The reason this is important is that in Luke's account, we read that there were two cups used, one on either side of the bread, Luke 22:17 / Luke 22:20. In Jewish history, the cup of the Passover was likely four cups of wine, which is the number found in the Mishnah, interspersed throughout the meal.
Jesus says He won't drink from this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when He drinks it new with them in His Father's kingdom, Luke 22:18 / Mark 14:25.
This is either speaking of the time when Christ's kingdom was established, Matthew 18:20 / Acts 2:42, and He will partake of the new supper with His people, or it could be speaking about the time we get to heaven.
Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

'Now I look forward to that day when I drink of it in His Father's kingdom with Him. I am going to have a glorious Lord's supper someday. And we're going to just be there with Jesus in the kingdom of God.'

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'These mysterious and beautiful words are a well-known 'crux' of interpreters. It seems clear, however, that they are to be taken as referring to the whole rite of the Lord's Supper, and not simply to the 'fruit of the vine', or cup. This is evident from Luke 22:16, 'I will not any more eat thereof', that is, of the Christian Passover or Supper, 'until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Interpretations fall into two main classes, according to as 'the kingdom of God', that is, 'My Father's kingdom', is understood to refer to the period after the Resurrection, or the period after the Judgment. According to the first interpretation, the sacred rite which Jesus now institutes, and which He will not

again celebrate until He has triumphed over death and sat down a conqueror on the throne of His Father's kingdom, will, after the Ascension, and especially after the descent of the Spirit, be to the disciples a new thing. No longer will the shadow of disappointment and seeming failure hang over their meetings. The sin of the world will have been atoned for, death will have been conquered, the Spirit will have been given, and Jesus will be present at the feast, not, as now, in the body of His humiliation, but the power of His risen and glorious life. According to the other interpretation, the Lord's Supper is regarded as a type and prophecy of the eternal marriage supper of the Lamb, Revelation 19:9. These two views do not exclude one another. The title 'this fruit of the vine' which Jesus applies to the sacred cup even after consecration, would seem to exclude the medieval doctrine of Transubstantiation.'

THE LORD'S SUPPER

I would like us to consider a few things concerning the Lord's Supper. Firstly, the prayer for the bread and the wine, too often I hear people asking God to bless the bread and the wine, but this isn't what Jesus did, He simply thanked God for them, Matthew 26:26-27 / Luke 22:17 / Luke 22:19 / Mark 14:22-23, He blessed God, not the bread and the wine because He knew that God was the One who supplied the bread and the wine and supplied everything for them to have it, i.e., the rain and sun which caused them to grow so that they could make bread and wine.
Secondly, we must remember that we don't come to the Lord's table looking for forgiveness, Matthew 26:28. I've lost count of the number of times I hear someone asking God to forgive us our sins as if we only have our sins forgiven once a week. Our sins have already been forgiven at our baptism, Acts 2:38, and when we confess our sins to Him, 1 John 1:9.

IS IT A TIME OF CELEBRATION OR MOURNING?

Well, possibly both, it saddens us when we remember what we did to cause Jesus to have to go to the cross, but it's also a time of celebration because Jesus has conquered death and dealt with our sins and promises to come back again, whilst we remember what He did for us.

Christ instituted the Lord's Supper in order for us to remember the great sacrifice He made for us and that we rely on Him and His sacrifice for our salvation.

He gave us this memorial, so we would not forget Him and what He did for us. In Luke 22:19, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.'
This is done to help us remember the Lord and what He did for us. The death of our Lord wasn't an accident. It was in God's eternal plan of redemption for Christ to come to this earth and take our punishment for our sins by dying for us, so God can now be just in saving us. In several places in the Old Testament, God foretells the death of His Son for us, Isaiah 53:5-6.
God and Christ are loving and wonderful for what they have done for us. We read of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. This is how we remember the great suffering that our Lord did for us. We proclaim our faith in this great and wonderful deed to the world each time we partake of the Lord's Supper.
Some partake of only the bread, and their priest partakes of the fruit of the vine; this is a perversion of the Lord's Supper. This isn't doing it the way the Bible instructs.

But notice each Christian is to partake of both the bread and the fruit of the vine. When we partake of the unleavened bread, we picture our Lord's body hanging there, suffering in anguish and pain, taking the punishment that was rightly due us.

As we drink of the fruit of the vine, we envision His precious blood which was poured out for us to cleanse us from all our sins. What great love and concern God and Christ have for us!

The Lord wants us to remember what He did for us every first day of the week as the church did in the first century. We are to remember that our Lord gave up heaven to come to this earth for thirty-three years, and then died for us.

We remember the humiliation of the mock trial, the crown of thorns and the terrible scourging that left His back raw and bleeding. We remember the soldiers gambling for the Lord's only earthly possession, the clothes on His back.

Then we remember the nails as they were driven into His hands and feet, and the cross as it was raised and dropped into the hole. We also remember the spirit of forgiveness of our Lord, as He was being crucified, Luke 23:34. We remember our Lord's loud cry of victory, Matthew 27:46.
We remember as our Lord hung on the cross, how the people mocked, shamed, and made fun of Him as He was dying not only for their sins but the sins of all mankind, 1 Peter 2:24. We remember the sun refused to shine, and the earth shook because of the death of the Son of God, Matthew 27:45 / Matthew 27:51.
We must first examine ourselves to determine whether we have the right attitude to partake in this memorial. We must put all else from our minds. We should make sure we have our minds centred on what Christ did for us.

We must clear our minds of all other thoughts and centre our minds on the sacrifice of our Lord, 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, or otherwise, as 1 Corinthians 11:29 (KJV) says, 'We eat and drink damnation to ourselves.' There are four things we need to look at before and whilst we participate in the Supper.
1. We need to look back to the cross, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.
2. We need to look forward to His return, 1 Corinthians 11:26.
3. We need to look within ourselves, 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.
4. We need to look at each other, 1 Corinthians 11:33.
Many Christians today refuse to partake of the Supper because they feel they are 'unworthy'. The truth is all of us are 'unworthy', but this isn't Paul's point. Paul is speaking about the Christian's attitude towards the Supper, do they partake without really thinking about what the bread and wine symbolise?

Do they partake without thinking about what Christ did for them on the cross? If not, they are spiritually crucifying Jesus all over again, hence the need to self-examine first to avoid judgment.

Many Christians today refuse to partake of the Supper because they have a problem with a brother or sister in Christ, so they believe they would be partaking in the Supper in an 'unworthy manner'.

I find it tragic that Christians refuse to partake of the Supper because they have a problem with someone else. The truth is, Christians shouldn't be participating in 'worship' as a whole, not just the Supper, if they have a problem with their brothers or sisters, Matthew 5:23-24.
I've often heard Christians say that we should refuse non-Christians the Lord's Supper because they will bring 'judgment on themselves'. First of all, Paul is writing to Christians, and it's Christians who should be 'examining themselves'; Paul doesn't deal with non-Christians participating in the Supper. Secondly, if non-Christians partake of the Supper, how much more 'judgement' can a non-Christian come under?

I find it fascinating that some Christians will refuse any non-Christian visitor the Supper but will happily take their money for the offering! I believe the Supper is for Christians, but if a non-Christian begins to come regularly to our assemblies, then someone should go and explain to them what the Supper is all about and who it is for.

Many people don't want to remember the Lord's death for us very often since they only partake of the Lord's Supper monthly, quarterly, annually, or not at all. The excuse is given that they do not want to partake of it more often because it will become too commonplace and lose its meaning. But the very opposite is true.

The Lord's Supper loses its meaning when we choose not to partake and think about it. This would be like saying that we should only pray two or three times a year, for if we prayed more often, then prayer would lose its meaning. This would be absurd.

Does the Lord's death really mean anything to us? But Jesus requested in Luke 22:19, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' Do we really care to regularly remember the death of our Lord?
People seem to be turned off by the death of Jesus and the shedding of His blood. They don't care to remember it. But it is His blood that cleanses us from our sins, Revelation 1:5.
They would rather remember Him as a babe in a manger than a crucified Saviour. It is an insult to Jesus to celebrate His manger and then ignore His cross. Many people seem to be ashamed of the death of Jesus, Mark 8:38.
This memorial of our Lord is called 'the Lord's Supper' in 1 Corinthians 11:20 and 'the Lord's table' in 1 Corinthians 10:21. In 1 Corinthians 10:16, it is referred to as 'the breaking of bread' and 'communion'. But the church in the first century met every first day of the week to observe the Lord's Supper, Acts 20:7.
Why did they come together on the first day of the week? Here we see the church in the first century came together on the first day of every week to break bread, which is the Lord's Supper.

Their primary reason for coming together on the first day of the week was to partake of the Lord's Supper. We cannot be pleasing to the Lord if we observe the Lord's Supper only a few times a year or not at all.

Are we really interested in proclaiming the Lord's death to the world until He comes? 1 Corinthians 11:26. People today don't seem to have a problem with the example to give on the first day of each week, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. One of the things they were to do when they came together was to give. What else was the church at Corinth to do every first day of the week when they came together? They were condemned for making a gluttonous feast out of the Lord's Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:20.
When did they come together in one place? Every first day of the week. What were they doing when they came together every first day of the week? Perverting the Lord's Supper by making it into a glutinous and drunken feast.

What were they supposed to be doing every first day of the week? Partaking of the Lord's Supper. Two of the things the church at Corinth did every first day of the week were to give and partake of the Lord's Supper.

Why shouldn't we be like those in the first century who assembled on the first day of every week to remember the Lord's death by partaking in the Lord's Supper?

But many people seem to have a problem in seeing the importance of partaking in the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, as the church in the first century did when it was under inspired apostolic guidance.

When the Jews, who lived under the Old Testament, were commanded to remember the Sabbath Day, that is, the seventh day of the week, to keep it holy, they kept all fifty-two Sabbath Days of the year holy. The first day of the week also occurs fifty-two times each year.

When Christians today observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, they are following the Biblical example of Acts 20 of the disciples who came together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper, Acts 20:7.
We also read in Acts 2:42, concerning the church at Jerusalem, 'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers.' Again, we see the first-century church was steadfast or regular in the breaking of bread, which is their observance of the Lord's Supper.

But later, men in denominational groups chose to partake of the Lord's Supper less frequently. Should we be any less regular than the church in the first century?

According to what we have seen in the scriptures, we are to both give and partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Could the Bible be any clearer concerning the Lord's Supper?

Another perversion of the Lord's Supper occurred when men introduced the absurd doctrine of transubstantiation in the Decrees of the Council of Trent, which met from 1545 to 1563 A.D.

This decree devised by men stated that the bread and the fruit of the vine are converted miraculously into the literal body and blood of Jesus when we partake of it.

Sadly, men would dare to pervert the Lord's Supper into such a mockery. It's ridiculous to place literal interpretations on symbolic language. In John 15:5, Jesus says, 'I am the vine, you are the branches.' Here, Jesus is using figurative language because we know He isn't a literal vine, and we aren't literal branches. In John 10:9, Jesus said, 'I am the door.' But again, He uses symbolic language.
Concerning the Lord's Supper, Jesus said in 1 Corinthians 11:25, 'This do in remembrance of Me.' The Lord's Supper is designed to help us remember what the Lord did for us.
And as we partake of it, as 1 Corinthians 11:26 says, 'You proclaim the Lord's death till He comes'. We are showing the world that we believe that Jesus died for our sins.

ONE CUP OR MANY!

It's hard to believe that churches years ago split over the issue of 'one cup or many', even today, there are some divisions within the Lord's body over how many cups should be used for the Lord's Supper.

I find it heartbreaking when divisions arise within the Lord's church, but I find it even more heartbreaking when some go as far as to make it a salvation issue. Let's go ahead and see some of the arguments that are used to 'prove' that we should only use 'one cup'.

The Bible references cited next are the passages some Christians use to argue for the use of 'one cup' only: Matthew 26:27 / Luke 22:20 / Mark 14:23 / 1 Corinthians 10:16 / 1 Corinthians 10:21 / 1 Corinthians 11:25 / 1 Corinthians 11:26 / 1 Corinthians 11:27 / 1 Corinthians 11:28.
When we're dealing with any Biblical text, we must think carefully about what is being said, keep it in context and be consistent with the outcome. When it comes to the Lord's Supper, we know that the 'bread' represents the 'body' of Christ, Matthew 26:26 / Luke 22:19 / Mark 14:22. When it comes to the Lord's Supper, we know that the 'wine' represents the 'blood' of Christ, Matthew 26:27-28 / Luke 22:20 / Mark 14:23-24.
And so, if the 'bread' represents His 'body' and the 'wine' represents His 'blood,' what does 'the cup' represent?
Most Christians who argue against more than 'one cup' maintain they are following the example of Jesus, but we need to ask ourselves the question: Is every part of an example binding?

Look at Acts 20:7-8, the text says they met in the 'upstairs room', are we going to say that the church today must meet in an 'upstairs room'? Look at Matthew 3:13, the text says that 'Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan', are we going to say that we must follow Jesus' example and be baptised in the River Jordan?
If Jesus was baptised in a river, does this mean that anyone who's been baptised in a baptistry or a lake hasn't received a Biblical baptism? 'Then Jesus came from Galilee to John to be baptised by him in the Jordan River.'

When we think about the ‘bread’ which was used in the first century, it looks nothing like the unleavened crackers we use today. Does this mean we must use a ‘loaf’ for the Lord’s Supper?

Those who insist on one cup only argue that they’re following Jesus’ example, and they say if churches use more than one cup, they have gone beyond what is written, 1 Corinthians 4:6, and therefore it is sinful.
The bulk of the argument is based on the fact that there is no Biblical evidence that authorises the use of more than ‘one cup’. They do agree, though, that the Bible authorises by command, example, direct statement and expediency, which basically means something useful.

Expediency involves the right of choice, within the realm of that which is authorised in the New Testament and is not itself a source of authority. A basic example is that we are commanded to teach, and the use of overhead projectors would be useful for doing so.

Those who argue for the use of ‘one cup’ only always ask the question, where is the command, example or direct statement that authorises the use of individual cups for the Lord’s Supper?

It seems to me they have forgotten about the expediency part. And like most people who make everything a salvation issue, they fail to be consistent with their arguments.

The same people who argue for the use of ‘one cup’ only have no problems authorising things like a church building, songbooks, seats, etc., because they say those things are expedient. Surely if those things are expediency, then so is the use of ‘multiple cups’ for the Lord’s Supper!

With all the arguments about ‘the cup’, what about the bread? The consistent argument would be to ask, Where is the Scripture that authorises the use of two or more plates for the bread to be served on? There is none! Yet these same Christians use more than one plate for the bread to be served on.

I also find it interesting that these same Christians understand that the expression ‘one bread’ just means that all are to partake of the bread, and they understand that the number of plates for the bread doesn’t change anything, in other words, they are all taking the bread.

You see, there is just as much Bible authority for more than ‘one cup’ as there is for more than ‘one plate’ for the bread. The point is that the ‘container’ isn’t important, but what is important is ‘the fruit of the vine’ and ‘the bread’. A cup is an expedient or aid to taking the fruit of the vine, just as a plate is an aid to taking the bread. The number of cups or plates isn’t specified.

Think about this, when the Samaritan woman spoke to Jesus and said in John 4:12, ‘Surely, you’re not greater than our ancestor Jacob, are you? For he gave us this well and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock.’ Does this mean that each of them put their lips on the well and drank? Surely it means all of them drank from it, but not all from the same container.
Jesus says in Matthew 26:27, ‘Drink from it, all of you.’ When he said this, did He mean for them to drink the cup or its contents? This was a figure of speech known as a metonymy. Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept.
We all agree that one plate or many plates don’t violate the command to eat the bread, why? Because the plate isn’t significant, it’s the bread which represents the body of Christ, which is significant.

It’s heartbreaking to hear how some Christians take things to the extreme and turn things into a salvation issue, whilst being inconsistent with their arguments.

The number of cups used in partaking of the Lord's Supper should no more divide the church than whether we meet in an upper room or ground floor, whether we baptise people in the Jordan River or a bath in someone's house, Ephesians 4:3.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST AND BAPTISM

Many people dismiss baptism as necessary for salvation because they don't understand the connection between the 'water' used in baptism and the 'blood of Christ'.

Many Christians, as I once did, struggle to understand how they are connected. To see and understand the connection between the water and the blood of Christ, we need to go back to Jesus' words when He instituted the Lord's Supper.

The text tells us the reason why Christ shed His blood, He says it was for 'the forgiveness of sins', Matthew 26:27-28. We know that if there was no blood shed, there would be no forgiveness of sins available to anyone, Hebrews 9:22. To this very day, all sinners need the blood of Christ in order to be forgiven for their sins, Hebrews 9:13-14.
When we read Acts 2:38, we learn that people were baptised in the Name of Christ 'for the forgiveness of their sins'. This demonstrates that Christ's blood is connected to baptism in water. John tells us that it is Christ's blood that 'washes our sins away', Revelation 1:5.
When Paul met Ananias, Ananias told Paul to 'be baptised to wash away his sins', Acts 22:16. This also demonstrates that Christ's blood is connected to baptism in water.
Paul tells us that it is 'in Christ', that Christians have 'redemption, through the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins', Ephesians 1:7. The word 'redeem' carries with it the idea of being bought out of slavery. Christians have been bought out of slavery by the blood of Christ, and when they are baptised, they have the forgiveness of sins, 1 Peter 1:18-19.
The Hebrew writer tells us, 'having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water'. Hebrews 10:22.
The sprinkling is a clear reference to the blood of Christ, 1 Peter 1:22, and the water is a clear reference to baptism, Ephesians 5:25-26. Peter speaks of our baptism as a pledge of a clear conscience toward God, 1 Peter 3:21. This again demonstrates that Christ's blood is connected to baptism in water.
It's the blood of Christ that reconciles people into a relationship with God, Ephesians 2:13 / Ephesians 2:16. For a person to be reconciled to God, they need the blood of Christ, and they come into contact with the blood of Christ at baptism.
Christians have been justified by the blood of Christ, and because they have been justified by His blood, the result is salvation, Romans 5:8-9. The word 'justify' simply means to make righteous (right before God, just as if one has never sinned).
Yes, everyone has sinned, but it's only Christians who can appear before God as though they haven't sinned. Christians are justified by the blood of Jesus when they have their sins washed away in the waters of baptism.

THE CONNECTION

1. Jesus shed His blood in His death on the cross, John 19:33-34; sinners are baptised into His death, Romans 6:3.

2. Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins, Matthew 26:28; sinners are baptised for the forgiveness of sins, Acts 2:38.
3. Jesus shed His blood to clean our conscience, Hebrews 9:13-14; sinners are baptised as a pledge for a clear conscience, 1 Peter 1:21.
4. Jesus shed His blood so that we can be washed of our sins in it, Revelation 1:5; sinners are baptised to have their sins washed away, Acts 22:16.

CONCLUSION

The Bible clearly tells us that Jesus' blood saves us, but the Bible also tells us that His blood can only be accessed by being baptised in water for the forgiveness of our sins, Acts 2:38 / Acts 22:16.
It's through the waters of baptism that God washes us clean from our sins, Colossians 2:11-13, and gives us a pledge of a clear conscience towards Him, 1 Peter 3:21.
We come into contact with the blood of Christ in the waters of baptism; it's then that we become 'in Christ' and all of our past sins are forgiven, and we receive a new life, Romans 6:1-5.
After we've been baptised, His blood will continue to cleanse us and purify us from all unrighteousness, if we remain faithful to Him and confess our sins to Him, 1 John 1:6-9. Have you been baptised for the forgiveness of your sins? If not, why not? Acts 22:16.

'When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.' Matthew 26:30

After instituting His memorial, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives, Matthew 26:30 / Mark 14:26. The word 'sung a hymn' is actually 'hymning' in Greek and is a reference to the Hallel Psalms, which they would have sung, Psalm 113-118.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Passover was observed by the Jews by singing or 'chanting', Psalm 113-118. These they divided into two parts. They sang Psalm 113-114 during the observance of the Passover, and the others at the close. There can be no doubt that our Saviour and the apostles also used the same psalms in their observance of the Passover. The word rendered 'sung a hymn' is a participle, literally meaning 'hymning', not confined to a single hymn, but admitting many.'

JESUS PREDICTS PETER'S DENIAL

'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.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.' Matthew 26:31-35

It's clear that Satan wanted to use Simon to stop Jesus from going to the cross, Luke 22:31. Jesus specifically prayed that Peter be strong, Luke 22:32. He also prayed for all the twelve on this occasion, John 17:9 / John 17:11 / John 17:15. His prayer was that their faith be strong enough to withstand the trials through which they were about to go in the next few days.

The Lord was about to foretell the denial of Peter and the flight of the twelve but He began by appealing to the prophecy, Matthew 26:31 / Mark 14:27, quoted from Zechariah 13:7.
God had revealed Himself in the Old Testament under the extensive use of the metaphor of 'the shepherd of Israel', Psalm 23 / Ezekiel 16, but here it was stated that the Shepherd would strike the Shepherd, thus God laid upon Himself in the person of the Son, the iniquity of us all. Inherent in this was the failure of all human support.
Christ here went far beyond the detailed prophecies of His passion and calmly set up an appointment to meet the twelve in Galilee after the great sacrifice had been offered, Matthew 26:32 / Mark 14:28. Christ promised to meet them after His resurrection, and He did, Luke 24:6 / Matthew 28:7-10 / Mark 16:7 / John 21:1-6.
Jesus told the disciples that they would all fall away, Matthew 26:33. The disciples still didn't fully realise what was soon to occur and so, Peter asks where Jesus is going, John 13:36. Jesus answered him and tells him he can't follow Him now but he will later, John 13:36.
Jesus was going voluntarily to death but it wasn't yet time for Peter to die. He would eventually 'follow' his Master to death by crucifixion, John 21:18-19. Peter retorted that, though the others might, he would never abandon Him, Matthew 26:33 / Mark 14:29. Peter asked why he could not follow Jesus immediately, which shows three things about Peter's personality.
1. His devotion. He wants to be with his Master.

2. His impatience. 'Why can't I follow you right now?'

3. His self-reliance. 'I will lay down my life for you.'

All of these are shattered for that time when he was guilty of denying the one he loved. Even though Peter wasn't perfect, he made mistakes as we all do. Christ replied that he would deny Him three times that very night, Matthew 26:34 / Luke 22:34 / Mark 14:30.
It's important to see that Peter was sincere in this assertion; he meant it, but he didn't know himself as well as Jesus knew him. He revived and became a great apostle for the Lord. Peter promises all for Jesus but Jesus knows better, Peter would deny his Lord three times that evening, Matthew 26:34 / Luke 22:34 / Mark 14:30 / John 13:38.
Matthew referred to the event of the cockcrow, a phenomenon taking place every morning, Matthew 26:34. Mark and John had reference to the beginning of a cockcrow, Mark 14:30 / John 13:38, which always starts with one or two roosters leading all the rest.
Again, Peter denied it, saying that he would even be willing to die with Him, Matthew 26:35 / Luke 22:33 / Mark 14:31. Perhaps Peter's overconfidence was one reason he fulfilled this very prophecy a few hours later.
Jesus knew the truth of what was to happen. Peter wouldn't lay his life down for the Lord, but the Lord for him. Peter wouldn't follow; he would deny. The prophecy Jesus gives in this regard tells of three great truths of Jesus.

1. Jesus, the great prophet.

2. Jesus, the great sufferer.

3. Jesus, the great Saviour.

'The cock will not crow' etc, Matthew 26:34 / Luke 22:34 / Mark 14:30. Mark 13:35 indicates that it marked the third of the four 'watches', 'evening', six through to nine, 'midnight', nine through to twelve.
'Rooster-crowing' twelve through to three, 'morning', three through to six, hence, what Jesus means seems to be that before three am, Peter will deny him three times.

The prediction shattered Peter; throughout the Upper Room discourse afterwards, he is silent. Jesus, just moments before His departure, takes time to teach Peter, who was in many ways the leader, about the future this great lesson. This lesson is recorded so we can learn from its experience.

Peter wasn't alone in rejecting the idea of their failure, for both Mark and Matthew relate how 'all the disciples' made the same affirmation of loyalty, Matthew 26:35 / Mark 14:31.
What none of them realised was that the source of true spiritual strength hadn't yet been provided through the death of Christ and that it was, therefore, impossible for them to have stood without that strength.

It was at this time that the events and statements of Jesus in John 13-17 took place. Jesus had a private meeting with the apostles as recorded in John 13-17. There were actually two meetings going on at the same time: this one, where Jesus said He was about to be crucified during Passover, and the other meeting when the chief priests were saying He can't be killed during Passover, Mark 14:1-2, but as usual, Jesus' plans are always first; He will die when He chooses to die.
In the John 13-17 meeting, Jesus made specific promises to the apostles that applied only to them. In John 17, He made a specific prayer for the apostles and for those who would not believe in Him through their preaching.
Jesus now reminds them of their past mission trips, Luke 9:1-6. He asks them if they lacked anything, and the disciples answered nothing, Luke 22:35 / Matthew 6:33. Now, Jesus is going to send out His apostles, but the situation has changed. No longer will they be able to go out empty-handed, preaching the kingdom of God.
He then tells them to take a purse and a bag, if they have them, but if they don't have a sword, then they should sell their cloak and buy one, Luke 22:36. Now, when they go on missions, they will find trouble and suffering. They are not going to find a welcoming world; they will face hostility.
Jesus now amplifies this message by quoting from Isaiah 53:12 and applying it to Himself, Luke 22:37. This is the prophecy of the suffering servant. The disciples respond to this by saying that they currently have two swords, Luke 22:38. There are two ways to take Jesus' response when He says, 'that's enough', Luke 22:38.
One way to understand Jesus is that He is saying that two swords are enough. Two swords are all the swords you will need. But I do not think this is what Jesus means; this is clear from what is about to happen when Jesus is arrested.

The other way to understand Jesus is that he is saying it is enough of this talk. It is not the swords that are enough, but enough of this talk. The point would mean that his disciples are completely misunderstanding what he is telling them.

Jesus is telling them about their future. No longer will their mission be easy; no longer will people welcome them into their homes to preach. They will be met with hostility and suffering; they will need to go prepared and ready to protect themselves because they are going to be counted as outlaws and rebels in society.

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.' Matthew 26:36

Apart from His upcoming crucifixion, this must have been one of the most agonising events in Jesus' life, and as we go through the account, we can only imagine the emotional and spiritual pain Jesus is going through.

The name Gethsemane means 'oil press', which suggests that the garden was a grove of olive trees in which was located an oil press. The Garden of Olives, Luke 22:39, as it is also called, is located to the east of the Kidron Valley between the path up the mountain and the busy Jericho Road.
John tells us that when Jesus had finished praying, He and His disciples went and crossed the Kidron Valley and went to a garden on the other side, John 18:1. The Kidron valley, east of Jerusalem, separating the Mount of Olives from the Temple Mount, was the route taken by David when he fled from the city because of Absalom, 2 Samuel 15:23, and it has a significant place in the history of the nation.

In 1 Kings 15:13, it's where Asa burned the 'abominable image'. In 2 Kings 23:4-30, it's where Josiah burned the idolatrous vessels out of the temple and in 2 Chronicles 29:16-36, it's where it involved the cleansing of the temple by Hezekiah.
From the altar of sacrifice in the temple, there was a channel down to the brook Kidron, and through that channel, the blood of the lambs drained away. When Jesus crossed the brook Kidron, it would still be red with the blood of the lambs which had been sacrificed.

The 'valley', 'cheimorrhos', literally means 'winter-flowing', a stream which flowed only in winter or after heavy rain. 'Place', 'chorion', an enclosed piece of ground, so the owner must have given permission for Jesus and the disciples to use it.

The owner was probably a friend of Jesus, as Jesus often went there. Notice Luke 21:37, this probably means that Jesus and His disciples used to shelter there, sleeping in the open air, and probably in this very garden.

THE GARDEN

A 'garden', 'Gethsemane', means 'oil press', Luke 22:39. It was a private garden, Mark 14:32. Located on the slopes of Mount of Olives, but the precise location is unknown.
The present 'Garden of Gethsemane' is very old, and the original garden must have been close by, but nobody can say with certainty exactly where it is today. This wasn't the first time Jesus came here to pray, John 18:2, and so, it's easy to understand why Judas knew exactly where Jesus would be when it came to Him being arrested.

'He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Matthew 36:37

Mark tells us that whilst they were in the garden, Jesus left the other eight disciples at a distance but took Peter, James and John, His inner circle of friends, with Him to a quiet, isolated place in order for Him to pray, Matthew 26:37 / Mark 14:32-33 / Matthew 4:21 / Matthew 17:1.

'Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.' Matthew 26:38

Matthew and Mark tell us a little more detail about Jesus' emotional state, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' Matthew 26:38 / Mark 14:34. While Jesus went to pray, they were to stay and keep watch and pray that they won't fall into temptation, Luke 22:40 / Mark 14:34.
It's clear that even though the disciples seem to be oblivious to what Jesus was going through and about to go through, Jesus Himself knew exactly what was coming up. He knew that the cross was awaiting Him, and He knew He was about to carry the sin of the world on His shoulders, John 12:27 / Hebrews 5:7.
It was time to express exactly what was going through His mind. It was time to go and pour His heart out to His Father, and so He asked Peter, James and John to stand guard and keep watch because He knew that the mob was coming with Judas, His betrayer, to arrest Him.

JESUS FIRST PRAYER

‘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.’ Matthew 26:39

Luke only records Jesus’ first prayer, Luke 22:41-42. Jesus’ outpouring of His heart towards His Father shows the real love He had for His Father, Matthew 26:39 / Luke 22:41-42 / Mark 14:35-36 / Matthew 6:9. This highlights the closeness of their relationship, a Father and Son relationship.

Remember earlier, Jesus taught the disciples to pray, ‘our Father’, Matthew 6:9, but notice here that Jesus addressed the Father as ‘My’ Father. God became His Father when Jesus was in Mary’s womb, Psalm 22:10 / Jeremiah 32:27. If this doesn’t show us that God the Father was the unique Father of the Son and the Son was the unique Son of God the Father, I don’t know what will, John 3:16.

We know that all things are possible for God, but if mankind were to be saved, then this couldn’t possibly be removed. Jesus knew exactly what was coming up, ‘the cup’, Matthew 26:39 / Luke 22:42 / Mark 14:26, symbolised suffering, and He knew the eternal destiny of mankind was upon His shoulders, Matthew 20:22.

We know that He gladly went to the cross, but not without expressing very real human emotions about it. He was fully Deity, but He was also fully human. His choice, which on the surface seems simple enough, was either His Father’s will or His own, Luke 22:42 / Mark 14:36 / John 6:38, but His human side was full of sorrow.

As God in the flesh, John 1:1 / John 1:14, He knew what the plan was, but as a human, the thought of it was overwhelming, Hebrews 5:7. He knew He had to be obedient even unto death, Philippians 2:8 / Hebrews 5:8.

‘Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?’ he asked Peter. ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Matthew 26:40-41

The disciples were sleeping when Jesus returned, Matthew 26:40-41 / Luke 22:45-46 / Mark 14:37. He specifically asks Simon a question and seems surprised that he was asleep, Matthew 26:40 / Mark 14:37. Notice why the disciples fell asleep, they were ‘exhausted from sorrow,’ Luke 22:45.

Scientists have actually proven that sleeping really helps relieve stress and anxiety. Jesus asks them to watch and pray, Matthew 26:41 / Mark 14:38, but notice He didn’t ask them to pray for Him. They had to pray for themselves as they were about to go through their own spiritual ordeal.

We often get the impression that Jesus left the disciples, prayed, and a few moments later came back to the disciples, but notice that Jesus actually prayed for ‘one hour’, Matthew 26:40 / Mark 14:37.

This implies that the words we have recorded for His prayers were all that He actually said. He obviously must have waited for some kind of reply from the Father and was in agony for that period of time.

Falling into temptation is a real danger for all Christians because the flesh is weak, Matthew 26:41 / Mark 14:38. This is the reality of sin; we may not want to sin or purposely get involved in sin, but we should never underestimate the power of those temptations which can lead us into sin, Galatians 5:17 / James 1:13-14.

JESUS SECOND PRAYER

‘He 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. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.’ Matthew 26:42-43

Jesus now prays for the second time, and He prays the same prayer as before. Once again, His choice which on the surface seems simple enough, was either His Father’s will or His own, Matthew 26:42 / Luke 22:42 / Mark 14:36 / John 6:38.

The first prayer of Jesus was asking God if it was possible to remove the cup of suffering which was coming His way, but here, He acknowledges that it's not possible. In other words, there is no other way to save mankind, so His Father's will, will be done, Mark 10:38-39 / Isaiah 50:5.
Because the disciples' 'eyes are heavy', Matthew 26:43 / Mark 14:40, tells us they were under a lot of stress too. Probably because of everything which has happened up to this point, especially during the Last Supper. They too were emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausted. The disciples were so tired they didn't know what to say to Jesus.

JESUS THIRD PRAYER

'So, he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.' Matthew 26:44

Jesus now prays for the third time and prays the same prayer as before, Matthew 26:44 / Mark 14:41. Why did He repeat His prayer in Gethsemane?
Plummer, in his commentary, says the following.

'We may reverently suppose that He Himself knew that the first utterance of the prayer hadn't been complete in its success. His human will wasn't yet in absolute unison with the will of his Father, and, in this way, we may trace progress between the first prayer and the second. In both cases, the prayer is made conditional, but in the first, the condition is positive, and in the second, it is negative. 'If it is possible' has become 'If it is not possible', and there's no longer any petition that the cup be removed. We may believe that in the third prayer, even if the same words were used, the 'if' has become equivalent to 'since', 'since this cup cannot pass from me, thy will be done.'

While they were sleeping, Jesus was receiving another kind of strength. He received strength from an angel, Luke 22:43-44 / Matthew 4:11 / Hebrews 1:14.

THEORY

There is a theory about what's going on here in reference to 'drops of blood,' Luke 22:44. Although this medical condition is relatively rare, according to Dr Frederick Zugibe, it's well known, and there have been many cases of it. The clinical term is 'hematohidrosis.'
Around the sweat glands are multiple blood vessels in a net-like form, and under the pressure of great stress, the vessels constrict. Then, as the anxiety passes, the blood vessels dilate to the point of rupture. The blood goes into the sweat glands.' As the sweat glands are producing a lot of sweat, it pushes the blood to the surface, coming out as droplets of blood.

Now I said that this was a 'theory' and I'm not denying this condition exists; however, I don't believe this is what's happening here with Jesus. Notice Luke the physician's words, he says, 'his sweat was like drops of blood,' Luke 22:44.
He uses the word, 'like', which tells us that it wasn't actually drops of blood but 'like' drops of blood. In other words, His sweat wasn't literal blood, but the sweat fell from His face as if it were blood.

When writers of the Bible are trying their best to describe something which they find difficult to explain, they often use words like 'seems like', 'looks like', 'sounds like', Acts 2:1-3.

If our text here in Matthew shows us anything, it shows us the intensity of His anguish. He knew exactly what was coming up, and as a result, He's sweating so hard that Luke writes that it looked like blood falling to the ground. No wonder an angel came to strengthen Him, Luke 22:43-44.

'Then 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. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" Matthew 26:45-46

When Jesus returned, He asked if the disciples were still sleeping and resting, Matthew 26:45 / Luke 22:45-46 / Mark 14:41. The betrayer, that is Judas, is coming with the mob, Matthew 26:46 / Mark 14:42, and they need to be alert. This isn't the time for sleeping, but a time for spiritual warfare preparation.
As Christians, we must always be on our guard. We must always watch and pray because our enemy, the devil, is seeking to destroy us, 1 Peter 5:9. While the disciples are still sleeping, the time has now come for Jesus to eventually go to the cross. It was the time of the betrayal, the trial and the crucifixion of the Son of God, John 2:4 / John 12:33. The time had come to fulfil the eternal scheme of redemption that God had planned before the foundation of the world, Ephesians 3:8-11 / Revelation 13:8. It was time for Jesus, the head crusher, to fulfil the promise of Genesis 3:15.
Satan would be crushed by the sacrifice of the Son of God. However, the heel of the Son would be bruised by the necessity of His death on the cross.

It was time for Jesus to pay a sacrificial price for our deliverance from sin. As predicted by Jesus, the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified, Matthew 26:1-5. Jesus has no intention of trying to run away and hide.
He's headed straight towards the mob like a man who's fully embraced the will of His Father. Jesus chose the will of His Father whilst Judas chose the will of his own pocket, John 12:6 / Matthew 26:15.
What exactly was Jesus struggling with? Have you ever wondered what Christ's struggle was all about? What was the source of Jesus' great stress and anguish? Clearly, He was in intense spiritual agony, but the reason for that anguish is that He has to make a decision.

The same decision that Adam had to make, and the same decision that you and I have to make. Will I do what I want? Or will I do what God wants?

God asked such a small thing of Adam. He put him in a beautiful paradise and told him to have anything he wanted, but just don't touch that one tree, Genesis 2:17, that's all He asked of Adam. But what did He ask of Jesus? He asked Him to go and hang on a tree.
That's what Jesus was wrestling with, and when He left Gethsemane, we know what His decision was because He didn't back down. Do you know why? Jesus died before He was killed.

He died to self, He died to personal ambition, He died to personal desire. He died before He was killed. Jesus didn't moan. He didn't walk to the cross like a victim. He marched to the cross as a man who had fully embraced the will of His Father, John 10:17-18.
Jesus had to make that decision, but He didn't have to choose to carry it out. Throughout His ministry, He could have stepped back into heaven at any time. Even the devil knew that, as you know from Luke 4:1-12 / Matthew 4:1-10, after Satan had failed to tempt Jesus, God sent angels to care for Jesus, Matthew 4:11.
I believe Jesus could have returned to His Father right there and then. And again, in Matthew 17:1-7 / Mark 9:2-13, when Jesus spoke with Elijah and Moses, He could have returned with them.
He could have avoided the cross, but not if He wanted to accomplish the longing of His Father's heart. His Father loved the lost children of the world, and their only hope was a perfect substitute to take the penalty that they deserved. Jesus loved His Father, and He knew what His Father wanted.

CONCLUSION

We only get a tiny glimpse, and we can only but imagine the agony which Christ went through here in Gethsemane, but we must never forget that He went through it all and chose His Father's will in order for sinners to be saved, even today. When He was faced with a difficult decision and His closest friends let Him down, He poured His heart out to His Father.

As Christians today, we too will have many times in our lives when we're faced with our Gethsemane moments. There will be times when we feel let down by our family, friends and even brothers and sisters in Christ, but it's then that we need to fall on our knees and pray from the depths of our soul for guidance from our Father.

Crucifixion certainly was an agonising experience. The victim slowly suffocated as he grew gradually weaker and finally was unable to pull his body up against the nails to breathe. But others have suffered similar executions with less dread than Jesus.

There must be something Jesus feared besides pain. Several passages teach that Jesus bore the sins of the world on the cross, Isaiah 53 / 1 Peter 2:24 / 2 Corinthians 5:21. The question is, will we accept His will for our lives or will we resist and choose our own?

IF JESUS IS GOD, DOES THAT MEAN HE WAS PRAYING TO HIMSELF?

The question is a common question which some Christians struggle to understand or explain to others, and it's a question that other religious groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Oneness Pentecostals, use to try and 'prove' that Jesus couldn't have been God in the flesh.

The simple fact is that God is a Spirit, John 4:24, and Jesus was a physical being. So, while the two are one, John 10:30, they are also separate entities. Think of Jesus as the physical form of God, Colossians 1:15.
When Jesus said that He and His Father are One, He was saying that though He has the form of a man, He also has the same divine nature as God the Father. This is exactly what Paul stated in Philippians 2:5-8. Jesus, therefore, has two natures; He is both God and man.
It's clear from Paul's words that while Jesus was on Earth, He put aside His Godly powers and made Himself only human, working through the power of the Holy Spirit, in submission to God's will for Him and praying to the Father for guidance.

He did this to give us an example of how we should live, working through the power of the Holy Spirit, in submission to God's will for our lives and praying to the Father for guidance.

According to the New Testament, there were several people who knew that Jesus was God in the flesh. The Gospel writer John knew that Jesus was God, John 1:1 / John 1:14, the apostle Paul knew that Jesus was God, Colossians 1:15, the Hebrew writer knew that Jesus was God, Hebrews 1:3, and of course, Jesus Himself knew that He was God, John 10:30 / Hebrews 1:8.
Remember, we're speaking about the humanity of Jesus. As a man, he, like the rest of us, got tired and hungry. He cried, He got angry, saddened, etc. All these references speak of His humanity, that is, Jesus being a real man.

Passages of Scripture which describe Jesus' limitations refer to His humanity. He lived His life as a true man, depending upon His heavenly Father day by day, just as we are expected to do.

Even His miracles and supernatural knowledge were enabled by the Holy Spirit, not accomplished by switching back and forth between His divine and human natures. Jesus was completely human, but He also had a divine nature. Notice the following.

AS GOD

Jesus is worshipped. Matthew 2:2 / Matthew 2:11 / Matthew 14:33 / Matthew 28:9
Jesus is prayed to. Acts 7:59 / 1 Corinthians 1:2
Jesus was called God. John 20:28 / Hebrews 1:8
Jesus was called the Son of God. Mark 1:1
Jesus is sinless. 1 Peter 2:22 / Hebrews 4:15
Jesus knew all things. John 21:17
Jesus gives eternal life. John 10:28 / John 17:2
The fullness of deity dwells in Jesus. Colossians 2:9

AS A MAN

Jesus worshipped the Father. John 17
Jesus prayed to the Father. John 17:1
Jesus was called a man. Mark 15:39 / John 19:5
Jesus was called the Son of Man. John 9:35-37
Jesus was tempted. Matthew 4:1
Jesus grew in wisdom. Luke 2:52
Jesus died. Romans 5:8
Jesus has a body of flesh and bones. Luke 24:39

Why did Jesus pray to the Father despite being God Himself? Like so much of Jesus' life as a man, He left us an example to follow, which includes praying. Remember, the disciples didn't know how to pray, so Jesus had to teach them how to pray, Matthew 6:10-14 / Luke 11:1.
While on earth, He modelled dependence on God, and that prayer is more important than food or rest. God is our source of life, strength and hope, and we must remain connected to Him.

We must remain connected to God the Father through Christ. Jesus demonstrated this by remaining in visible fellowship with the Father, Philippians 2:8 / Hebrews 2:17-18.
Jesus was fully God and fully man, and He left us an example of what we must do when we hunger, thirst, get weary and sorrowful, and so, just like Jesus, we should cry out to our Father in Heaven. It's all about our relationship with the Father, and Jesus gave us the supreme example in prayer, John 13:15.
As a man, Jesus needed to pray, and when He was praying, He wasn't praying to Himself but to God the Father. Jesus prayed to God the Father because it was an appropriate, natural and essential part of His mission on earth. His prayers set an example for us to grow in intimacy with our Heavenly Father.

JESUS ARRESTED

‘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. 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. Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 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. “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 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?” 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.’ Matthew 26:47-56

THE KIDRON VALLEY

Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley and went into a garden, John 18:1. The Kidron valley east of Jerusalem, separating the Mount of Olives from the Temple Mount, was the route taken by David when he fled from the city because of Absalom, 2 Samuel 15:23.
And it has a significant place in the history of the nation, it’s where Asa burned the ‘abominable image’, in 1 Kings 15:13 / 2 Chronicles 15:16, it’s where Josiah burned the idolatrous vessels out of the temple, in 2 Kings 23:4, it’s where it involved in the cleansing of the temple by Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 29:15-17.
From the altar of sacrifice in the temple, there was a channel down to the brook Kidron, and through that channel, the blood of the lambs drained away. When Jesus crossed the brook Kidron, it would still be red with the blood of the lambs which had been sacrificed.

The ‘valley’, ‘cheimorrhos’, literally means ‘winter-flowing’, a stream that flowed only in winter or after heavy rain.
A ‘garden’, ‘Gethsemane’, means ‘oil press’, Luke 22:39.
It was a private garden, Mark 14:32. ‘Place’, ‘chorion’, an enclosed piece of ground, so the owner must have given permission for Jesus and the disciples to use it. The owner was probably a friend of Jesus, as Jesus often went there.

THE GARDEN

Located on the slopes of Mount of Olives, precise location unknown, the present ‘Garden of Gethsemane’ is very old, and the original garden must have been close by, but nobody can say with certainty exactly where it was located. It seems as if the disciples and Jesus had stopped for Jesus’ prayer somewhere in Jerusalem.

Now that the prayer was completed, they continued to the edge of the city, out one of the gates on the Western side of the city and towards the Kidron valley, which runs west of the city along the length of the temple.

They crossed the valley and entered the garden of Gethsemane, which was on the Mount of Olives; this Mount was so-called because of the olives grown on it. Some of these olive trees still exist today, and they are believed to be the same as those mentioned in Jesus’ time. It seems that Jesus slept here on the Mount of Olives each night of the last week of His life.

We see that this was commonplace for Jesus and the disciples to go for prayer and meditation. As a result, Judas the traitor knew where to find Jesus, and it was common for them to go there after the evening meal, John 18:2-3.

Judas brought an entire detachment of soldiers with him to capture Jesus. Judas brought with him 'a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees'.

The word 'detachment' of soldiers is 'speira', and was the term used for a Roman Cohort, a body of six hundred men. However, it's also sometimes used to describe a group of two hundred soldiers. It's impossible to say how many on this occasion, but it's certainly used for a large number, Matthew 26:47 / Luke 27:47 / Mark 14:43.
Imagine two to six hundred Roman soldiers and all the religious leaders, armed with torches, lanterns, clubs and swords, Matthew 26:47 / Luke 22:52 / Mark 14:48.
'Their officers', 'chiliarchos', the Roman commander of a cohort, Luke 22:52-53, and the temple guard were carrying 'lanterns and torches', perhaps expecting that Jesus and disciples would hide, Luke 22:52. The chief priests and elders were also present, Luke 22:52.
The chief priests had no jurisdiction over Roman soldiers and would need Pilate's permission to use them; however, he later doesn't seem keen on the whole event, so it isn't likely that he would give his permission to use his men to capture Jesus.

The torches were sticks tied together, wrapped in cloth, dipped in pitch or oil; the lantern was an open dish or oil lamp. This seems likely because of their reaction when Jesus uses the term 'I AM', John 18:5.

WHY DID THEY NEED JUDAS?

The religious leaders didn't need Judas to recognise Jesus. They didn't need Judas to find out where Jesus was. Three times in the Gospel of John, they sent guards to arrest Jesus, and all three times the guards couldn't do it.

I think they were beginning to fear that Jesus was un-arrestable. And they said, 'We need someone on the inside, someone that can catch Him when his guard is down, someone that won't surprise Him so that we can get Him before He knows what's going on.' And Judas said, 'I'm your man.'

THE KISS

Under normal circumstances, the kiss was a brotherly kiss of affection, Romans 16:16 / 1 Corinthians 16:20 / 2 Corinthians 13:12 / 1 Thessalonians 5:26 / 1 Peter 5:14, but it seems like Judas had other plans; his kiss was more like a kiss of betrayal.
His kiss signalled to the mob who Jesus was; remember, the religious leaders who were in attendance knew exactly who Jesus was, Matthew 26:48-49 / Mark 14:44-45, as they had many dealings with Him up to this point. This shows us the extent Satan had been working on His heart, he even had the audacity to greet Jesus first, Matthew 26:49 / Mark 14:45.
Jesus tells Judas to do what he came today and even calls him friend, Matthew 26:50. This is similar to the last time they spoke when Jesus tells him what he is about to do, to it quickly, John 13:27.
When Jesus asked him the question about betraying the Son of man with a kiss, Luke 22:48, this tells us that Jesus knew Judas's motives. I'm sure Judas once again would have been taken aback by Jesus' question.
Remember, these are the final days of Jesus, and He was well aware of everything which was about to happen, Revelation 13:8, and Judas coming to Him was no surprise either, Psalm 41:9 / Luke 9:44 / Matthew 20:18 / Acts 1:16-17.

Jesus was well aware of His eventual destination. He knew that His time had now come, but still He asked, 'Who is it you want?' They specify Jesus, John 18:5. He replies, 'I am he', John 18:5; this is the old statement used as a reference to God. Jesus knew everything that was about to happen: John 2:24 / John 5:6 / John 6:64 / John 13:1 / John 13:3.

Notice it was when Jesus said, 'I am he,' 'they drew back and fell to the ground,' John 18:6, why? The word 'he' is merely supplied in the text, Jesus said 'Ego Eimi', 'I AM,' John 8:58 / Exodus 3:14, which is the Greek equivalent of YHWH, Exodus 3:13-14 / John 5:18.

He is Eternal, Psalm 135:13, and self-existent, Psalm 88:6-7. The expression 'Ego Eimi' also occurs in John 6:35 / John 8:12 / John 8:58 / John 10:9 / John 10:11 / John 11:25 / John 14:6 / John 15:1. The Jews understood perfectly well what was alluded to by the term 'I AM' used by Jesus, Leviticus 24:16 / John 5:18.

Just as a side note, I remember studying with the Jehovah's Witnesses and bringing this text to their attention. At first, they said, 'Oh, you guys are always making a big deal out of the 'I AM' statements', and then they went on to explain that everyone present 'drew back and fell to the ground', simply because Jesus openly admitted that He was Jesus, and everyone was surprised when He did!

REALLY!

Imagine two-six hundred Roman soldiers and all the religious leaders, armed with torches, lanterns, clubs and swords, Matthew 26:47 / Luke 22:52 / Mark 14:48, and who knows what else, coming to Jesus, and Jesus asks, 'Who are you looking for?' John 18:4 / John 18:7, and they reply, 'Jesus of Nazareth', John 18:5 / John 18:7.

Imagine, Jesus replies, 'Yep, I'm your man', and because He said, He is the one they are looking for, two-six hundred soldiers and everyone else in their company, not only 'drew back' but they also 'fell to the ground.' That simply doesn't make any sense unless there was something about the words Jesus used.

The 'I AM' statements are a big deal, but they fail to see the significance of them because if they did, they wouldn't come out with such dribble to explain passages like this.

After declaring to the mob that He is the 'I AM', for the second time, Jesus pleads for His disciples to be released, John 18:8. This was to fulfil a prophecy He previously made, which prevented any from being captured with Him, John 18:9 / John 6:39 / John 18:8.

THE EAR

When the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him, Matthew 26:50, Peter's reaction isn't surprising. He was always the impulsive one, who often said things without thinking first, John 13:37 / Matthew 26:33. He drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, who was the high priest's servant, Matthew 26:51 / Luke 22:50 / Mark 14:47 / John 18:10.

The fact that Peter is carrying a sword, possibly for protection, tells me that maybe He still didn't understand the nature of God's kingdom; he was still thinking in terms of a physical kingdom.

We know that Jesus never wanted or never intended physical force to establish His kingdom, John 18:36 / Revelation 13:10. Before Jesus restores Malchus' ear, Jesus rebukes Peter; this isn't the first time he has rebuked him, Mark 8:33 / John 18:11, and it certainly won't be the last time he's rebuked, Galatians 2:11-21.

The cup, John 18:11, which Jesus refers to is the cup of agony, Matthew 26:39. He reminds Peter if he's going to fight with a sword, then he will certainly die by the sword, Matthew 26:52 / Romans 13:4.

We must wonder what those who were present were thinking when Jesus restored Malchus' ear back to normal, Luke 22:51. Surely after Jesus claimed to be the 'I AM', and then performed this 'sign', John 20:30-31, those present would have noticed what He just did!

I often wonder if Malchus himself ever went on to believe that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. If no one else believed within the mob who Christ was on that day, I'm sure Malchus would have believed, and who knows, maybe later He went on to become a Christian. At the very least, it was certainly one of those moments in his life that he would never forget.

Peter, still thinking in human terms, thought Jesus needed help, but little did he know how much help Jesus had at His disposal. If it wasn't for the love of Christ for mankind, He could have easily brought all this to an end, but He wasn't about to play into the devil's hands; He wasn't about to blow His whole mission this close to the end, John 18:11 / John 10:17-18.

TWELVE LEGIONS OF ANGELS

Matthew tells us that Jesus could have called numerous angels to rescue Him, Matthew 26:53, but He knew by doing that, He wouldn't fulfil Scripture, Matthew 26:54 / Isaiah 50:6 / Isaiah 53:2-11.

Twelve legions of angels are estimated to be around seventy-two thousand angels, but notice Jesus says He has 'more than' that number at His disposal, Matthew 26:53.

Remember, the angel of the LORD, wiped out one-hundred and eighty-five thousand of God's enemies in one moment, 2 Kings 19:35, how much more would these many angels affect those who were present?

The mob were armed with swords and clubs, Matthew 26:47 / Luke 22:52 / Matthew 26:55 / Mark 14:48. This tells us that both Roman soldiers and the temple police were present to arrest Jesus.

Luke is the only account which tells us the chief priests were present too, Luke 22:52. You have to wonder, how many people does it take to arrest one man? John 18:12.

THE TIME HAS COME

Jesus tells them they've had ample opportunity over the past three and a half years to arrest Him but they didn't, Matthew 26:55 / Luke 22:52-53 / Mark 14:51. Now was the time because it was God's timetable they were working under, not theirs.

The commander was usually in charge of a thousand men, but on this occasion, he didn't have a thousand men with him. John simply tells us about him to help us understand that he was a man of high rank, John 18:12.

It was now time to carry out the death sentence on Jesus, Luke 22:53 / John 18:12. Satan has been working through these people because He wanted Jesus out of the picture but little did he know that the cross was a part of God's plan from the beginning, Genesis 3:15 / Romans 8:28.

The devil had no idea what God's plan was, he had no idea that he was actually putting God's plan into effect, 1 Peter 1:10-12 / Acts 2:23. Christ knew the Scriptures. He knew moment by moment they were to be fulfilled, Matthew 26:56 / Mark 14:49.

Jesus is saying that He must die, but He is also saying all these things must happen to fulfil prophecy, Matthew 18:7 / John 10:35 / 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. He knew His sheep would be scattered, Matthew 26:56 / Mark 14:49 / Zechariah 13:7.

Why the disciples deserted Jesus and fled, Matthew 26:56 / Mark 14:50-52, is uncertain. Probably because they were afraid, John 20:19, and didn't want to be arrested along with Jesus.

Notice that Jesus didn't try to run away. He surrenders Himself to the authorities, and no attempt is made to capture the disciples. He voluntarily handed Himself over to them, John 18:12.

I don't believe there was any need to bind Him, John 18:12, but such is the nature of Satan and the people he was using to rid the world of Jesus. There was no escaping for Jesus, but Jesus had no intention of even trying to escape. He only had one thing on His mind, to lovingly fulfil the will of His Father, Luke 22:42. Jesus was in full control of everything which was happening around Him, and He has always been in control of everything going on around Him and will continue to be in control of everything, even to His resurrection and beyond.

As Christians, it's so important to remember that as long as we remain under His control, He will protect us from harm, John 10:28-29. We must also remember that it's so easy to abandon Him, especially when people criticise us for being Christians and abuse us for the faith we hold onto so dearly, 1 Timothy 6:12.

We know that Peter and John stayed kind of close to Jesus during His trial, John 18:15, but we don't know why the others fled. One thing to notice is that Matthew includes himself as one of those deserting and fleeing from the scene, Matthew 26:56.

The young man who was left naked could have possibly been John Mark, Mark 14:51-52. Mark makes this brief statement here in order to identify himself as the writer of the document. I can imagine this event being both sad for the disciples later, but also humorous as they remember Mark running away naked.

From this time on, things begin to happen quickly in reference to the trials, crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Throughout the next three days, the disciples would experience the greatest trauma of their lives. Expectations would be crushed, and their hopes in Jesus would be dashed.

They would be in a state of disillusionment until Jesus redirected them through several appearances that would take place after the resurrection. After the trauma of all these events, they would be prepared to go forth for Jesus.

WHAT DATE WAS JESUS ARRESTED?

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'We should note that if Jesus was arrested on the night of Passover, as some suggest, then none of the chief priests or the temple guards would have been permitted to carry weapons after sundown of Nisan fourteenth. And so, this must have happened the night before, on Nisan thirteenth, technically the fourteenth, that Jesus was arrested. If it had been Nisan fourteenth after sundown, it would have been technically Nisan fifteenth, the night of the Passover meal, Luke 22:2.'

THE TRIALS OF JESUS

Jesus went through six trials before His execution. There were six parts to Jesus' trial, three stages in a religious court and three stages before a Roman court. On the night of His arrest, Jesus was brought before Annas, John 18:12-

14 / John 18:19-23, Caiaphas, Matthew 26:57-75, and the Sanhedrin, Luke 22:66-71 / Mark 14:53-65 / Matthew 26:57-68 / John 18:12-24, a group of religious leaders. In these trials, he was charged with blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of God.

He was imprisoned at Caiaphas' palace, and the Jewish High Priest and the Jewish High Court, the Sanhedrin, effectively asked Jesus two questions: 'Are you the Messiah? And are you the Son of God?' To both of these, Jesus answered, 'I AM', Matthew 26:63 / Mark 14:60-64 / John 14:61.

This was enough to condemn Jesus for blaspheming God by claiming to be God. The Jews understood perfectly well what was alluded to by the term 'I AM' used by Jesus, Leviticus 24:16 / John 5:18.

THE PRELIMINARY HEARING

Matthew, Mark and Luke don't mention the preliminary hearing, only John.

JESUS BEFORE ANNAS

Jesus was first taken before the powerful Annas, the ex-high priest and the power behind the current one, John 18:12-14 / John 18:19-23. These verses remind us of the important prophecy made by the current high priest, John 11:49-51, which he had said without realising the truth behind his statement. Perhaps he's also underlining the fact that with two such scoundrels involved, Jesus had no hope of a fair trial.

While Jesus is on trial, we find Peter is about to deny Jesus three times, just as Jesus said he would, Matthew 26:33-35 / Mark 14:29-31 / John 13:37-38. In John 18:15-18, we read that Peter and it appears John follow the group, including the Lord, to the house of the high priest; it's most likely that Annas and Caiaphas lived at the same address. John is known at the gate and allowed into the courtyard, and he seeks permission for Peter to come in also.

THE COURT OF THE HIGH PRIEST

When we compare this with Matthew 26:57-58, and with John 18:13 / John 18:15 / John 18:24, it suggests that the same court or courtyard is in view in each case. It's probable that Annas lived in a part of the official palace of his son in law. The sending of Jesus to Caiaphas would be merely sending him across the courtyard.

As Peter is denying the Lord, the Lord is making His first defence. He's being questioned by the high priest, either Annas or Caiaphas, about His teaching and His apostles, John 18:19. It may have been that the authorities wanted the apostles as well to make sure that this sect was completely crushed; this would further explain Peter's denials.

It wasn't a judicial trial but rather a preliminary investigation; it would be in character for Annas to try to pin something on Jesus. Jesus is questioned 'about His disciples and His teaching', John 18:19, surely the questioner was well informed about both!

Jesus' answer shows that the high priest's questions were evilly motivated, John 18:20. What Jesus means is that He didn't have two kinds of teaching, a harmless one for the general public and a very different one for the secret revolutionaries. The essence of His teaching was public property, John 18:21.

Jesus defends Himself by explaining the openness of all His actions; He never hid behind someone or conspired in a closed room. His entire statement had been in the open, for all to hear, John 18:21. Because of this answer, one of the officials struck Jesus, who then sought the reason why He was struck, John 18:22.
Annas was acting illegally because Jewish law required that evidence be heard from witnesses and that their testimony be shown to be in agreement, then a prisoner might be cross-examined.

The official who slapped Jesus was a member of the temple guard. Jesus is saying, 'if I have said anything wrong, let it be revealed by proper legal procedures. If not, why hit me?' John 18:23.

JESUS SENT TO CAIAPHAS

Notice that Jesus was bound, John 18:24. Jewish custom was for a prisoner's hands to be tied behind their back. After being bound, Jesus is sent by Annas to Caiaphas as the official high priest, John 18:24.
Evidently, the preliminary hearing before Annas has allowed the Sanhedrin time to assemble. This was for the official 'trial' narrated by the Gospels, Matthew 26:57-67 / Mark 14:53-65.
If Annas and Caiaphas lived in the same palace and the Sanhedrin met there for this 'trial', then John 18:24 would merely involve Jesus being led across a courtyard. Jesus is sent to Caiaphas's quarters, where the entire council of the Sanhedrin had gathered to seek cause to have Jesus put to death, Luke 22:66.

JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

''Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. 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. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 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. 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." "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." 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. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?" Matthew 26:57-68

Matthew, Mark and Luke record the account of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, but John doesn't.

THE OFFICIAL TRIAL BEGINS

Though it was very late at night, Jesus was brought before the Jewish supreme court and tried, Matthew 26:57 / Mark 14:53 / Luke 22:66. Peter was following Jesus from a safe distance, and so, he went into the courtyard and sat down beside some guards next to a fire, to see what was going to happen, Matthew 26:58 / Mark 14:54.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for any excuse to put Jesus to death, Matthew 26:59 / Mark 14:55. They bribed false witnesses who told contradictory stories about Him, Matthew 26:59-60 / Mark 14:56.
For a time, it appeared that the court would be unable to find consistent testimony by which to convict Jesus. Another group stood and gave false testimony, Matthew 26:60 / Mark 14:57. They accused Jesus of plotting to destroy the temple and in three days He would build another one, Matthew 26:61 / Mark 14:58.
Their testimony was untruthful because Jesus actually said, 'You' destroy this temple, referring to His body, and in three days I will raise it up, that is, rise from the dead, John 2:19.
In context, Jesus' words were a prediction that the religious leaders would take His life and that He would rise from the dead three days later. There was no suggestion whatever of such a thing as the false witnesses alleged.

Even such a misrepresentative and malicious garbling of Jesus' words, however, was useless to the chief priests because there was no coherent account of such an alleged statement. One said one thing, and another declared something else, Mark 14:59.
All night long, the preliminary investigation had gone forward, and nothing had come of it. In desperation, Caiaphas, who was beginning to find the judge's bench a very uncomfortable place, forsook the judicial status, usurped the role of a prosecutor, placed Jesus under oath and demanded an answer, Matthew 26:63 / Mark 14:60, but he would ask a question first. Jesus remained silent, Matthew 26:63 / Mark 14:61.
Finally, the high priest asked Him if He were the Christ, Matthew 26:63 / Mark 14:61 / Luke 22:67. When Jesus said, 'I AM,' they used this statement as evidence of blasphemy and convicted Him, Mark 14:61.
Christ's, 'I AM' claim here speaks of His Deity, John 6:35 / John 8:12 / John 8:58 / John 10:9 / John 10:11 / John 11:25 / John 14:6 / John 15:1. Each of His 'I AM' claims is a claim that He is God, EGO EIMI, which is the Greek equivalent of YHWH, Exodus 3:13-14 / John 5:18. He is Eternal, Psalm 135:13, and self-existent, Psalm 88:6-7. The Jews certainly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God, John 8:57-59.
I used to think that sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven refers to the final judgment when all men shall stand before the throne of God for sentencing, Matthew 26:64 / Mark 14:62 / Luke 22:69. However, notice it says, 'He's sitting at the right hand.' It doesn't say He's standing or He's riding a horse; it says, He's sitting.
I think what Jesus is saying there is, 'Caiaphas, this day you are my judge. You and your people are judging me, but the day is coming, and you're going to see it when I'm sitting at the right hand of God, and I'm sending my judgement to you.' And Caiaphas' generation saw that prophecy come true, Matthew 26:64 / Mark 14:62.
In this text, Jesus is bringing the news of the passing of one era and the establishment of another in which the glory of God isn't going to be in the temple made by hands anymore.

The high priest had heard enough, Luke 22:71. He tore his clothes in anger and didn't need any more witnesses and accused Him of blasphemy, Matthew 26:65-66 / Mark 14:63-64.

GUARDS MOCK JESUS

They spat on Jesus, they blindfolded him, punched him, and mocked him and beat Him up, Matthew 26:67-68 / Mark 14:65 / Luke 22:63-65. There were six mockeries of Jesus in all, all of which were designed to totally humiliate Christ.
We would expect this kind of behaviour from the Romans, but since this took place in the court of the high priests of Israel, this tells us just how far from God they had come.

The religious leaders allowed this to happen right in front of their very eyes. This was the second of Jesus' six trials, the first having been the arraignment before Annas, perhaps in the same palace where apartments for both Annas and Caiaphas were located around the courtyard, John 18:12-27.

The meeting of the Sanhedrin was probably not at full strength, its more noble members, such as Nicodemus, John 3:1-2, and Joseph of Arimathea, John 19:38, having already withdrawn. It may well be doubted that even a quorum was present, but on the other hand, it may be assumed that every effort was made to attain one.

THE WHOLE TRIAL OF JESUS WAS ILLEGAL

1. No formal change had been made against Him.

2. The arrest was made by the men who would be His judges.

The High Priests and the Sanhedrin were also the ones who accused Him of violating the Law, which said that the Council was not permitted to lay charges.

3. The trial was held at night. Forbidden by the Law, because it was believed that the darkness might bind the mind of the accused, and cause him to testify against himself.

4. His questioning by the High Priest was alone forbidden by the Law.

The Judges were not allowed to question the accused, because he might be led into providing evidence against himself.

5. The law required the High Priest to 'search, enquire and ask diligently', if the charge against the accused was true, Deuteronomy 13:14.

6. A trial could not be held before sunrise.

So that potential witnesses for the defence could be present.

7. A guilty verdict could not be pronounced on the same day as the trial.

A night must intervene between trial and sentence so that the judges can meditate on the verdict.

8. After the verdict, a period of nine hours must be allowed for potential objections to be made to the verdict.

9. The verdict must be pronounced in the Chamber of Stones, the room in the Temple, where the Sanhedrin held its Meetings, before being made public.

10. The death sentence was invalid because it was not the unanimous verdict of the full Council.

Joseph of Arimathea was not present, John 19:38 / Luke 23:50-51.

11. The testimony of the witnesses, procured by the Priests, on which the 'Guilty' verdict was based, was false.

They claimed that Jesus said, 'I will destroy this Temple'.

12. The Law forbade the holding of a Trial on a Friday.

The trial was illegal because it was held on a day that was followed by an Annual Sabbath, the Passover, John 18:28.

PETER DENIES KNOWING JESUS

'Now 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. 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!" 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!" 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.'
Matthew 26:69-75

PETER'S FIRST DENIAL

While Jesus is on trial, we find Peter is about to deny Jesus three times just as Jesus said he would, Matthew 26:33-35 / Luke 22:34 / Mark 14:29-31 / John 13:37-38. Here we read about Peter's first denial, but who is the 'other disciple' mentioned in John 18:15?

Traditionally, this has been accepted as John himself; this would be consistent with John's habit of not naming himself, John 1:40 / John 13:23-25 / John 19:26 / John 20:2-8 / John 21:20-24.

Also, Peter and John appear to have been constant companions, Luke 22:8 / Acts 3:1 / Acts 4:13 / Acts 8:14. This unnamed disciple 'was known to the high priest', John 18:15, which means he was well enough known for the servant girl to admit him.

Peter and it appears John follow the group, including the Lord, to the house of the high priest, Matthew 26:58 / John 8:15; it's most likely that Annas and Caiaphas lived at the same address. John is known at the gate and allowed into the courtyard, and seeks permission for Peter to come in also, John 18:15-16.

Peter and John both enter and find a fire with people around and go to it to keep warm, Luke 22:55 / Mark 14:54 / John 18:17-18. It appears as if the other disciples had fled back to 'his own', in accordance with Jesus prophecy of John 16:32.

The girl at the gate sees Peter and recognises him as one of Jesus followers, Matthew 26:69 / Mark 14:66-67, she asks him about this and Peter makes that first terrible denial, Matthew 26:30 / Luke 22:57 / Mark 14:68 / John 18:17.

In John 18:17, we see the question asked by the maid is phrased to anticipate a negative answer, 'You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you? Remember that the 'other disciple' was known to be one of Jesus' followers; he had openly entered along with Jesus, John 18:15.

HOW EASILY PETER FELL!

Questioned by a maid, 'paidiske', girl, he said, 'I am not,' Luke 26:69-70 / John 18:17. The other disciple was apparently in no danger, but why didn't Peter own up? Perhaps he was taken by surprise when a mere girl challenged him; maybe he was afraid he would be recognised as the one who wounded Malchus.

We know that nearby are the 'officers,' John 18:18, who had been involved in the arrest of Jesus, John 18:13-14. A few hours ago, he had said he would die for Jesus, John 13:37, but now, a frightened man, he denies his Master.

PETER'S SECOND AND THIRD DENIAL

In John 18:25-27, we see Peter's second, Luke 22:58, and third denial. It's difficult to harmonise the accounts of the denials in the Gospels with that of John. This was during Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, John 18:24-28.
Matthew and Mark relate that before this, Peter had gone out to the 'porch' or 'gateway', Matthew 26:71 / Mark 14:68. Perhaps, deeply ashamed by his first denial, he wanted to slip away unseen but was unable to escape unobserved.
Matthew and Mark both tell of his being approached in the porch by a 'maid'. Accused of having been with Jesus, 'he denied it with an oath', Matthew 26:71-72 / Mark 14:69-70. Peter 'was standing and warming himself' at a charcoal fire, John 18:18. This charcoal, only mentioned by John, would provide much heat but little light.
And he is challenged by bystanders, 'You aren't one of his disciples, too, are you?' Again, he answers, 'I am not', Luke 22:58. Then he is challenged by a slave of the high priest, who is also a kinsman of Malchus, 'Didn't I see you with him in the garden?' John 18:26.
The Gospels tell what was said both to and about Peter regarding his speech, Matthew 26:73, the bystanders say, 'certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you'.
Mark 14:70, the bystanders say, 'Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.' In Luke 22:59, another bystander, probably a maid, says, 'Certainly this man was with him, for he is a Galilean.'
So, we see he was twice challenged about his presence with the Lord. First, by a slave girl, one of the most unimportant persons imaginable. Her question expected a negative answer, and Peter takes the easy way out.

Next, by a relative of the servant whose ear Peter had cut off. Peter again denied any link with Jesus, and as he concluded his statement, the crowing began. John's account is more discreet than the other Gospels; he merely states, 'Peter again denied it and at once the cock crowed', Matthew 26:34 / John 13:38 / Mark 14:30.

ALLEGED CONTRADICTION

Notice that Matthew, Matthew 26:34, and John, John 13:38, both say that, 'before the rooster crows', Peter will have denied the Lord three times. And now notice that Mark, Mark 14:30, says that 'before the rooster crows 'twice,' Peter will deny Christ three times. Although some see this as a contradiction, when we actually take a moment to slowly read the text itself, we will soon realise there's no contradiction.
Notice how Matthew, Matthew 26:34, and John, John 13:38, don't expressly state how many times the rooster will crow. They both simply say that Peter will deny Jesus three times, 'before the rooster crows', but they don't tell us how many times it will crow.
I believe it's reasonable to accept that Mark is being a little more specific in terms of how many times the rooster will actually crow. In fact, if you look at the word 'twice' in Mark 14:10 and Mark 14:72, you will notice that it has a footnote, which tells us that 'some early manuscripts do not have 'twice'.
In other words, it's possible that different accounts are due to an early copyist error in Mark, which resulted in the insertion of the word 'twice' in early manuscripts.

PETER WEPT BITTERLY

Luke records in his account that at this moment, Jesus was outside, probably on his way from Annas' quarters to Caiaphas's, and he looked straight at Peter, who broke down and cried, Luke 22:61-62 / Matthew 26:74-75 / Mark 14:71-72.

We can't help but sympathise with Peter at this point as he saw Jesus and then remembered what He prophesied about his denying Him three times, Matthew 26:33-35 / Luke 22:33-34 / Mark 14:29-31 / John 13:36-38. He literally was sobbing his heart out.

CONCLUSION

This was probably one of the lowest points in his life, and it was an event he wasn't going to forget for the rest of his life. It's interesting that things seem to happen in threes for Peter from this point on, John 21:15-17 / Acts 10:9-16 / Acts 10:17-19.

What Peter was demonstrating here was genuine godly sorrow, which was the opposite of what Judas was demonstrating, as he went on to hang himself, Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18 / 2 Corinthians 7:10.

If we learn anything from Peter, we should learn that he didn't allow this occasion to affect the rest of his life. He went on to become a powerful apostle for the Lord and became bolder when he spoke more openly about the Christ, Acts 2.

As Christians, we too will make many mistakes, some out of fear of being persecuted, but we must learn to draw a line under those occasions and move on. Think back upon the contributing factors in their failure.

1. They hadn't listened when Jesus had frequently warned them of His impending suffering.

They had been too eager to argue about who would be the greatest in the kingdom.

2. They were overconfident.

Earlier that evening, Jesus warned them that they would flee, but they didn't believe it.

3. They didn't watch and pray in the garden as He instructed.

Thus, they were not mentally prepared to face the challenge. We could fail in the hour of temptation for these same reasons.

Peter denied Jesus, but he repented. Judas was remorseful and returned the pieces of silver, Matthew 27:3. But he later hung himself, Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18. There was a difference between the reaction of the two men to their discovery of what Jesus said each would do.

Peter's reaction led him to return to faithfulness with a stronger conviction. Judas' reaction led him to further guilt and subsequently to his own suicide, Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18.

CHAPTER 27

INTRODUCTION

‘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. 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. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” “What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 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. 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.” Matthew 27:1-10

JUDAS HANGS HIMSELF

The chief priests and elders of the people apparently already had their minds made up that Jesus was to be executed. In their mind, they wanted to execute Jesus according to their law, despite Jesus being innocent. Caiaphas, the High Priest, is the one who clearly exhibits their collective motives, Matthew 26:57-67.
He’s the one who orchestrated the worst miscarriage of justice in legal history. Lawyers who have studied the legal system of the Jewish people of that time are quite clear that, in his eagerness to get rid of Jesus, Caiaphas broke the law, and he broke it many times over.

1. He shouldn’t have allowed the trial to go ahead at night.

2. He shouldn’t have allowed it to be held out with the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple.

3. He shouldn’t have allowed a criminal case to proceed during the Passover season.

4. He could only allow the case to finish on the same day if it was a not guilty verdict.

5. He didn’t have two witnesses examined separately before the trial.

6. And he certainly didn’t have all the evidence for the court, prior to the start of the trial.

Because this time the verdict was decided before the evidence was even considered. What happened that would cause these men to conduct an unfair and crooked trial?

Scripture has the answer; the Chief Priests and Jewish leaders were trying to find a way to get the Romans to pass the death sentence on Jesus. So they pack Jesus off, in chains, to Pilate, Matthew 27:1-2 / Luke 3:1 / Luke 13:1 / Acts 3:13 / Acts 4:27, but as we’re about to read, Pilate wasn’t conned by their claims that they cared about the future of the Roman Empire.

JUDAS HANGS HIMSELF

It’s at this point that Judas hears the news concerning Jesus that he begins to be filled with remorse, returns the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, Matthew 27:3.
He now knows that the thirty pieces of silver, Matthew 26:15, he received to give Jesus into their hands, simply wasn’t worth it. He knows that he has sinned; he knows he has betrayed innocent blood, in reference to Jesus, Matthew 27:4.

It's clear that the religious leaders weren't concerned about Judas; despite confessing his sin, they didn't want to know, and more or less told Judas to get on with it; this was his responsibility, Matthew 27:4.

Judas throws the money into the temple, Matthew 27:5, and by doing so, fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah, Zechariah 11:12. He then left and went on to hang himself, Matthew 27:5 / Deuteronomy 21:22-23. In the heat of the day, his gases built up within him, and he fell or was cut down, and when he landed, he burst open. Everyone in Jerusalem knew about this event, Acts 1:18-19.

If only Judas had gone to Jesus for forgiveness rather than going to the chief priests and elders of the people. It's here we see the great contrast between Peter and Judas. Peter's sorrow led him to godly repentance and life, but Judas' worldly sorrow led him to his death, 2 Corinthians 7:10.

The hypocrisy of the chief priests and elders is incredible; they are very happy to have an innocent man killed, but when it came to the thirty pieces of silver, which they now call blood money, Matthew 27:6 / Matthew 26:15 / Zechariah 11:12, they wanted to stick to the law.

They used the money to buy a potter's field as a burial place for foreigners, which is called the Field of Blood, Matthew 27:7-8 / Acts 1:19, that is, Akeldama in Aramaic.

This field was where potters apparently collected clay for their work. In doing this, they fulfilled the prophecies of both Jeremiah and Zechariah, Matthew 27:9-10 / Jeremiah 32:6-9 / Zechariah 11:12-13.

ALLEGED CONTRADICTION

Some claim there is a contradiction here concerning the way Judas dies and the people who bought the field. Matthew records that, 'Judas left and went away and hanged himself, the chief priests took the silver and bought the potter's field', Matthew 27:7. Luke records that, 'Judas bought a field, he fell headlong, his body burst open, and all his intestines spilled out,' Acts 1:18.

The answer to the alleged contradiction is fairly simple. Who bought the field? They both did; it just depends on how we understand the application of the word 'bought'.

It was Judas' money, and it was the priests who used the money he returned to them to buy the field. They bought the field because they could not accept blood money and returned it to the temple treasury.

In essence, the priests bought the field on behalf of Judas. And according to Luke, we can conclude that either the branch he used to hang himself on or the rope itself broke and Judas' body fell and burst open.

JESUS FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

'Meanwhile, Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied. 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. Matthew 27:11-14

Note the governor's movement in and out of the Praetorium.

1. Outside, John 18:28-32. 2. Inside, John 18:33-37. 3. Outside, John 18:38-40. 4. Inside, John 19:1-3. 5. Outside, John 19:4-7. 6. Inside, John 19:8-11. 7. Outside, John 19:12-16.

'The Praetorium' was the Roman governor's official residence when in Jerusalem, which could be one of two locations.

1. The palace of Herod on the western side of the city, or

2. The castle of Antonia, which housed the Roman garrison and overlooked the temple.

If the 'luthostratos' pavement, John 19:13, in the church of the Flagellation is authentic, it would be the latter. Notice they wanted to be able to eat the Passover, John 18:28.
This appears to contradict the other Gospel writers because it suggests that Jesus is going to be crucified on the day before the Passover meal. In other words, how can Jesus have eaten the Passover meal if the time for eating the Passover meal hadn't arrived yet?

The answer to this question is fairly straightforward when we remember that the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread is referred to as Passover. We see this in the Old Testament, where Ezekiel refers to the Passover as a feast of seven days, Ezekiel 45:21, and we see this in the New Testament, Luke 22:1.
When we keep this in mind, John 18:28, becomes clearer. The priests didn't want to defile themselves at any point during the feast of Passover because they would be eating sacrifices every night. According to Numbers 28:16-24, they offered sacrifices to God every day, for the entire seven days of the feast.
Jesus is now on trial before Pilate. John doesn't mention Jesus being sent to Herod Antipas, Luke 23:6-12, or the message received by Pilate from his wife, Matthew 27:19. Pilate is abruptly introduced into the narrative, without any personal details, which suggests that he was well-known to John's readers.
Pilate was made procurator in 26 A.D. He established himself in Caesarea, a Roman city on the Mediterranean coast. He was extremely harsh in his day-to-day dealings. On one occasion, he set up Roman standards in the temple, causing a riot.

Within six days, they were removed; perhaps this is why he seems now to be more tolerant of Jewish ways. He had the power of life and death over his subjects; he had about one-hundred and twenty cavalrymen and over five thousand infantrymen, yet he himself was still subject to Caesar.

The whole assembly, Mark 15:1 / Luke 23:1, that is, all of the accusers who came to the garden, were men with evil on their hearts, men with false accusations with one thing on their mind, to get rid of Jesus once and for all, Luke 23:2 / Matthew 17:27 / Mark 12:17.
Notice the reason the religious rulers didn't enter the Praetorium, 'to avoid ceremonial uncleanness' etc., John 18:28. A religious Jew wouldn't enter the house of a Gentile, Acts 10:38 / Acts 11:3.
Pilate goes out to them and asks what accusation they bring against this Man? John 18:29. They said if this Jesus wasn't an evildoer, they wouldn't have delivered Him to Pilate,' John 18:30. They also said, they found Jesus misleading their nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King, Luke 23:2.
Notice also the hypocrisy which shows they were determined to have an innocent man killed, John 18:29-30, they were prepared to lie to achieve their purpose, Luke 23:2.
They charged Him with sedition, rebellion and treason, Luke 23:2. Since Jesus was sinless, the only option they had was to make up a bunch of lies about Him to get Him charged.
Pilate tells them to take Jesus and judge Him according to their law, but the Jews reply that they aren't permitted to put anyone to death, John 18:31. The word 'yourselves' is emphatic; if the prisoner couldn't be charged with crimes against Roman law, then it wasn't for Pilate to decide.

Their reply reveals their desire, not that Jesus shall be fairly tried, merely that he be killed, 'it's not lawful for us to put any man to death', John 18:32. The Jews didn't have the authority to carry out sentences of capital punishment that were determined by their own courts, capital crimes had to be tried by Roman officials.
They wanted to put Jesus to death in accordance with Leviticus 24:16, which demands death for the blasphemer, but as they were under Roman Law, they couldn't do it without Pilate's permission. Jesus had predicted that He would die by crucifixion, John 3:14 / John 12:32 / Matthew 20:19.
If the Jews had executed Him, it would have been by stoning, the Law's penalty for blasphemy, but He was to be executed by being crucified, a method never used by the Jews.

Most likely, the chief priests wanted Jesus to be put to death by the Romans because of the implications for Jesus' claims to be the Son of God, Galatians 3:13, 'Curse. Curse. Cursed.' Deuteronomy 21:23.
Notice the words, 'You, 'emphasis', you are the King of the Jews?' Matthew 27:11 / Mark 15:2 / Luke 23:3 / John 18:33. All four Gospels record that this was the charge on which the Sanhedrin asked for Jesus to be condemned.
Pilate asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews, and Jesus replied, You have said so, Matthew 27:11 / Mark 15:2 / Luke 23:3. Jesus admits that He is a king. Pilate must have expected a political revolutionary, a self-styled 'king' who posed a threat to the rule of Rome.
Jesus was the King of Israel, John 1:49 / John 12:13, but His kingdom was spiritual, John 18:36. The word 'My Kingdom', 'basileia', means sovereignty, royal power, dominion. Jesus asserts the spiritual nature of His reign, 'My 'basileia' is not of this world, not from the world,' John 18:36.
If it were physical, then His disciples would fight, John 18:36. It's not worldly in worldly means, 'My kingdom doesn't belong to this world. If it did, my followers would be fighting to save me from arrest by the Jews.'
In the garden, He had forbidden His followers to fight, even to save Him, John 18:10-11 / Matthew 26:51-52 / Matthew 5:43-48 / Romans 12:17-21 / Ephesians 6:10-17.
In John 18:37, we find an ironic question, 'You are a king then. You!' Obviously, Jesus wasn't a leader of the sedition, just as obviously, He claimed to be King of the Jews. What did he mean? Jesus' answer is 'you say it correctly, you speak correctly, for I am a King, certainly I am the King!'
Jesus says, 'This is why He was born, and for this reason He has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth, John 18:37. Everyone who is of the truth, is a friend of the truth, who belongs to the truth, hears and listens to my voice,' John 18:37.
If the governor's sole consideration had been justice, that would have been the end of the matter, but he was influenced by considerations of political expediency and personal safety.

One who is 'of the truth,' John 18:37, will put it before every other consideration, Proverbs 23:23. The word, 'truth', 'alethea,' means reality, that which is genuine as opposed to that which is false, John 14:6. Pilate wasn't 'of the truth', Luke 8:15.
Pilate tells Jesus that He is a king, and Jesus tells him that He is a king, and this was the reason He was born. He was born to testify concerning the truth, John 18:37. Everyone who is of truth hears Jesus' voice, John 18:37. Pilate then asks him what is truth? John 18:38.
We don't know what Pilate's attitude was; John merely records the fact. Pilate's question couldn't be answered by a simple yes or no. In the political sense, as Pilate would use the term, he wasn't king, and in the spiritual sense, as Jesus used the term, He was king.

Jesus replies to Pilate and asks if he is saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell him about Me? Matthew 27:34. In John 18:35, Pilate is basically saying, 'I am not a Jew, am I?' As if to say, 'I am not interested in your theocratic subtleties.'

The governor is impatient and says, 'Your own nation and the chief priests, the Sanhedrin, have handed you over to me. What have you done?' What had caused the Jews, who might have been expected to support their 'king', to demand his death? He must be guilty of some serious crime. What is it? John 18:35.

Despite the chief priests and elders accusing Jesus harshly of many things, Mark 15:3, Jesus didn't answer, Matthew 27:12. Pilate asks Jesus if He hears all the things being testified against Him, Matthew 27:13, but Jesus didn't answer, Matthew 27:14 / Mark 15:4. Despite Pilate asking Jesus about the allegations, Jesus remained silent, which amazed Pilate, Matthew 27:14 / Mark 15:5.

The Jews accused Him of many things but Pilate was honest enough to declare that he found no basis to charge Jesus, Luke 23:4 / John 18:38. He was to say this, three times, John 19:4 / John 19:6. This was in accordance with Roman law, Matthew 27:11 / 1 Timothy 8:13.

Pilate questions Jesus about His claims but under Roman Law, there were no grounds to have Him executed, John 18:31. Jesus' teaching did stir up the people, Luke 23:5, but the people who were stirred up weren't the common people; it was the religious leaders, Mark 7:1-9. It was no longer the Israel of God, but their nation. Because Jesus was Galilean and Galilee wasn't Pilate's jurisdiction, he sent Jesus off to Herod, Luke 23:6-7.

JESUS BEFORE HEROD

Luke is the only writer who records Jesus before Herod, Luke 23:6-12. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee and Perea, which was where most of Jesus' ministry took place.

This is where we know that earlier the Pharisees lied about Herod wanting to kill Jesus, Luke 13:31, because we see that Herod had an opportunity to do so, but didn't because he would send Jesus back to Pilate, Luke 23:11.

Herod only wanted to see Jesus because he had heard of the many miracles that Jesus had performed, Luke 23:8. I's clear he thought of Jesus as some kind of showman or magician who was here to entertain the masses, Acts 4:26-27. Jesus didn't answer Herod because He didn't accept his authority; Herod had no place of authority, Luke 23:9. Probably because the chief priests were vehemently accusing him, Luke 23:11, Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked Jesus, then even dressed Him in an elegant robe,' Luke 23:11. We also see the tremendous self-control of Jesus; He knew exactly what was happening and what would eventually happen, John 10:17-18.

Notice that Pilate and Herod became friends, Luke 23:12. The hatred may have started between Pilate and Herod when Pilate had previously put down a probable insurrection in Galilee that was under Herod's jurisdiction, Luke 13:1-2. Whatever the reason was for their hatred of each other seems to be laid to rest at this point.

JESUS SECOND APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

'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. 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." But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 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!” All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!” Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.’ Matthew 27:15-26

Pilate now summons the chief priests and the rulers and the people and says to them, they have brought Jesus to him as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Jesus before them, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him, Luke 23:13-24.
He tells them that even Herod didn’t find anything in Jesus which describes death, Luke 23:15. Then Pilate declares that he will punish Jesus and then set Him free, Luke 23:16.
Pilate appears before what was now a mob and offers Jesus as the one to be set free, as was the tradition at that time of the year, Matthew 27:15 / Mark 15:6 / Luke 23:17 / John 18:39. Pilate knew that releasing Jesus would not please the crowd.
So, he tried to please the mob with a series of four cowardly compromises. Giving them what they wanted, without this whole fiasco turning into a gross miscarriage of justice.

It was a custom of the Roman governor to release someone during the Passover feast, Matthew 27:15 / Mark 15:6 / Luke 23:17 / John 18:39. This was done in order to appease the most radical Jews of the Roman Empire who were in Jerusalem at this time. Pilate asks the mob if they wish that he release for them the King of the Jews? John 18:39.
We are told that Barabbas was a notorious prisoner, Matthew 27:16, who had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection, Mark 15:7, a robber, John 18:40 and a murderer, Luke 23:19.
From this Mark’s account, we learn that Barabbas was a terrorist against the Roman government, Mark 15:7. He was possibly a member of the Zealot group of Jews whose ambition was to free Palestine from Roman occupation.
On this occasion and others, it seems that Pilate was trying to find some reason to release Jesus. Pilate once more asks, Whom do they want him to release for them? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ? Matthew 27:17. Mark records that Pilate asks them if they want him to release for them the King of the Jews? Mark 15:8-9.
Again, we see their hypocrisy; that was the kind of Messiah they wanted, one who would throw off the Roman yoke.
They lied about Jesus because they were determined to kill Him, John 11:53. Pilate knew they were motivated by ‘envy’, Matthew 27:18 / Mark 15:10.
Pilate sat on the judgment seat,’ Matthew 27:19 / Acts 18:12 / Acts 18:16-17, was a raised platform on which a Roman judge sat to pronounce a sentence, and Matthew 27:19 tells us of the message from Pilate’s wife, ‘have nothing to do with that righteous man.’
Notice it was the chief priests and the elders who persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death, Matthew 27:20. It is the religious leaders who are stirring up the crowd to release Barabbas, Mark 15:11.
Pilate again asked the mob, which of the two do they want him to release? And they said, Barabbas.’ Matthew 27:21 / John 18:40. Pilate then asked what shall he do with Jesus, who is called Christ? And they all said, Crucify Him! Matthew 27:22.
Mark tells us that Pilate asked them what he should do with Him whom they call the King of the Jews? Mark 15:12, and they shouted back, Crucify Him! Mark 15:13.
Pilate again asked, why, what evil has He done? But they kept shouting all the more, saying, ‘Crucify Him!’ Matthew 27:23 / Mark 15:14. Pilate appears to be determined to release Jesus, and so once again he addressed the mob, but they kept on calling out, saying, ‘Crucify, crucify Him!’ Luke 23:20-21.
The word ‘him’ isn’t in the text. This has been called ‘an ominous chant, a monotonous refrain, ‘Crucify! Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!’ manipulated by their rulers, the mob shouted the same demand.

For a third time, he asks them what evil has Jesus this man has done? He has found in Jesus no guilt demanding death, he will punish Jesus and release Him, Luke 23:22.
But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified, and their voices began to prevail, Luke 23:23.
Believing that the mob wouldn't want a violent thug released to them, it didn't work. The mob chose Barabbas, Matthew 27:20 / Mark 15:11 / Luke 23:19 / John 18:40.
Pilate wasn't a Jew and had little understanding or sympathy for Jewish Law. He had the power of life and death over the people, but he would be reluctant to do anything that would disturb the peace; he didn't want a riot on his hands, Matthew 27:24.
The nationalistic emotions of the multitudes, therefore, were running high. As governor of the region, Pilate had to make compromises with the intense Jewish multitudes in order to prevent riots in the city.

With great pomp and ceremony, Pilate had a bowl of water brought to him and washed his hands, Matthew 27:24 / Deuteronomy 21:6-9. He tells the mob 'I am innocent of the blood of this good man, Matthew 27:24.
Notice that John doesn't record Pilate's 'hand washing'. The responsibility is yours!' And they said, That's fine with us, 'His blood is on us and on our children!' Matthew 27:25 / Acts 20:26., Matthew 27:24-26.
Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, Matthew 27:26 / Mark 15:15, and Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted, Luke 23:24. He then released Barabbas but delivered Jesus to the mob, Luke 23:25.

THE SOLDIERS MOCK JESUS

> 'Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.' Matthew 27:27-31

As Barabbas is released, Roman soldiers flogged Jesus, mocked Him, and led Him out to be crucified, Matthew 27:26 / Mark 15:15 / John 19:1. Flogging was the governor's attempt to convince the Jews that Jesus had suffered enough and should be released. Luke 23:16.
The soldiers then led Jesus out to be crucified outside of the city, Matthew 27:31 / Mark 15:20 / Luke 23:26 / Numbers 15:35 / 1 Kings 21:13 / Acts 7:58 / Hebrews 13:11-12, while a mournful multitude of faithful disciples followed, Luke 23:27-31.
The mob rejected Jesus in favour of Barabbas, a criminal, and so, Pilate decides he'll have Jesus flogged within an inch of His life, and that'll come close to the real thing and satisfy the mob, Mark 15:15.

FLOGGING

Pilate had Jesus flogged, John 19:1. Jesus suffered intensely in His last few hours. After being up all night, subjected to the stress of six different trials, if we compare the accounts in Matthew, Luke, and John, He was also scourged, Mark 15:15.

Flogging was usually administered to one who was about to be crucified. Antiochus Epiphanies used it to force Jews to eat swine's flesh, 2 Maccabees 6:30 / 2 Maccabees 7:1. The flagellum was similar to the 'cat o' nine tails', a handle with leather thongs, tipped with bone or metal.
The prisoner was stripped to the waist and then bound in a stooping position to the post. The blows were applied to the back and loins, sometimes even to the face and the bowels. So hideous was the punishment that the victim usually fainted and not rarely died under it.

Eusebius describes the death of Christian martyrs at Smyrna about 155 A.D., 'so torn with scourges that their veins were laid bare, and the inner muscles and sinews, and even the bowels, were exposed'. Josephus tells of a man who was 'flogged to the bone' before a Roman governor.

Flogging was accomplished by tying bits of bone, metal and glass to a whip and then striking the victim's back. This procedure produced excruciating pain, much loss of blood and sometimes even death. The victim's back became a bloody mass.

Remember the Jews practised flogging, which consisted of thirty-nine lashes, but here, the Romans had no restrictions on how many lashes they delivered on the victim; they would carry on until the one doing the lashing would tire.

Once again, all four Gospels mention the flogging but say absolutely nothing about it; there is no attempt to play upon the reader's emotions. Also, at that age, people were perfectly familiar with it and needed no explanations.

After flogging Him, they took thorns, wove them into a crown, put it on Jesus' head, and began to beat on it, causing intense pain. They put a scarlet robe on Him, Matthew 27:28, Mark's account calls it purple, only to later rip it off, undoubtedly tearing open the blood-dried wounds on His back in the process.
Then came the crucifixion. Imagine striking the very One who created the universe! Imagine striking the very One who created them! Colossians 1:16. 'The whole battalion' was involved in everything which is about to happen, Matthew 27:27 / Mark 15:16.

THE PURPLE ROBE

John records 'a purple robe', John 19:2, whilst Matthew records a 'scarlet' robe, Matthew 27:28. Purple, with the ancients, was a vague term for bright, rich colour, and would be used of crimson as well as violet.
It was probably the cloak of a Roman soldier, i.e., an officer. The 'robe', 'himatismos', is used generally of costly or stately raiment, the apparel of kings, of officials, etc., Luke 7:25.

CROWN OF THORNS

It was often a prelude to crucifixion, but in this case, it wasn't, as Pilate later tried to have Jesus released, and this flogging was an attempt to satisfy the Jews without killing Jesus.

The soldiers went further than just flogging and placed a crown of thorns upon His head, Matthew 27:29. This was a mock coronation for the one claiming to be the king of the Jews, and it was followed by mock worship of Him. There are two thoughts concerning 'a crown of thorns.'

1. That it was an instrument of torture, long, sharp spikes turned inward, or

2. That it was a radiant crown, with the spikes turned outward, similar in appearance to a crown worn by an emperor.

There is a shrub in Palestine called 'spina Christi' or 'palimus shrub' which has long, sharp spikes, and leaves similar to the ivy used for emperors' or generals' crowns; this is the traditional source of the crown of thorns.

Matthew says that they 'put a staff in his hand', Matthew 27:29. Notice they spit on Jesus, Matthew 27:30 / and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again, Matthew 27:30 / Mark 15:19.
Note the tense, 'they kept coming up to Him, kept striking Him,' John 19:3, it was repeated action. The picture is of a soldier after soldier coming up to Jesus, kneeling before Him, slapping Him, spitting on Him and shouting.
The soldiers then bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' Matthew 27:29 / Mark 15:18 / John 19:3. They worshipped Him, Mark 15:19. In John 19:4, we see Pilate for the second time telling the people that he can find no charge with which to charge Jesus.
He ought to have released Jesus at this point; if the prisoner's guilt or innocence had been the sole consideration, Jesus would have been set free before this, but he is afraid of possible political repercussions.

When Jesus comes out, Pilate shows Him to the crowd, 'here is your man!', John 19:5. This was an attempt to gain sympathy for Jesus as if to say, 'look at this poor fellow!' How could they accuse such a pitiable object of treason? It's a weak attempt to free Jesus. The governor is almost begging the Jews to show pity for the prisoner.
When the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out, 'Crucify, crucify!' and once more Pilate tells them to take Jesus themselves and crucify Him, for he find no guilt in Jesus, John 19:6.
They have tried to have Jesus condemned for sedition, Luke 23:2, now in John 19:7, they are forced to reveal the real charge against him, 'He ought to die because he made himself the Son of God'.
The charge was blasphemy, and their 'Law' of Moses called for the death penalty, Leviticus 24:16. It was on this charge that the Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus to death, Mark 14:61-64 / Matthew 27:23-66, but they don't reveal this until they are forced to do so. If Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was false, then the Sanhedrin was right in condemning Him to death for blasphemy.
Pilate knows that the Jews aren't allowed to crucify someone, and the offer to them here isn't genuine but an attempt to get the crowd to move away. He is afraid of them, John 19:8, and wants this problem to go away as soon as possible. The governor was already a frightened man, John 19:8; two things would have made him afraid.
1. His wife's message, Matthew 27:19.
2. The words and demeanour of Jesus.

Pilate knows that it's the policy of Rome to allow the natives religious freedom, as long as they worship Caesar, claiming deity as well. The Jews are aware of this policy and hope to use it to persuade the reluctant Pilate.

And so, Pilate takes Jesus into the Praetorium, and asks, 'Where are you from?', 'To what world do you belong?' John 19:9. Notice that Jesus didn't answer, John 19:9, perhaps because worldly Pilate had already been told, and could not grasp the answer, John 18:37-38.
Perhaps also because a man who would scourge a prisoner, he had declared innocent, did not deserve a reply. To the governor, a kingdom based entirely on 'truth' was incomprehensible, for Jesus to have said that He was the Son of God who had come from heaven would have been more so.

He seems to get into a rage, and he can't fathom what Jesus is all about. He arrogantly brags about his power, trying to get a response out of Jesus, even offering his freedom for the correct answers. Refusing to answer could be regarded as 'contempt of court'.

Pilate, as Tiberius' representative, had the power of life and death over a prisoner, John 19:10. He says, 'Do you not know that I have power 'exousia' to release you, and power 'exousia' to crucify you?' The governor's 'exousia' was delegated authority, derived from Caesar.
Calmly, Jesus tells Pilate of the origin of His power, His authority is 'given from above', from God, John 19:11 / Romans 13:1. God had entrusted Him with the power He has, and He is answerable to God for the way He uses that power. Jesus reassures Pilate that he is not totally to blame for putting the Son of God to death, as he does so out of ignorance of the truth.
Caiaphas, acting officially for the Sanhedrin, had delivered Jesus to Pilate; he had 'the greater sin,' John 19:11. The deeper guilt lies with the man who 'handed me over to you'.
This is Jesus' final statement to Pilate, and in it, He affirms God's supremacy, He is in control of human affairs, and also man's accountability; the Jewish rulers and the Roman governors are answerable to God.

John tells us that Pilate knew that Jesus was no leader of the sedition against Rome, he was also frightened, so he 'sought', notice again the tense, 'kept on seeking', to free Him, John 19:12.
John doesn't say how he did so, but he records that the governor finally gave up the efforts because of fear, John 19:12. The chief priests however had the Law, they ought to have recognised the Messiah but instead, they are about to force His execution.
This short speech of Jesus impresses Pilate, who recognises some characteristics that he doesn't quite understand, so he tries again to persuade the Jews to allow Jesus to go free.

The Jews shouted, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friends', John 19:12. This was political blackmail, and it ended the efforts to release Jesus. The Jews were saying, 'Free this man and we will accuse you to the Emperor. The charge against you will be high treason, that you released a man who claimed to be King of the Jews.' Tiberius was a very suspicious ruler, even a hint of disloyalty would be disastrous for a Roman official. Pilate knew that a charge of high treason could cost him position, liberty, and life, and so, this frightened him, and then he decided to put personal safety before justice, to condemn an innocent man to death.

The Jew's new weapon against Jesus is all-powerful against Pilate. Jesus claims to be the king; thus, He opposes Caesar, who is the king of all the vast Roman domains.

This was the ultimate hypocrisy, as all present knew that the Jews didn't consider Caesar their king and held no allegiance to him. This very good argument must have again caused a troubled Pilate to slip into a rage, but they now had him in a corner.

Pilate makes one last attempt to change the mob's mind, but they will not hear of it; they want Jesus dead, John 19:12. John 19:13 could imply that Pilate had Jesus sit on the judgement seat; the Greek could have either meaning. The Jew's threat has decided Pilate, and at once he prepares to pass sentence; he 'brought Jesus out', that is, out of the Praetorium and 'sat down on the judgment seat', Acts 18:12 / Acts 18:16-17, this was a raised platform on which Roman judges sat to pronounce sentence.
'The pavement', John 19:13, 'luthostratos', was stone-paved; Josephus states that Temple Mount was covered with a mosaic pavement. Hebrew 'Gabbatha' means raised place, elevation. John 19:14 seems to make this quite possible, Pilate showing the Jews a weak, blood-covered man not able even to stand and needing the seat more than Pilate.

THE DAY OF PREPARATION

The Day of Preparation was the day before Passover, John 19:14, which began at the next sunset. John mentions it was 'about the sixth hour'; scholars and commentators are divided about whether John uses Jewish or Roman time. Jewish time is twelve noon, but Roman time is six a.m.

John is in Asia Minor, writing toward the end of the first century, when Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the Jewish state ceased to exist. It would be natural for him to give the time according to Roman reckoning. In Mark 15:25, Mark would use Jewish reckoning; at 6 a.m., the trial was in progress, and at nine a.m. Jesus was crucified.

When Pilate says, 'Behold your King!', John 19:14, this was a joke in bad taste at the expense of the Jews. 'They yelled, 'off with him! Off with him! Crucify Him!' John 19:15. Pilate replied, 'The King of you shall I crucify?' John 19:15.

The chief priests, who were the religious leaders and teachers of the nation, replied, 'We have no king but Caesar,' John 19:15. In fact, they claimed that as Israel was God's special nation, God was their only King, and they hated Caesar and bitterly resented the Roman occupation.

With the use of the argument by the mob, in favour of Caesar, Pilate knows that he has lost to satisfy them, and so, he hands Jesus over to be crucified, John 19:16. This declaration was 'the crowning apostasy of Judaism' and 'the utterance of a nation turned traitor to its noblest traditions'.

After they had mocked Jesus, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him, Matthew 27:31 / Mark 15:20. Then they led Jesus away to crucify Him, Matthew 27:31 / Mark 15:20 / John 19:16.

No doubt he shows them the wounds that have been inflicted in the hope that they would now be satisfied, but alas the appearance of Jesus only makes the mob rowdier and bloodthirsty. You never get rid of a pack of wolves by showing them blood!

CONCLUSION

The trials before the Roman authorities started with Pilate, John 18:23, after Jesus was beaten. The charges brought against Him were very different from the charges in His religious trials. He was charged with inciting people to riot, forbidding the people to pay their taxes, and claiming to be King.

Pilate found no reason to kill Jesus, so he sent Him to Herod, Luke 23:7. Herod had Jesus ridiculed, but wanting to avoid the political liability, he sent Jesus back to Pilate, Luke 23:11-12.

This was the last trial as Pilate tried to appease the animosity of the Jews by having Jesus scourged. The Roman scourge is a terrible whipping of thirty-nine lashes.

In a final effort to have Jesus released, Pilate offered the prisoner Barabbas to be crucified, and Jesus released, but to no avail. The crowds called for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified.

Pilate granted their demand and surrendered Jesus to their will, Luke 23:25. The trials of Jesus represent the ultimate mockery of justice. Jesus, the most innocent man in the history of the world, was found guilty of crimes and sentenced to death by crucifixion.

HISTORY OF CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion is an ancient method of execution, in which the victim was tied or nailed to a large wooden cross and left to hang there until death. It was never performed for ritual or symbolic reasons; usually, its purpose was only to provide a particularly painful, gruesome, and public death, using whatever means were most expedient for that goal.

The history of crucifixion can be traced back to the ancient Persians, and there's evidence to support the Greeks practising this form of torture. As always, the Romans adopted the custom from Carthage and used it for slaves, rebels, and anyone who was their enemy, along with criminals.

While most Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion, if you were a Roman and found guilty of treason, then you could face crucifixion. Crucifixion was considered a humiliating way to die. The prisoner usually had to carry the horizontal beam, patibulum, to the place of execution, not necessarily the whole cross.

Crucifixion was an art form for the Romans, who had specially trained men to carry out the sentence. There would usually be a commanding centurion and four soldiers. When it was done in an established place of execution, the vertical beam, stipes. was sometimes permanently embedded in the ground.

THE CROSS

The horizontal beam of the cross, the transom, could be fixed at the very top of the vertical piece, the upright, to form a 'T' called a tau cross. The horizontal beam could also be affixed at some distance below the top, often in a mortise, to form a 'T-shape' called a Latin cross. Alternatively, the cross could consist of two diagonal beams to form an 'X'. A single, vertical wooden stake with no transom at all has also been cited by some.

THE NAILS

The 'nails' were tapered iron spikes approximately five to seven inches long with a square shaft 3/8 inch across. The victim was probably affixed to the cross by ropes, nails, or some combination of the two.

In popular depictions of the crucifixion, possibly derived from a literal reading of the description in the Gospel of John, of Jesus' wounds being 'in the hands', the victim is shown supported only by nails driven straight through the feet and the palms of the hands.

However, the flesh of the hands can't support a person's body weight, so some other means must have been used to support most of the weight, such as tying the wrists to the cross beam.

Another possibility, that doesn't require tying, is that the nails were inserted just above the wrist, between the two bones of the forearm. the radius and the ulna. The nails could also be driven through the wrist, in a space between four carpal bones, which is the location shown in the Shroud of Turin. As some historians have suggested, the Gospel words that are translated as 'hands' may have in fact included everything below the mid-forearm.

Another possibility is that the nails may have been driven in on an angle, entering in the palm in the crease that delineates the bulky region at the base of the thumb, and exiting in the wrist, passing through the carpal tunnel.

The Romans would often display the victims, still on the cross, in rows. There would be row after row of condemned criminals lining the streets of the main entrance to the city, so that everyone entering a new city would know what

would happen to them if they didn't adhere to Roman laws and regulations. It also sent a powerful message to any oncoming enemies of the fate which awaits them.

PUBLICLY NAKED

Crucifixion was a very public affair; criminals, rebels, etc., needed to be reminded of the terrible consequences of breaking Roman law. Fear ruled the day. Unlike what we see in many artists' impressions of the crucifixion, the victim was usually stripped naked and hung naked.

Historian art has most people who were crucified covered in a loincloth, but this simply isn't true. Nakedness was often a symbol of spiritual shame and ignominy.

CAUSE OF DEATH

Death could come in hours or days, depending on the exact methods, the health of those crucified, and environmental circumstances. It's widely accepted that the typical cause of death is asphyxiation.

When the whole-body weight was supported by the stretched arms, the victim would have severe difficulty exhaling, due to hyper-expansion of the lungs. The victim would therefore have to draw himself up by his arms or have his feet supported by tying or by a woodblock.

Indeed, Roman executioners were said to break the victim's legs, after he had hung for some time, in order to hasten his death. Once deprived of support and unable to lift himself, the victim would die within a few minutes.

The Romans often broke the prisoners' legs to rush the death process. Please note that the Roman soldiers responsible for carrying out the sentence were responsible for the victim until they died. In other words, the Romans weren't being kind by breaking the victim's legs; they broke the victim's legs so that they could get on with their other duties.

Burial afterwards wasn't usually permitted. According to history, Emperor Constantine abolished crucifixion in the Roman Empire when Christianity became the state religion.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

'As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). There, they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head, they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.' Matthew 27:32-37

Notice that the mere fact of the crucifixion is recorded, in John 19:18, as with flogging, John 19:1, it isn't described. First-century readers knew well what was involved in these acts.
Roman law didn't permit a Roman citizen to be crucified; it was regarded as the death of a slave. The punishment was handed out for such crimes as treason, desertion in the face of the enemy, robbery, piracy, assassination, sedition, etc.

Cicero said the folowing.

‘Let every name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen but even from his thought, his eyes, his ears.’

After Jesus was flogged, we know that He carried His own crossbar, weighing in at seventy-five to one hundred and twenty-five pounds, and He carried it outside the main city walls. The upright part of the cross was probably permanently mounted in the crucifixion area.

The crossbar would be balanced on the shoulders, and His arms were tied to the crossbar. We can only imagine what this would have been like if he had tripped or fallen. He couldn’t use His arms to break their fall; he would likely fall face-first into the ground.

Jesus went out, bearing His own cross, John 19:17. As they went out of the city gates, Simon from Cyrene, Matthew 27:32 / Mark 15:21 / Luke 23:26, which is in north Africa, Acts 2:10 / Acts 6:9 / Acts 11:20 / Acts 13:1, was forced to carry the cross of Jesus, Matthew 27:32 / Mark 15:21 / Luke 23:26. This must mean that Jesus was unable to carry it, an execution party would show no mercy to a condemned man.
Once Jesus reached the place for crucifixion, Golgotha, or Calvary, Matthew 27:33 / Mark 15:22, in English, it means ‘skull,’ John 19:17. He was offered a drink of wine mixed with myrrh to act as a mild painkiller.
Although this was a kind gesture, usually done by the women, Jesus refused to drink, Psalm 69:21 / Matthew 27:34 / Mark 15:23. We need to read Luke 23:37-41 for details of the procession to Golgotha. It’s called ‘the place of a skull,’ John 19:17, but what and where was this? Here are three proposals.
1. It was a hill resembling a skull, but the Bible nowhere describes it as a hill.

2. It was a place of execution, littered with skulls.

However, the Jews wouldn’t allow bones of dead men to litter the ground close to the city. Joseph of Arimathea wouldn’t have a tomb near such a place, John 19:41.
3. That according to legend, it was the place where Adam’s skull had been buried.

The truth of the matter is that we simply don’t know why this place was simply named ‘Skull’, Luke 23:33. Whatever the speculation, the fact remains.
Jesus is taken by Roman soldiers to the place of execution, called Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, which was probably the hill on the Northern side of Jerusalem. Golgotha was close to the city, and the inscription was read by many, John 19:20.
The Gospels suggest it was close to the road as Jesus was insulted by ‘those who passed by’, Matthew 27:39 / Mark 15:29. It’s outside the city walls, a wall was present at the time, and the hill has a strange appearance, almost like the face of the skull.
This may well be why it is called the place of the skull and why it was designated the place of execution. Some even say that the crucifixion occurred at the present-day site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but this place is now generally accepted to be inside the city walls during Jesus’ time.

There was a large number of women who mourned and wailed for Jesus. Jesus turns to speak to them and tells them that they should mourn for themselves, Luke 23:27.
Jesus knows the calamities that were about to come upon them in the desolation of their city by the Romans, Luke 23:28-31. It was at this point that Jesus says, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do, Luke 23:34.
Note the numerous prophecies that were being fulfilled at this time. They divided His garments, Psalms 22:18 / Matthew 27:35 / Mark 15:24 / Luke 23:34 / John 19:24.

With Him, they crucified two thieves, Isaiah 53:9 / Isaiah 53:12 / Matthew 27:38 / Mark 15:27 / Luke 22:32-33. He was numbered with the transgressors, Isaiah 53:12. They blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, Psalm 22:6-7 / Psalm 69:7 / Matthew 17:39-40 / Matthew 27:39 / Mark 15:28.
Jesus' clothes were then divided up, which was also a fulfilment of prophecy, Psalm 22:17-18 / Matthew 27:35 / Mark 15:24 / Luke 23:34 / John 19:23-24, and the soldiers kept watch at the foot of the cross, Psalm 22:17 / Matthew 27:36.
The 'four parts' would consist of a head-dress, turban, sandals, outer robe and girdle, the soldiers cast lots for these. Because His tunic was seamless, they then diced for this as a separate item, John 19:23-24.
Josephus, in his writings, says the following.

'The linen tunic of the Jewish high priest was a seamless garment; this fulfilled Psalm 22:18.'
John's statement in this verse sums up his abhorrence of the whole incident, 'so this is what the soldiers did.' John 19:24. We are reminded again that this was to fulfil prophecy, John 19:23-24 / Psalm 22:18.
The clothes Jesus had been wearing were split up among the Romans present, and His only possession, His cloth, was gambled for. Jesus was thus left with nothing to give to those He had left behind. He had given His all, even Himself.

The actual physical pain endured by Jesus is too horrific to contemplate, John 19:19-22. Over His head on the cross was the inscription, 'THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS'.
It was the custom of those days that the accusation under which men were condemned should, in every case, be posted above their heads and under the circumstances, the inscription posted by Pilate amounted to a sadistic jest.

The people passing along the road North all saw Jesus on the cross and read the sign as it was in all three main languages of the time, John 19:20. Aramaic, used by the common people, Latin, used by the elite and legal rulers of the empire, and Greek, used by the forces in the region, Luke 23:38 / John 19:20, it was the language that was universal at the time. Hebrew was being used only by the Jews in their religious dealings.
Regarding the 'notice', 'title', 'titlon,' John 19:19, this was a board stating the victim's name and crime for which they were condemned. He was adamant, and he refused to change what he had written, John 19:21-22. Notice the four different accounts of what was written above Jesus' head.

'THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS'. Matthew 27:37

'THE KING OF THE JEWS'. Mark 15:26

'THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS'. Luke 23:38

'JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS'. John 19:19

When we put the words together, we see that it would read as follows.

'THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.'

Pilate wouldn't remove it, John 19:20, probably because he wanted to do something to impose his will on the people in response to them imposing their will on him by having Jesus put there. This was, of course, an entirely honest and true statement to make. Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews and the King of all nations.
Pilate had been willing to yield to the ruler's demand for the death of an innocent man because His own safety was threatened, John 19:12-13, and the Jews protested to Pilate about the sign.
The chief priests of the Jews come to Pilate and ask him not to write the words The King of the Jews but that he said, I am King of the Jews, John 19:21. Pilate tells them what he has written, he has written, John 19:22.

‘Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” In the same way, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way, the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.’ Matthew 27:38-44

There were also two thieves who were carrying their crosses with Jesus, Matthew 27:38 / Luke 23:33 / John 19:18. On each side, they crucified a common thief to show their contempt for Him; He was numbered with the transgressors, Isaiah 53:9-12 / Matthew 27:38 / Mark 15:27 / Luke 22:32-33.

When we consider that the One who was struck and mocked in these few passages was the One who created all things, including those who were mocking and striking Him, Colossians 1:16, we realise that God is far greater than the imagination of our minds.

He had the power to call on the angels of heaven for His own deliverance, Matthew 26:53-54, but He didn’t issue the command. He allowed Himself to be humiliated in order to provide redemption for those who mocked and struck Him.

This was the darkest hour in the world’s history, yet out of the darkness would soon come light as Jesus conquered death and the grave, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 / Revelation 1:17-18.

Bystanders laughed at the idea that He could rebuild the temple when He couldn’t even save Himself, Matthew 27:39-40 / Mark 15:29-30. Come down from the cross, they taunted, and we’ll believe in You! They blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, Psalm 22:6-7 / Psalm 69:7 / Matthew 17:39-40 / Mark 15:29-30.

Some Jewish officials standing nearby smirked that He had been able to save others but was powerless to save Himself, Matthew 27:41-43 / Mark 15:31-32. The chief priests are also mocking Him, Psalm 69:19 / Luke 23:34-35. Jesus was certainly the prophesied Messiah.

The soldiers also mocked Him and offered Him vinegar, saying, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself, Luke 23:36-37. Even the two thieves who were executed on either side of the Lord ridiculed Him, Matthew 27:44 / Mark 15:32 / Luke 23:39-43.

We see in John 19:18 that ‘two others’ were crucified with Jesus. Matthew and Mark say, ‘robbers,’ Matthew 27:38 / Mark 15:27, whilst Luke says, ‘criminals,; Luke 23:32. John says one on each side. This occurred simply to ensure Isaiah 53:12 was fulfilled.

THE CONVERSATIONS ON THE CROSS

In Luke 23:39-43, we find the full conversation which went on between the two thieves and Jesus, which is worth having a look at.

THE CROSS ON THE RIGHT

On this right-handed cross, we see the figure of a dying thief. He is in pain and suffering. Yet more significant than his physical anguish is his scorn and hatred for Jesus.

He said, ‘If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us,’ Luke 23:39. Has there ever been any ‘if’ about it? That little ‘if’ has enough venom in it to destroy a soul.

What had Jesus done that so aroused this thief? Nothing that we know of. He challenged Christ to save 'yourself and us,' Luke 23:39. What impudence! What had this thief ever done that entitled him to make such a demand? Here is a thief, within the shadow of death. Obviously, his sins did not bother him even as he was about to die.
How much this reminds us of those who live in sin all their lives and then, when faced with death, they rail at God, accusing Him of dealing harshly with them, demanding that He do something to relieve them of their situation.

HIS WAS A CROSS OF REBELLION

This cross depicts the enmity that many have toward Jesus. It typifies clearly the unbelief of the world at large toward Jesus. Thousands have perished on this right-handed cross of rebellion ever since. Despite all that we know about Him, men still reject him.

There is enough information in John's Gospel to produce faith in Christ, which can lead to salvation, John 20:30-31. Yet men reject Him despite the evidence, John 14:6.
We have a clear choice. The only way to eternal life is through Jesus. If men rebel and reject Him, then there is no hope. They are lost eternally, having never been cleansed by His blood.

THE CROSS ON THE LEFT

Again, we see the figure of a dying thief. Yet instead of dying in his sin, he was dying to sin. It was a cross of repentance. This thief twists himself upon the nails to look at the centre cross, but not to scoff in unbelief, but in recognition of who Jesus was, Luke 23:40-41. He, like the other thief, would like to get his hands free, but more importantly, to free himself from his guilt and sins.
Earlier this thief had joined with the other thief in reproaches against Christ at the beginning of the crucifixion, Matthew 27:44. But now we see in this man unfailing evidence of a great change.
As the day progresses, he becomes more and more aware that this was God Himself in the person of Jesus. Notice his faith and reverence in the presence of Deity. To the other thief, he said, 'Do you not even fear God?' Luke 23:40. There follows an immediate admission of his own guilt when he said, 'We receive the due reward of our deeds,' Luke 23:41. He expresses his belief that Jesus was suffering 'wrongfully'. But 'this Man has done nothing wrong,' Luke 23:41. Then there is his open confession of the Deity of Jesus. He calls him "Lord," Luke 23:43.
Finally, we see genuine repentance and humility on the part of this dying thief. He says to Jesus, 'Remember me when You come into Your kingdom,' Luke 23:42. He wanted to change and be in the Lord's kingdom.
Repentance, simply explained, is a change of heart, 2 Corinthians 7:10. Everything about this thief indicates his regret over his sins and a desire to be with the Lord.
What a difference between these two thieves! The first saw Jesus as only a man, the second saw Him as Lord. The first saw Jesus as a mock king, but the second saw Him as the 'King of kings,' Revelation 17:14 / Revelation 19:16. The first saw him as an impostor, the second saw Him as Saviour, John 3:16. We can understand better now why Jesus answered him, 'assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise,' Luke 23:43. Paradise is another term for heaven, both Jesus and the thief would be in heaven when they died, 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 / Revelation 2:7.

ONE WORD OF CAUTION

The salvation of this thief occurred while the Law of Moses was still in effect. About fifty days later, Christ would set in force His new covenant law. Today, we live under this new law, found in the New Testament, not under the Law of Moses.

The terms of salvation under this new covenant require that one believe, Hebrews 11:6; repent of one's sins, Acts 17:30, confess the name of Jesus, Acts 8:37, and then be baptised for the remission of one's sins, Acts 2:38.
Some have used this man to prove that one can be saved today without ever being baptised for the remission of sins. This is simply not the Lord's plan for us today.

THE MIDDLE CROSS

Here we have the cross of redemption. Jesus, our Redeemer, died for the sins of the world. By his blood, we can be brought back to God, Ephesians 1:7. It was also a suffering cross. We cannot begin to imagine the torture of those nails driven through His hands and feet. The victim of a Roman crucifixion literally suffered a thousand deaths.
There was also the shame and reproach associated with death on a cross. It was reserved for the vilest of criminals. Added to this were all the mocking and verbal abuse from the mob.

IT WAS A VICARIOUS CROSS

The thieves were suffering for their own crimes, but Jesus suffered for you and me, for our sins. He had no sin, 1 Peter 2:24. Our Lord was under no obligation to pay the debt for our sins. Someone had to suffer for sin, so he was willing, 1 Peter 3:18.
Why would Christ give up the glories of heaven and come down to this sinful earth to die for our sins? Because of our utter helplessness to provide a remedy for sins, Jeremiah 10:23. Also, He came to show us the redemptive love of God for sinful man, 1 John 4:9-10.
Why was it that He alone was the only one who could die for our sins? First, because He was spotless and able to provide the perfect sacrifice, 1 Peter 1:19. Second, it was because God, the Eternal Father, appointed Him for this work, Philippians. 2:6-8 / 1 Peter 1:20. To this middle cross, each sinner today must look for salvation. There is no other way, John 14:6 / Acts 4:12. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us of our sins.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

'From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").'
Matthew 27:45-46

Jesus' final hours on the cross lasted from approximately 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., a period of about six hours, Matthew 27:41-43. Answering the question of how long Jesus was on the cross is complicated by the fact that two systems of marking time are used in the Gospels.

Matthew, Mark and Luke use the Jewish system of marking time. John uses the Roman System. Using the Jewish system, Christ's crucifixion began at 9:00 a.m. Also, using the Jewish system of marking time, Matthew says that 'from the sixth hour there was darkness over the land until the ninth hour,' Matthew 27:45.

That is, the darkness lasted from 12 noon to 3 p.m. The darkness was a sign of God's personal presence in the crucifixion, Psalms 18:9. These were Jesus' final hours on the cross. Whilst Christ hung on the cross, there were four miraculous events which occurred.

1. The three hours of darkness, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45.
2. The veil of the temple was torn into two, Matthew 27:50-51/ Mark 15:37-38.
3. An earthquake, Matthew 27:50-52.
4. The graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, Matthew 27:50-53.

THE DARKNESS

When we think about what God was doing while Jesus hung on the cross, it shouldn't really surprise us that He provided some visible miracles for those who were onlookers.

Both Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus has been on the cross for three hours, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45. It's now noon, which means the sun would have been high in the sky. All of a sudden, complete darkness falls over the entire land for three hours. Luke tells us that the sun stopped shining altogether.

The word 'land' is the Greek word 'ge', which can mean a region, which would imply all of Palestine, but it can also mean the whole earth. So whether this darkness fell over Palestine only or the whole earth is really difficult to say.

The word darkness is the Greek word 'skotizo', and it carries with it the idea of sudden darkness. This wasn't something which happened over a period of time; it happened suddenly.

We can almost picture the silence as every animal and every person was wondering what was happening. We can almost imagine people speaking with each other, trying to understand exactly what was going on, Job 5:13-14 / 1 Samuel 2:9.

PROOF OUTSIDE OF THE SCRIPTURES THAT THIS DARKNESS HAPPENED

Tertullian said the following.

'In the same hour too, the light of day was withdrawn, when the sun at the very time was in his meridian blaze. Those who were not aware that this had been predicted about Christ, no doubt thought it an eclipse. You yourselves have the account of the world portent still in your archives!' Tertullian, Apology in the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), Vol. III, p. 35.

Why would Tertullian appeal to Proculus, a Roman senator, if the Roman records concerning this darkness weren't true?

The Greek Historian Rufinus, when writing to Roman historians, says the following.

‘Search your writings, and you shall find that in Pilates time, when Christ suffered, the sun was suddenly withdrawn and darkness followed’. Rufinus, Greek Historian

Rufinus would never have asked the Romans to search their records for the account of the darkness if it didn’t happen. The point is that this miraculous event did happen, and we know it happened because Pontius Pilate himself wrote about the event. Pontius Pilate sent the following report to Tiberius, emperor of Rome.

Note, the following quote has been debated for years as to whether it is legitimate.

‘And when he had been crucified, there was darkness over the whole earth, the sun having been completely hidden, and the heaven appearing dark, so that the stars appeared, but had at the same time their brightness darkened, as I suppose your reverence is not ignorant of, because in all the world they lighted lamps from the sixth hour until evening. And the moon, being like blood, did not shine the whole night, and yet she happened to be at the full.’ Pontius Pilate, To Tiberius in Ibid., Vol. III, p. 463.

Who or what caused the darkness? There are a few people who try to come up with answers as to where the darkness originated, but for this study, we’ll only look at four possibilities.

A NATURAL PHENOMENON

1. There are those who believe that the darkness was caused by a simple natural phenomenon.

They believe it was probably just an earthquake or some kind of volcanic eruption, after all, Matthew records there was an earthquake around this time, Matthew 27:54.
Although a volcano erupting may indeed cause thick dust to fill the air, both Matthew and Luke record that the entire land of Palestine was in complete darkness, but the darkness suddenly left after three hours.

Also, the Bible doesn’t mention any other earthquake happening before the darkness came, but it does record an earthquake happening afterwards when an angel rolled away the stone from Jesus’ grave, Matthew 28:2.

DUST STORM OR DARK CLOUDS

2. There are those who believe that the darkness was caused by some kind of dust storm or cloud cover.

Most people who have witnessed dust storms and thick black cloud coverings tell us that they can be spotted coming on the horizon, whereas the darkness recorded by Matthew and Luke came suddenly.

AN ECLIPSE

3. There are those who believe that the darkness was caused by an eclipse of the sun.

Remember, the reason for this darkness was because ‘the sun stopped shining’, Luke 23:45. The last total eclipse in the UK was on 11 August 1999. It could be seen over Cornwall and parts of Devon, which were on the path of totality, although cloud cover ruined the view for many areas.

The Natural History Museum says the following.

‘A solar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes between the Sun and Earth. When the Sun, Moon and Earth line up exactly, it causes a total eclipse. This is because the diameter of the Sun is 400 times that of the Moon, but coincidentally, it is also 400 times further away. During an eclipse, the Moon temporarily covers the Sun, blocking out the daylight for a short period and casting a shadow on part of Earth.’

The miraculous darkness recorded at the time of Christ’s crucifixion could not have been a solar eclipse because the Passover always occurred at the full moon. Many of us have witnessed eclipses in our lives, and we know that they don’t happen suddenly. As I mentioned earlier, the word ‘darkness’ is the Greek word ‘skotizo’, and it carries with it the idea of sudden darkness.

The darkness here happened suddenly, and note also that the darkness was all over the land for three hours, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45. A normal eclipse only ever lasts for a few moments.
NAASA say the following.

‘Total solar eclipses last anywhere from 10 seconds to about 7.5 minutes.’

GOD

4. The only possible reason the darkness came was that it was God who caused it.

We only have to cast our minds back to the ninth plague, which God hit Egypt with, it was the plague of darkness, Exodus 10:21-23. This was a judgment against the sun god, ‘Re’, who was symbolised by Pharaoh himself. For three days, the land of Egypt was smothered with unearthly darkness, but the homes of the Israelites had light. The Israelites must be utterly shell-shocked by what’s happening.

They must have been in awe as they enjoyed the light, but the rest of Egypt is in total darkness. They must have been thinking to themselves, ‘Is there anything that this God cannot control or do?’ I can imagine them saying to themselves, ‘No wonder our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob worshipped this God.’

It was God who created light in the beginning, Genesis 1:3, and it’s God who removes the light. God put Egypt in total darkness to the point where no one could see anything, but at the same time, the land where the Israelites were had light. Imagine being in Egypt and witnessing this event, while Egypt is in total darkness, the land where Israel lived was completely sunlit.

DARKNESS IS USED FIGURATIVELY AS GOD’S JUDGMENT

Darkness is often used figuratively in the Scriptures to demonstrate God’s judgment. In Isaiah 5:30, we read about God’s judgment against Judah. In Isaiah 13:10-11, we read about God’s judgment against Babylon. In Ezekiel 32:7-8, we read about a judgement against Egypt.
When a Jew hears language like, the stars are going to be darkened, the moon is going to turn dark, the sun is going to fall. When they heard talk like that, they didn’t think that was the ‘end of the world,’ they thought, ‘What nation is God judging now?’

When Jesus uses that kind of language in His sermon, He's saying that God is sending judgment on Israel, Matthew 24:19, just like He did on Judah, Babylon, and Egypt. The Jews certainly believe that the darkening of the sun was a depiction of God's judgment on the world for an especially heinous sin.

DARKNESS IS USED FIGURATIVELY AS PEOPLE'S SPIRITUAL CONDITION

Darkness is also used figuratively in a spiritual sense, where people who don't know God or have a relationship with Him live in spiritual darkness. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they go through life stumbling time and time again without knowing why, Proverbs 4:19 / Micah 3:6 / John 11:10 / John 1:5.
The land of Zebulun, Naphtali, etc were the main sufferers in the first Assyrian invasion under Tiglath-Pileser, Isaiah 9:1-2. They were the first to enjoy the blessing of Christ's teaching and to see His miraculous works. The land of Galilee, which is the land of the Gentiles, will indeed be honoured. They were in the darkness, but they will be in the light.
Jesus says He is the light of the world and speaks of darkness as a reference to those who are walking in sin, John 8:12. In 1 John 1:5-6, John uses the word 'if' to speak about the terms and conditions for having fellowship with God and His Son.
If we claim to have fellowship with Him, we can't at the same time walk in the darkness, we can't lie, we can't continue to live in sin, and we must live out the truth.

If God can cause the sun to stand still for a full day in order that Joshua can win his battle against the Amorite kings, Joshua 10:12-14, then why can't He cover the land of Palestine or the whole earth with darkness?
Hezekiah, on his deathbed, was visited by the prophet Isaiah, who told him that he was not going to die. Hezekiah asked for a sign as proof, and so Isaiah spoke to the Lord, and the Lord brought the shadow ten degrees backwards, 2 Kings 20:9-11.
If God had put the clock back ten degrees, that's forty minutes, then why can't He cover the land of Palestine or the whole earth with darkness? Why can't the One who created the universe be able to cause the darkness? Genesis 1:1-5.
When God spoke to Abraham about Sarah laughing when she was told she was going to have a son in old age. The Lord more or less said to Abraham, nothing is impossible for God, Genesis 18:14.
Why did God cause the darkness? God caused the darkness because He didn't want anyone, either in the land of Palestine or everyone on the whole earth, to have any doubts that the death of Jesus was significant for everyone.

His Son came to die for the world, John 3:16, in order for us to have a way to be saved, John 14:6. Just like the purpose of the miracles of Jesus, God used the darkness to bring about faith in His Son and who He claimed to be, John 20:30-31.
When Jesus hung on the cross, and the land of Palestine or the whole earth became totally dark, we can only imagine what people must have thought. I'm sure some would be scared, while others would be intrigued. But make no mistake about it, this was God's doing to prove to the world that His Son was indeed who He claimed to be.

Over and over again, we read of the religious leaders demanding a sign from Jesus during His ministry, Matthew 12:39-40 / Matthew 16:4. They asked for any kind of proof, any kind of miracle in order to prove that He was who He claimed to be.

The only miracle they really needed to witness was the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus refused to give in to the religious leaders' requests, and as a result, they just wanted to get rid of Him; they wanted to kill Him, John 8:58-59.

As Jesus hung on the cross, many people would have witnessed the miracle of the three hours of darkness, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45, the veil of the temple was torn into two, Matthew 27:50-51 / Mark 15:37-38, the earthquake, Matthew 27:50-52, the graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, Matthew 27:50-53. They would have to conclude, as the centurion soldier did, that 'Truly, this man was the Son of God.' Mark 15:39.

THE SEVEN SAYINGS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Luke 23:34
'Today you will be with Me in Paradise.' Luke 23:43
'Woman, behold your son.' John 19:26
'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Matthew 27:46
'I thirst!' John 19:28
'It is finished!' John 19:30
'Into Your hands, I commit My spirit.' Luke 23:46

Matthew only records one of the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Notice that Jesus calls on the Father as His God, Matthew 27:46. He can do this because He is a man and the Father became His God at his conception, Psalms 22:10 / Luke 22:42 / Mark 14:36 / John 5:18 / John 20:17 / Revelation 3:2 / Revelation 3:12

'MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?'

Many today believe that these words of Jesus clearly demonstrate that God actually turned His back on Jesus whilst He was on the cross, that God somehow couldn't bring Himself to look at Jesus and so abandoned Him because of the sin He was carrying, Matthew 27:46. Although this idea seems plausible to some, to understand what Jesus meant, we have to look to other Scriptures to see if this claim could actually be plausible.

GOD HAS ALWAYS LOOKED AT OUR SIN

To claim that God can't look at sin is foreign to the Scriptures; God has been looking at the sin of mankind since the fall of mankind in the garden and has been ever since. Even in the days of Noah, the Bible tells us that God SAW their sin, which implies He was looking at mankind's sin, Genesis 6:5-7 / Hebrews 4:13.

If God can't look at sin, then surely that would imply that He can't bring Himself to look at mankind today, because we're all sinners, Romans 3:23. There's a huge difference between God hating sin and not being able to look at it, in order to deal with it.

Whose Sin Was He carrying? We also need to ask the question, whose sin was Jesus carrying? He was carrying OUR sin because He Himself was sinless. Jesus wasn't a sinner, and there's a huge difference between being a sinner and bearing the consequences of someone else's sin.

Jesus became sin for us, but He was still the perfect Son of God, 1 Peter 2:22 / Hebrew 4:15. 'Truly, this was a righteous man,' Matthew 23:47. Ask yourself this question, if you were a judge, and your own innocent son heroically stepped forward at a trial to take a criminal's punishment upon himself, would you be angry with him and reject him? Of course not.

JESUS WAS DOING THE FATHER'S WILL

Why would the Father turn His back on His Son if the Son pleased the Father in every way? When we think about the cross, it was God's plan to deal with sin once and for all; it was Jesus' ultimate act of obedience to the Father, Philippians 2:8 / Hebrews 5:7.
And surely if there was ever a time in the life of Christ when the Father would have said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased', it would have been at the cross.

We know that the Old Testament sacrifices to God were 'a sweet-smelling aroma'; how much more would God be pleased with Christ's selfless sacrifice? Ephesians 5:1-2.
We have to remember that everything Jesus did was in accordance with the will of the Father; this included Jesus' death on the cross, Isaiah 53:9 / Luke 22:42 / Acts 2:23.
The whole point of God coming in the flesh was to deal with our sin problem and fulfil Scripture; the whole point of Jesus having a body was for the purpose of the cross. Notice that phrase in Hebrews 10:5-10, 'a body you prepared for me', the cross was God's plan, even before Christ came into the world.
And so, when we look at the cross and Jesus' submission to the Father's will, we clearly see that Jesus was doing everything which pleased the Father with the body He provided for Jesus. So, why on earth would God turn His back on His Son, if His Son was pleasing the Father and doing the Father's will with the body He provided for Him?

JESUS STOPPED BEING GOD AT THE CROSS!

We know that Jesus was God in the flesh, as Philippians tells us, Philippians 2:5-8. Some people, though, suggest that Jesus stopped being God when He was on the cross, just for that one moment.
And so, they ask, when Jesus was on the cross suffering for our sins, did Jesus stop being God? The answer is No. Was God the Father unable to look upon the judgment that fell upon God the Son? Of course not.

Clearly, Jesus never stopped being God, even when He died for the sins of mankind. Jesus didn't in any sense, to any degree, at any time, or for any season surrender any bit of His deity, Colossians 2:9. Likewise, Jesus can't be separated from God the Father because He said, 'I and the Father are One,' John 10:30.

PSALM 22

The biggest reason for this misunderstanding of Jesus' words on the cross is that people don't understand Psalm 22. When Jesus said, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' He was quoting from Psalm 22 and therefore fulfilling Scripture prophesies concerning Himself.
The idea of God turning His back on Jesus on the cross would never have been on the mind of anyone present on that day. The problem today is that many people just take one verse and make it mean something which it was never meant to mean.

Now remember the Jews knew these Scriptures really well, and when anyone read out the first line of any Psalm, the Jews would recognise it and be able to recite the whole Psalm in their minds. This was the Jewish practice at the time of Jesus, and this is exactly what Jesus did here on the cross.

Psalms 22 has many references to the atoning death of Jesus Christ. To us today, the prophecies are profound and obvious. Likewise, those Jews watching Jesus on the cross being crucified saw the many parallels between the crucifixion and the fulfilment of prophecy. As Jesus was suffering, He was quoting the Jewish Scriptures from the cross.
Can you imagine the expression on the Jews' faces as they remembered the whole of the messianic prophecy as we find in Psalm 22 being fulfilled in front of their eyes?
And the climax would be Jesus' final words, 'It is finished,' John 19:30. Look at the last line of Psalms 22. Psalm 22:31, 'He has done it!' Jesus isn't saying that His father 'has forsaken Him' or His Father has 'turned away from Him', He's saying that He is the Messiah. John 19:30.
Read Psalm 22:1 again, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?' This doesn't say the Father rejected the Son. First of all, look at the context, look at the parallel verse, 'Why are you so far from saving me?' This is the issue, 'no help', the sufferer is asking why God doesn't save Him from His oppressors.
In other words, 'Why do you let my oppressors torment me?' The Father gives the Son over to suffering. Psalm 22:1 is the equivalent of Isaiah's statement, 'It pleased the Lord to bruise Him', Isaiah 53:10. In fact, the Psalm later says, 'you lay me in the dust of death,' Psalm 22:15.
Secondly, it's a rhetorical question; the sufferer knows full well why God does this. Now you may well think, well, what's the point of asking it, then? He's simply expressing His distress because this is real suffering; he really doesn't want to go through it.

He would rather God save Him instantly out of it. 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will,' Matthew 26:39. Maybe the idea is that 'it feels like you have abandoned me' or 'it's really hard in my present circumstances to feel your closeness,' which is a very real human reaction, isn't it?
And again, if God turned His back on His Son, why does the Psalm say otherwise? 'For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.' Psalm 22:24. Does 'the Father turn His face away' according to this verse? Not at all.

'When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." Immediately, one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.' Matthew 27:47-50

There were some who stood near the cross but clearly didn't understand what Jesus meant, hence, why they thought He was calling on Elijah, Matthew 27:47. The name Elijah means 'Jehovah is my God' and so they thought that was who He was calling out to.
Jesus said, 'I thirst', John 19:28, and so, one of them compassionately went and got some wine vinegar and offered it to Jesus to drink, Matthew 27:48 / John 19:29.

This was cheap wine, a very bitter wine called posca or sour wine commonly drunk by the Roman soldiers. This wasn't the drugged wine usually offered to the condemned man just before the crucifixion. He had refused that, Matthew 27:33-34 / Mark 15:23.
Victims often lived for many hours on the cross, and so, giving Jesus a drink was an act of kindness. However, as one man showed compassion toward Jesus, the others told him to leave Jesus alone, to see if Elijah would come and save Him, Matthew 27:49.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'All this talk of Elijah sprang from Pharisaical prejudice and the propaganda they had waged, alleging that Jesus could not be the Christ, 'because Elijah had not yet come.' Theirs was a misinterpretation of the prophecy that 'Elijah must first come'. Christ had already identified John the Baptist as that Elijah who was to come, the Elijah foretold by the prophecies. Doubtless, the Pharisees were still harping on their old argument to the effect that Christ could not be the Messiah, Matthew 17:10-13.'
After crying out in a loud voice, Jesus gave up His spirit, Matthew 27:50 / Ecclesiastes 12:7 / Psalm 31:5. Notice He gave up His spirit; in other words, He voluntarily went to the cross, and He died when He was ready to die, John 10:17-18.

THE MAJESTY OF JESUS' DEATH

There were multiplied ironies in the events of those final hours. As they ridiculed Jesus, saying that He had saved others, but now couldn't save himself, they were unaware that He was fully capable of saving Himself, but that if He had, He would not have saved others. He died voluntarily.

He had at His disposal thousands of angels that could have rescued Him, Matthew 26:53-54, but He deliberately chose to lay down His life because He loved us.
Jesus had the power to do anything He wanted against His tormentors, but he subdued all desire for revenge and actually prayed for God to forgive those who were treating Him so cruelly, Luke 23:34.
By dying as He did, Christ provided the sacrifice that would forgive men's sins. Therefore, the temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom. The veil had blocked access to God's presence; it was a symbol of man's sin.

Since Jesus' death atoned for sin, the veil was severed, demonstrating that with sin removed, men could once again enter into fellowship with God. Truly, this man was the Son of God!

Satan had waged war against the Seed of the woman from the time God promised that the Seed would crush his head in Genesis 3:15 up to this time, when he certainly believed that he had been victorious over the work of God.
But what he didn't understand was that God had used his evil work all along in order to put on the cross the sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, John 1:29.
The plan of God's redemption that had been predestined before the creation of the world was accomplished, Ephesians 3:8-12. The Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world had now in reality been slain, Revelation 13:8.

ONE SOLITARY LIFE

Here is a young man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter's shop until he was 30, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office.

He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never travelled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

While he was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.

While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth, which was his coat. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that One Solitary Life.
Author Unknown

'At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.' Matthew 27:51-53

As soon as Jesus died, the curtain of the temple tore from top to bottom, Matthew 27:50-51 / Mark 15:37-38.

THE VEIL

When God gave Moses instructions concerning the Tabernacle. He tells him that the veil or curtain, as some translations render it, was to be a divider between the holy place and the Holy of Holies, Exodus 26:31-37.
The veil was made using four colours, blue, purple, scarlet and white of the fine linen. These four colours were also used at the Door of the Outer Court, Exodus 27:16-17.
It was over seven feet high, thirty feet wide and was supported by four pillars set in bronze sockets. This curtain separated the people from the outer court of the tabernacle. They could only enter when they brought their sacrifice to the gate as an offering for God upon the bronze altar.

These four colours were also used at the Door to the Sanctuary, Exodus 26:36-37. This veil separated the people in the outer court of the tabernacle from the Holy Place. Only priests were permitted to enter the Holy Place after they had made the proper sacrifice at the altar and washed at the bronze laver.
These four colours were also used for the Cherubim Embroidered Covering that forms the ceiling of the Tabernacle, Exodus 26:1-6. These four colours were also used for the Ephod that the high priest wore, Exodus 28:6-14 / Exodus 39:2-7.
Josephus describes the temple veil as follows.

'Before these doors, there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colours without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe; for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea; two of them

having their colours the foundation of this resemblance; but the fine flax and the purple have their own origin for that foundation, the earth producing the one, and the sea the other. This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures.' (The Wars Of The Jews 5.5.4)

IS THERE ANY SIGNIFICANCE WITH THE FOUR COLOURS?

Blue indicates heavenly and godly: "Behold your God", Isaiah 40:9, pointing to John's Gospel, where doubting Thomas eventually says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God", John 20:28.
Purple signifies kingship: "Behold your King", Zechariah 9:9, pointing to Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus, the descendant of King David, Matthew 1:1, declares after rising from the dead, "All authority in heaven and on earth is given to Me", Matthew 28:18.
Red signifies blood: "Behold My servant", Isaiah 52:13 / Isaiah 53:5, pointing to Mark's Gospel, where Jesus says He "came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many", Mark 10:45.
White signifies purity and real humanity: "Behold the man", Zechariah 6:12, pointing to Luke's Gospel, where Pilate says of Jesus, "Behold, I have found not one fault in this man", Luke 23:4 / Luke 23:14.
The veil we are speaking about is the veil which separated the holy place from the most holy of holies. This is the final door to pass through, to enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. Entry was forbidden to all except one, the high priest, but he couldn't just stroll in there anytime he wanted.

He was permitted entry only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when he brought the blood of the sacrificed goat to sprinkle on the lid, called the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, Leviticus 16:15-16 / Hebrews 9:6-7 / Exodus 25:10-22 / Exodus 37:1-9.
In Herod's temple, there were two veils in front of the Holy of Holies. The Talmud tells us the following.

'It was not known whether the veil in Solomon's temple was hung on the inside or the outside of the entrance to the Holy of Holies. When the Temple was rebuilt after the exile, they hung two veils — one on the outside of the entryway in the Holy Place and one on the inside of the entryway in the Holy of Holies.'

According to the Talmud, 'the veils were sixty feet long, thirty feet tall and four inches thick'.

Danby says the following.

'The veil was one handbreadth thick and was woven on a loom having seventy-two rods, and over each rod were twenty-four threads. Its length was forty cubits and its breadth twenty cubits; it was made by eighty-two young girls, and they used to make two in every year; and three hundred priests immersed it.' (Herbert Danby translator, The Mishnah, p 161, par 5)

Jewish tradition claims that the veils were so heavy that it took three hundred priests to hang them.

THE VEIL TORN IN TWO FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

The size of the veil would have made it absolutely impossible for any human to tear it into two pieces. But the fact that it was torn from top to bottom, Matthew 27:50-51 / Mark 15:37-38, signifies that this was a work of God. The Greek word for top is 'anothen' in the New Testament, and it frequently means that something comes from above, that is, from God, John 3:31 / James 1:17. God tore the veil from top to bottom to show that it was He who was making a way for us to come into His presence.

THE PRIESTS IN THE TEMPLE

It's often overlooked that when the veil was torn in two, there would have been many priests within the temple at this time. We can only imagine what they were thinking as they witnessed this happening before their eyes.

Imagine if you were a priest, and you heard this loud noise, and when you go to investigate, you see the veil is torn in two. Imagine, as you examine it, you realise that this hasn't been cut with a very sharp knife by someone because the tear starts from the top of the curtain, not the bottom.

Wouldn't you be thinking to yourself what does this mean? Wouldn't you be speaking to the other priests, trying to figure out what happened and why? Could this event be one of the reasons why a large number of priests would later become Christians? Acts 6:7.

THE CENTURION

Matthew and Luke both record that the centurion at the crucifixion saw everything which happened, Matthew 27:54 / Luke 23:47. Did he witness the veil tearing in two? Some suggest that this Gentile soldier could see straight into the Holy of Holies, but I personally doubt it.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TORN VEIL

Rabbi Gabriel says the following.

'In the Jewish Talmud, the Temple veil is spoken of as the 'tunic of God'. It's ripping at the time of the death of Messiah speaks of the tradition of tearing one's clothes as a sign of mourning. God tore His 'tunic' when Yeshua died.'

In other words, they believe the veil being ripped in two signified God tearing His 'tunic' as a sign of mourning when Jesus died. Some scholars have suggested this was the curtain that separated the court of the Jews from the court of the Gentiles. This would make sense in light of what Paul said that Christ has torn down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, Ephesians 2:14.
I believe the torn veil signifies something much bigger. I believe the veil which was torn in two was the veil that separated the holy of holies from the other parts of the temple.

The word 'veil' in Hebrew means 'to separate'. The veil itself was a symbol of our sin, which separated us from God; it reminds us that we were excluded from the presence of God because of our sinfulness, Isaiah 59:2 / Romans 3:23.

However, just as the Passover lamb was slain for the redemption of the children of Israel in Egypt, and the goat was slain so that its blood could obtain God's forgiveness for the Israelites on the Day of Atonement, so Jesus 'bore our sins in His own body on the tree,' 1 Peter 2:24.

It's now possible, on the basis of faith in Jesus' death for our sins, to stand in the presence of God as justified and forgiven people, Romans 5:1-2. As Hebrews 10:19-22 shows, the way to the Holy of Holies has been opened up for us through the veil of Jesus' flesh being torn on the cross.

There is a 'new', literally 'freshly slain' and 'living' way for us to enter. The Lord Jesus Christ is not just our freshly slain, dead offering; He is also the Living One who rose from the dead, Luke 24:5 / Revelation 1:18. He ascended as our great High Priest, with our names on His heart, going into the Holy of Holies, where God's presence is over the Ark of the Covenant!

When Jesus cried out, 'It is finished', John 19:30, this was a cry of triumph. He had accomplished the work He came to do. As the Lamb of God, John 1:29, He had now finished His work.

In the very beginning, we have the promise of the Head crusher, that is, Jesus, Genesis 3:14-15. The Seed of woman, Jesus, would eventually crush the head of Satan by His death on the cross, and so, freeing mankind from the control that Satan has over mankind through sin, Romans 16:20.

In crushing the head of Satan on the cross, Jesus would bruise His heel by His own death. However, His heel would only be bruised because He would be raised from the dead.

Satan was now defeated, his rebellion against God was ruined, and his works were destined for destruction, 1 John 3:8. He was the perfect sacrifice, an innocent man dying in our place in order for us to be forgiven of our sins, Hebrews 9:22.

No one else could have done this, no one else could ever do this; Jesus alone was worthy, Revelation 5:1-10. The way to God was finally opened to everyone, regardless of their race or gender, Hebrews 4:16 / Hebrews 9:11-12.

Why did God tear the veil? God tore the veil in two because it signalled the beginning of the end of the Jewish worship system, Matthew 24:1-2. God tore the veil in two because He didn't want anyone to have any doubts that the death of Jesus was significant for everyone.

His Son came to die for the world, John 3:16, in order for us to have a way to be saved, John 14:6. Just like the purpose of the miracles of Jesus, God tore the veil from top to bottom to bring about faith in His Son and who He claimed to be, John 20:30-31.

CONCLUSION

The tearing of the veil from top to bottom was nothing less than another miracle from God. This miracle signified that He had opened the door for us to come in and have a relationship with Him. Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice, so the veil, or separation, was no longer needed. We can now enter His presence through Christ Himself.

As Jesus hung on the cross, many people would have witnessed the miracle of the three hours of darkness, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45, the veil of the temple was torn into two, Matthew 27:50-51 / Mark 15:37-38, the earthquake, Matthew 27:50-52, the graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, Matthew 27:50-53. They would have to conclude, as the centurion soldier did, that 'Truly, this man was the Son of God,' Mark 15:39. Not only was the curtain torn, but there was an earthquake.

THE EARTHQUAKE

When God finished creating the world and everything in it, He said it was 'very good', Genesis 1:31. We know that after mankind sinned, not only were they going to feel the consequences of their sin, but so was planet Earth, Genesis 3:17-18.
And I believe planet Earth is still feeling the consequences of mankind's sin. Romans 8:19-22 tells us that creation is frustrated, it's decaying, and it's groaning, all because of mankind's sin in the garden. Could it be that earthquakes are a natural visible sign of the Earth's frustration, decaying and groaning?
Earthquakes are nothing new, and they still happen all over the world even to this day. But despite scientists having really good technology to estimate if and when an earthquake is going to take place, many people still face the devastation that earthquakes cause. Earthquakes have caused widespread destruction and the deaths of millions of people.

In ancient Greece, earthquakes were seen as bad omens. Philosophers attributed them to the congestion of the air or the movement of subterranean water. Astrologers related them to signs of the zodiac and tried to make out what they predicted. They were commonly thought to accompany appearances or manifestations of something or someone divine.

WHAT IS AN EARTHQUAKE?

The British Geological Survey, says the following.

'An earthquake is the sudden release of strain energy in the Earth's crust, resulting in waves of shaking that radiate outwards from the earthquake source. When stresses in the crust exceed the strength of the rock, it breaks along lines of weakness, either a pre-existing or new fault plane. The point where an earthquake starts is termed the focus or hypocentre and may be many kilometres deep within the earth. The point at the surface directly above the focus is called the earthquake epicentre.'

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

In the Scriptures, God uses earthquakes to signify His presence. An earthquake is often used figuratively to represent the presence of God, Judges 5:4-5 / 2 Samuel 22:8 / Psalms 77:18 / Psalm 97:4 / Psalm 104:32 / Ezekiel 3:12.
When God Israel stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, God's presence was made known by an earthquake, Exodus 19:16-19. The same thing happened to Elijah when he was up on a mountain, and the Lord made His presence known to him, 1 Kings 19:11-12.

GOD'S JUDGEMENT AGAINST SIN

God uses earthquakes to signify His judgment against sin. God used an earthquake to destroy Korah and his followers, who started a rebellion, Numbers 16:31-33. David often speaks about how earthquakes are a demonstration of God's anger against His people or a nation, 2 Samuel 22:8 / Psalm 18:6-7.

Isaiah speaks about how God will punish His people because of their sin using an earthquake, Isaiah 5:25 / Isaiah 29:6. Jeremiah also speaks about how God will bring judgment upon the nations because of their sin using an earthquake, Jeremiah 10:10.

Nahum, Nahum 1:5, Habakkuk, Habakkuk 3:6, and Zechariah, Zechariah 14:5, all speak about how God will bring judgment upon the nations because of their sin, using an earthquake.

Jesus Himself speaks of an earthquake which would happen when God was going to bring judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, Matthew 24:7.

John, in his vision, speaks about how God will bring judgment against Rome and unbelievers, Revelation 6:12-14 / Revelation 8:5 / Revelation 11:19 / Revelation 11:13 / Revelation 16:18.

A NATURAL EARTHQUAKE

Some people may well conclude that this was just a random earthquake, but when we consider the timing of this earthquake recorded in Matthew, Matthew 27:50-52, we are left with no doubts that this was no random earthquake. Earthquakes were common in Palestine, though there was nothing common about this one. The timing and accompanying events suggest this was a supernatural event.

EVIDENCE OUTSIDE OF THE SCRIPTURES

The oldest known account outside the Bible of the crucifixion earthquake was recorded by the Greek historian Thallus around 50 AD. His three-volume history of the Mediterranean world included information about the crucifixion. Thallus' volumes no longer exist, but we have quotations from them by other early historians.

Julius Africanus, who co-founded Rome's public library, wrote a five-volume History of the World in about A.D. 221 in which he referenced Thallus' History about the Crucifixion. He writes the following.

'On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down.' 'From Extant Works (Julius Africanus), Fragment 18.'

The very fact that the darkness and the earthquake have been recorded as happening around the same time, during Christ's crucifixion, should give us confidence.

They should give us confidence in not only knowing that they reinforce what the Scripture says, but this should also tell us that the earthquake itself was no ordinary earthquake.

A SUPERNATURAL EARTHQUAKE

This was no random earthquake; this was God working miraculously as he would do later when Paul and Silas were in prison, Acts 16:25-26. We know that this was not a random earthquake because of the timing of this earthquake; it happened precisely when Christ died on the cross, Matthew 27:50-52.
The whole land shook, and the rocks split precisely when Christ 'gave up His spirit', Matthew 27:50. Imagine if you had been there. Imagine hearing the loud sound of rocks and boulders fracturing and splitting apart.
Imagine feeling the ground shaking beneath your feet. Wouldn't you be wondering what was going on? I am sure the people may have thought that this was just another earthquake. But remember the earthquake happened immediately after the darkness fell over the land for three hours, Matthew 27:45.
The sun would now be shining again, and so, the people in Palestine would know this was no random earthquake. They would have to conclude that this was the miraculous work of God because of the timing of the earthquake.

Why did God cause the earthquake? With an earthquake, the law was given, Exodus 19:16-19, and with an earthquake, the law was fulfilled, Matthew 5:17. Straight after the law was given, three thousand people died, Exodus 32:28, and so the law brought death.
It's no accident that when grace and truth John 1:17 were preached on Pentecost, three thousand people were added to the Lord's church, Acts 2:41. And so, we are reminded that mankind was separated from God because of their sinfulness, and mankind had no hope because God is so holy, Isaiah 59:2.
The earthquake which happened at Christ's death signified that mankind can now approach God and have hope for fellowship with God because of what Christ achieved on the cross, Ephesians 2:17-18 / Hebrews 10:19-22.
Why did God cause the earthquake? We also must note that the earthquake was so violent that the rocks actually split in two, Matthew 27:51. It appears that the death of Christ had a huge impact on the natural world, too.
As I mentioned earlier, the fall of mankind had a huge effect on all of creation, Romans 8:19-22. Who subjected the creation to this bondage of corruption? God did. Only God could give creation hope because only God has the power to make this kind of change in His created world.
We can almost imagine creation looking forward to the day when something great is going to happen, just as we look forward to the day when our bodies will be redeemed.

Is it possible that the earth quaked in response to the victory shout of Jesus? Is it possible that God was sending a message out to all of creation, that your wait for freedom is getting closer?

Why did God cause the earthquake? The Scriptures record another significant earthquake which happened afterwards when an angel rolled away the stone from Jesus' grave, symbolising Christ's power over death, Matthew 28:2.
God caused both of these earthquakes because He did not want anyone in the land of Palestine to have any doubts that the death and resurrection of Jesus were significant for all.

His Son came to die for the world, John 3:16, in order for us to have a way to be saved, John 14:6. Just like the purpose of the miracles of Jesus, God used the earthquake to bring about faith in His Son and who He claimed to be, John 20:30-31.

CONCLUSION

As Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, most people praised Him and hailed Him as King, but the Pharisees were not impressed. They ask Jesus to rebuke the people; however, in response, Jesus tells them that if the people keep quiet, then the stones will cry out and praise Him, Luke 19:39-40.

The earthquake certainly caught the attention of the Roman centurion at the foot of the cross of Jesus, Matthew 27:54. Notice that he and everyone else who had witnessed what had happened became terrified. Luke tells us the centurion started to praise God and declared that Jesus was a righteous man, Luke 23:47.

As Jesus hung on the cross, many people would have witnessed the miracle of the three hours of darkness, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45, the veil of the temple was torn into two, Matthew 27:50-51 / Mark 15:37-38, the earthquake, Matthew 27:50-52, the graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, Matthew 27:50-53.

The Pharisees refused to accept Jesus for who He was, but after witnessing the miraculous events surrounding the death of Jesus. They would have to conclude, as the centurion soldier did, that 'Truly, this man was the Son of God,' Mark 15:39. Not only was the curtain torn, but there was an earthquake, the earth shook, rocks split, and people were brought to life.

THE OPENED GRAVES AND THE RESURRECTED DEAD

In Bible times, tombs were often cut out of solid rock and large rocks were used to cover the entrance as we read here concerning Lazarus' tomb, John 11:38, and Jesus' tomb, Matthew 27:60.

The door to the tomb was usually made of a circular-shaped stone, running in a groove and settled down into a channel, so it could not be moved except by several strong men. This was done to ensure that no one would disturb the remains.

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'The usual mode of shutting the door of the tomb; the Jews called the stone golal, the roller.' (Bruce)

Bible Gateway says the following.

'Cemeteries were generally located in Biblical times outside inhabited settlements, usually near the city or village, even as in modern times. Every city had its own burial place. The dead were generally buried in the ground, away from dwellings, and rarely within the occupied settlement itself. The tombs were usually prominently marked, sometimes painted with whitewash, so that no one would be accidentally defiled by contact with the dead.' (Leviticus 21:1 / Numbers 6:6 / Numbers 19:13).'

Some believe that the opened tombs weren't a miracle in themselves; it was simply the result of the miraculous earthquake. This is certainly possible, but when we also read that the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life, this tells us that God was responsible for the tombs opening up as well as raising the dead back to life.

We don't know how long those who rose when Jesus was on the cross had been dead. Maybe they've been dead for a few days, weeks or even years; the Bible doesn't tell us how long they have been dead.

But we do know these holy people were raised back to life just as Christ said they would earlier in His ministry.

In John 5:25-29, we read that Christ speaks concerning Himself and judgement and He speaks of two resurrections.

1. Spiritual, 'now the hour is coming', Pentecost, Ephesians 2:1-5, dead in sin.
2. Physical, 'all in the tombs', all physically dead, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.

In other words, what we're about to study was part of the fulfilment of Christ's words.

WHO WERE THESE HOLY PEOPLE?

Some believe they were the ancient patriarchs, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. Others believe they were modern saints, such as his father Joseph, Zechariah, Simeon, John the Baptist, etc. The truth is, we simply don't know because we are not told.

WHEN DID THEY RISE FROM THEIR GRAVES?

Interestingly, it's only Matthew who records this event, Matthew 27:52-53, so we can't look at any other passage to help us understand what the chronology of this event is.
Is Matthew telling us that these holy people rose from the grave, and then somehow stayed in their tombs for three days until Christ rose? Is Matthew telling us that they actually rose from their graves when Christ rose from the grave?

Some suggest that they rose from the grave after Christ rose from the grave because of what Paul writes to the Colossians, Colossians 1:18. But the word 'firstborn' doesn't necessarily mean the first one; it can refer to the 'pre-eminent' one.
We know that Jesus wasn't the first person to rise from the dead; there were others, Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus. Paul tells us Jesus is the first to rise, never to die again, and is declared to be the 'firstfruits' of the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. These holy people rose from the grave but would later physically die again.
I believe that Matthew is saying that those saints who died arose and came out of the graves, and after Jesus' resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many.

The Wycliffe Bible translates these verses this way.

"And burials were opened, and many bodies of saints that had slept rose up. And they went out of their burials, AND AFTER his resurrection they came into the holy city and appeared to many." Matthew 27:52-53. Wycliffe Bible Lenski says the following.

'Already the death of Jesus brought resurrection to these saints, hence the account of this occurrence is properly connected with the death of Jesus and not with his resurrection.'

In other words, they were brought back to life at the time of Jesus' death, but they did not go into the city until after Jesus' resurrection. We don't know the reason for the delay in going to the city, but it is possible that they saw themselves as unclean, Numbers 19:11.
They may be aware that others may have seen them as unclean, Numbers 19:16. No one would want to go anywhere near any open tomb because the law said that they would become unclean for seven days.

IMAGINE THE SCENE

We're not told the number of people who were raised from the dead, but there were enough of them to cause some kind of a stir in Jerusalem. We're not told if any of these resurrected holy people remembered anything about where they were, what their bodies were like and who else was with them.

Did they know that they were dead but brought back to life? We're not told if they became believers or if they were to witness to others about what happened. Were they to give some kind of testimony to the death-destroying, life-giving power of the Lord Jesus Christ?

We simply don't know because the Bible doesn't tell us. But I do wonder what they would have spoken about when they met their family and friends again. Maybe like Paul, they weren't permitted to say anything about their experience, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4.
Can you imagine these formally dead people walking back into Jerusalem? Can you imagine their relatives seeing them again? Imagine if this were someone whose funeral you actually attended, and now, they are at your home visiting you.

That's exactly what happened in Jerusalem; this was real, this was physical, and this was very public. I can imagine everyone in Jerusalem would be speaking about them. Just as Lazarus, John 11:43-44, Jairus' daughter, Luke 8:52-56, and the widow of Nain's son, Luke 7:13-15, had died and were brought back to life by Jesus.
The good news is that these holy people were also raised back to life; the sad news is that, like Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son would have to physically die again.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE EVENTS

The significance of these events demonstrates Jesus' ultimate power over death, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 / 2 Timothy 1:9-10. They pointed to the fact that He Himself would rise from the grave, Matthew 28:5-6 / Matthew 16:21 / Mark 8:31 / Luke 24:46 / 1 Corinthians 15:4.
These events give us hope for the future because we, too, will be resurrected because Jesus was resurrected first, 1 Corinthians 15:12-14 / 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 / 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 / 1 John 3:2.
These events also point to the final judgment when all will be raised, regardless of whether they are 'holy' or not, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It was a small sample in one location of the coming day when the saints will be raised triumphant, and all the graves of all the saints will be empty forevermore.
With the death of Christ, the penalty of sin had been paid, and the cause of death was dealt with, 1 Corinthians 15:56.
When Christ returns, death will be no more, 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 / Revelation 20:14 / Revelation 21:4.
Why did God open the graves and resurrect the dead? God brought some individuals back to life to show that Jesus had the ability to give new life. Even as Jesus rose from the dead, He proved that His power over death enabled Him to give life to all who believe, John 10:10 / John 11:25-26.
Why did God open the graves and resurrect the dead? Just as creation as a whole is awaiting its redemption, so too are those who have already left this earth. They, too, are awaiting the redemption of their bodies, Romans 8:23.
The opening of the graves and those who were resurrected at the death of Christ was a clear signal to all those who had already died that their time of redemption was coming soon. In other words, God doesn't want to save our souls; He wants to save our bodies.

Why did God open the graves and resurrect the dead? God opened the graves and resurrected the dead because He didn't want anyone in the land of Palestine to have any doubts that the death of Jesus was significant for all.

His Son came to die for the world, John 3:16, in order for us to have a way to be saved, John 14:6. Just like the purpose of the miracles of Jesus, God used opened graves and raised the dead to bring about faith in His Son and who He claimed to be, John 20:30-31.

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we too were once dead, but thanks to the work of Christ on the cross, we are now very much alive in Christ, Ephesians 2:1-5 / Romans 6:8-14 / Colossians 2:13-15.
As Jesus hung on the cross, many people would have witnessed the miracle of the three hours of darkness, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45, the veil of the temple torn into two, Matthew 27:50-51 / Mark 15:37-38, the earthquake, Matthew 27:50-52, the graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, Matthew 27:50-53.
They would have to conclude, as the centurion soldier did, that 'Truly, this man was the Son of God,' Mark 15:39.

'When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.' Matthew 27:54-56

A centurion and those with him were responsible for guarding Jesus; they had witnessed everything that had just happened and became terrified. They said, surely, he was the Son of God! Matthew 27:54 / Luke 23:47. Here are more Gentiles confessing who Christ is, something which the religious leaders refused to accept.
Once again, we see the faith of the women who faithfully followed Jesus and took care of His needs. Some of these women were relatives of the disciples who lingered at the cross with John, Matthew 37:55-56 / Luke 8:2-3 / Luke 23:49 / John 19:25.
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons, were all present. Mark records the name of the mother of Zebedee's sons as Salome, Mark 15:41. The women were the last to wait upon Jesus at the cross and the first to whom He revealed Himself after the resurrection.

WAS JESUS' BODY BROKEN?

I'm sure we've all sat around the table to partake of the Lord's Supper, and we've heard someone make some kind of comment or reference to Jesus' 'broken body' on the cross, either in their talk or in their prayer.

Maybe you are reading this and wondering what the big deal is, concerning the bread representing Jesus' 'broken body'! Maybe you're thinking, well, that's what the Scripture actually says, isn't it!

CONFUSION OVER THE BREAD AND JESUS' BODY

Let's go ahead and carefully read the four accounts concerning the bread and Jesus' body.

'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.' Matthew 26:26

‘While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he BROKE IT and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Mark 14:22

‘And he took bread, gave thanks and BROKE IT, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ Luke 22:19

‘And when he had given thanks, he BROKE IT and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ 1 Corinthians 11:24

Now notice that in each of these four accounts, the word ‘broke’ is used; however, you will also notice that it is used in reference to the bread which was ‘broken’, not Jesus’ body.

When we carefully read these four accounts again, we find that Matthew and Mark record Jesus saying, ‘This is my body’, in Luke’s account, he writes that Jesus says, His body ‘is given’ for you, and finally, Paul writes and quotes Jesus as saying, His body is ‘for you’. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read that Jesus’ body is ‘broken for you’.

So, where do people get the idea that Jesus’ body was broken?

‘And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, take, eat: this is my body, WHICH IS BROKEN for you: this do in remembrance of me.’ 1 Corinthians 11:24 KJV

Notice that the KJV says, ‘this is my body, which is BROKEN for you’. This is where people get the idea that Jesus’ body was indeed broken. It’s not surprising that many people quote this passage of Scripture during the Lord’s Supper because it’s a popular version of the Bible, and people have heard this being quoted time and time again over the years.

Part of the problem is that the word ‘broken’ isn’t in the original text, and it isn’t in a vast majority of manuscripts. My Greek Lexicon has it written as follows:

‘and having given thanks he broke (it), and said, this of me is the body, which (is) for you; this do in of me remembrance.’ 1 Corinthians 11:24

The word ‘broken’ isn’t in the actual text; in fact, when we read through the three Gospel accounts again, we find that none of them actually say, ‘this is my body which is BROKEN for you’.

When we read 1 Corinthians 11:24, in most translations, we find it’s very similar to what Luke records, except Luke adds the word ‘given’.

‘This is my body, which is GIVEN for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ Luke 22:19

‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ 1 Corinthians 11:24

BROKEN BONES!

We also know from Scripture that they clearly teach that Jesus’ body wasn’t broken, even after His death, in order to fulfil Scripture. Notice John says that Jesus’ bones were not broken, John 19:33-36.
What John does here in his account is quote from Psalm 34, to let us understand that this prophecy concerning the Christ was fulfilled in Christ at the cross of Christ, John 19:36.

‘He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.’ Psalm 34:20

Psalm 34 is a psalm of the deliverance of David when he changed his behaviour before Abimelek in order to spare his own life, 1 Samuel 21:10-15. We know that bones are the structural framework of the body, and so, God metaphorically provides structure to the life of the righteous. Though the wicked will reap the reward of their evil, God will preserve those who are His.

Psalm 34:20 points us to the Christ, who is the only truly righteous One, and saw the complete fulfilment of this on the cross, John 19:36. Jesus is 'our Passover lamb' who was sacrificed for our sins, John 1:29 / 1 Corinthians 5:7 / Hebrews 4:15 / 1 Peter 1:19 and the Passover lamb wasn't to have any of its bones broken.

'It must be eaten inside the house; take none of the meat outside the house. DO NOT BREAK ANY OF THE BONES.' Exodus 12:46

'They must not leave any of it till morning or BREAK ANY OF ITS BONES. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations.' Numbers 9:12

BROKEN BODY!

Over the years, I've heard countless arguments suggesting that the body can be broken without the bones being broken. I've heard people say, 'Ah, well, His bones weren't actually broken, but His body was!'

I hear people say that 'when they flogged Jesus' back when they placed a crown of thorns on His head, when they nailed Him to the cross, when they did all these things, they actually broke His skin, which is a part of the body.'

As thought-provoking as that sounds, it appears to me they're just trying to make sense of the word 'broken' in the KJV of 1 Corinthians 11:24. Yes, the Scriptures teach that His body was 'wounded' and 'pierced', Isaiah 53:5 / John 19:34, but it doesn't say His body was 'broken' for us.

BROKEN SPIRIT!

Another popular idea is that it was Jesus' spirit, His human spirit, which was broken. I guess when we look at what Christ went through, we could easily conclude that this was true from a human perspective, but we must remember Jesus didn't crawl to the cross like some defeated victim, He marched to the cross as a man who totally embraced the will of the Father, Hebrews 10:5-10, and said triumphantly: 'it is finished.' John 19:30.

CONCLUSION

It appears that some Christians are a little confused about the word 'broken', and so they end up being confused over the 'breaking' of the bread with Jesus' body. I think we've seen that the Scripture clearly teaches us that it was the bread which was 'broken' and not Jesus' body.

The next time someone asks you to thank God for the bread at the Lord's Supper, or the next time you hear someone saying or praying about Jesus' 'broken body', remember the Scriptures teach that Jesus wasn't broken in any shape or

form, His bones weren't broken, His human spirit wasn't broken. It was the bread, which was broken, but our Lord's body was given for us.

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

'As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.' Matthew 27:57-61

Since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Mark 15:42, Joseph of Arimathea had to act quickly. He had to act quickly since, according to Jewish law, he couldn't bury the body on the Sabbath day, which officially began at sundown, Mark 15:42. He wished to give the body a proper burial.

It's also worth noting that the Romans didn't take the criminals down from the cross, they left them there to rot, to act as a warning to anyone who walked by if they broke the Roman laws and the soldiers at the cross couldn't leave to go home until the criminals were officially dead, hence why they drove a spear in Jesus' side and didn't need to break any of His bones, John 19:31-37.

He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, Matthew 27:57 / Mark 15:43, and also didn't consent to the execution, Luke 23:50-54. He was 'rich', Matthew 27:57, 'a respected member of the council', Mark 15:43, 'a good and righteous man,' Luke 23:50 / John 19:38, who had 'not consented to their purpose and deed', Luke 23:51.

He was 'a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews', John 19:38 / John 12:42-43. Evidently, he had kept his belief secret until now. He was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, Mark 15:43.

He 'took courage and went to Pilate', Matthew 27:58 / John 19:38 / Mark 15:43, asked Pilate for permission to bury Jesus' body, Matthew 27:58 / Mark 1543 / Luke 23:52 / John 19:38.

He must have been a very important person because not anyone could go and speak to Pilate. Pilate was surprised that Jesus died so quickly, Mark 15:44. Not one bone in His body was broken, Exodus 12:46 / Numbers 9:12 / Deuteronomy 21:22-23 / Psalm 34:20 / Zechariah 12:10.

Being able to remove Jesus from the cross was a huge privilege for Joseph, Mark 15:45 / John 19:38. He gathered the corpse up in a sheet, Matthew 27:59 / Mark 15:46 / Luke 23:53 / and put it in a hole chiselled into the wall of a cave, Matthew 27:60 / Mark 15:46 / Luke 23:53 / which served as a typical grave in that era.

He closed off the cave by rolling a large rock over the entrance, and went away, Matthew 27:60 / Mark 15:46. The tomb was Joseph's own and was new, unused, Luke 23:54 / John 19:41; it wasn't a natural cave, but one dug out of the rock.

This was Joseph's own tomb, in his own garden, which tells us he must have been wealthy too. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away, and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb, Matthew 27:60-61. This was Joseph's own tomb, in his own garden, which tells us he must have been wealthy too.

Significantly, Matthew and Mark include the statement that the two Marys saw where Jesus was laid, Matthew 27:56 / Matthew 27:61 / Mark 15:47. These two women knew where the tomb was located, the women knew the exact location of the tomb, Luke 23:55, and so, because of that we can be sure that they were valid witnesses that when they returned three days later, the tomb was empty.

Nicodemus, John 3:1, joined Joseph in preparing the customary burial of the body of Jesus, John 19:39. Nicodemus joined him for His burial, John 19:38-42; he too was a member of the Sanhedrin, and a believer, John 3:1-2 / John 7:50. John 12:3-5 indicates that Nicodemus was a rich man also.
The amount brought suggests that they intended to completely cover the corpse with spices, John 19:39.
'Myrrh', John 19:39, was a gum resin used as a perfume and embalming fluid, 'alces', pounded wood of the aloe tree, also used for embalming, Psalm 45:8 / Proverbs 7:17 / Matthew 2:11. A hundred pounds weight, John 19:39, 100 litras, one letra being equal to twelve ounces.
The 'lined cloths', Luke 23:53 / John 19:40, were linen strips that were bandages. The wrapping of the body in linen and the use of spices was the custom of the Jews, John 19:40. The woman also brought spices, Luke 23:56.
One layer of bandages would have been applied, followed by another layer of the spices Nicodemus brought along, and His body would have been finally wrapped in a sheet-like piece of linen. Both men would have been unclean as a result of this action and wouldn't have been able to participate in the Passover.

Joseph's 'new tomb' had not been used and was in a garden close to Golgotha, Matthew 27:60 / John 19:41 / Luke 23:52. Joseph, the owner of the tomb, was a believer, so Jesus' body was always in the hands of believers.
It was now close to the Passover, and they hurried to arrange Jesus' body in a nearby tomb, John 19:42. In keeping with the law of Moses, they had rested on the Sabbath, Luke 23:56, but will return to complete the burial rites of the Saviour which they had begun on the day of His death, Matthew 28:5-6 / Luke 23:54.
Because this tomb was 'close to hand', and the Sabbath was imminent, John 19:42, it appears to be a temporary arrangement. This suggests that Jesus was to be buried elsewhere after the Sabbath. It was very convenient as it was so near the place of the skull and the Sabbath was fast approaching, Luke 23:54 / John 19:42.
Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 23:55-56.
'This reference to the women prepares for the account of Jesus' resurrection. When they went to the tomb on Sunday morning, they did not go to the wrong one. They had previously been there and had seen Jesus' corpse in it. They prepared spices for their return visit on Sunday to honour Jesus further. Luke's reference to the passing of the Sabbath with no disciple activity confirms Jesus' prediction that He would be in the grave three days, Luke 18:33 / Luke 24:7. It also shows that Jesus' followers observed the Sabbath as obedient Israelites, Exodus 20:10.'

WHERE DID JESUS' SPIRIT GO WHEN HE DIED?

Before we answer this question, I think it would be useful to look at what the Bible says about heaven first. The Bible tells us there are three heavens. Note the plurality in Genesis 1:1.
Speaking about himself, the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:2 that he was caught up to the third heaven. So, we have here three 'heavens'.
1. The heaven which is God's spiritual, eternal home.

This isn't physical and isn't created.

2. The heaven where the stars and planets are.

This is physical and is created.

3. The heaven surrounding the earth where the atmosphere is, and the birds fly.

This is physical and is created.

The word 'heavens' is used in different ways in the Bible.

1. It refers to one of the two heavens that God created.

2. It's also used of the third heaven. This is the uncreated heaven where God has always been from eternity.

God is everywhere, Acts 17:27-28. He is present in all 'three heavens', Psalm 115:2-3. We cannot get away from God, Psalm 139:1-16.

THE TWO HEAVENS GOD CREATED

'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.' Genesis 1:1

So He existed before the heavens and the earth. These aren't the heavens He has always lived in; these are the heavens where the atmosphere is, and the birds fly and the heaven where the stars are.

THE THIRD HEAVEN

The heaven where God has always lived isn't physical; it hasn't been created. Because God is Spirit, He doesn't need a physical place to live in, John 4:24. He doesn't need pictures or images or temples or mosques or churches or shrines to live in, Acts 17:24-25.

Where did Jesus' spirit go when He died? Some suggest He went to preach to the souls in hell based on 1 Peter 3:19-20. A proper understanding of what Peter means will help clarify what Peter means, and that's simply that Christ in His spirit didn't go anywhere to save those who were righteous before the flood because there were none, just Noah and His family, Genesis 6:5-13.

Does Peter mean that the Gospel was preached to those who were already dead? No, what he means is that they were dead whilst Peter wrote this letter, but they were very much alive whilst the Gospel was being preached to them.

What he's saying is that the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, spoke through Noah to the people when they were alive. He's not talking about what happened when Jesus was in the grave, and we shouldn't make a text mean something it doesn't say.

PARADISE

Paradise is a Persian for 'an area enclosed by a wall' or 'garden.' Nehemiah 2:8 / Ecclesiastes 2:5 / Song of Solomon 4:13. The Greek word, 'paradeisos', is used for the garden in Eden in Genesis, Genesis 2:8-16 / Isaiah 51:3 / Ezekiel 28:13.

The New Testament understands paradise in terms of its Jewish heritage. In Luke 23:43, Jesus promises the penitent thief, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' The intermediate state was transformed by Jesus' emphasis on being with him 'today.' There's no denying where Jesus was going; He was going to 'paradise'.

Wait a minute, didn't Jesus say to Mary, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.' John 20:17? Yes, He did, so if we're saying He went to heaven when He died, how do we understand what He said to Mary?

Jesus is telling Mary not to cling to Him because there is work to be done, she needs to tell others what has happened, and so there's a sense of urgency. She wanted to hold on and not let go, but Jesus wouldn't allow her. Remember, later Thomas was invited to touch Jesus, John 20:27.
Could it be possible that when He's speaking to Mary, He's speaking in terms of His new glorified body? He hasn't ascended to the Father in His new everlasting body. Isn't that what the resurrection is about? 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 / 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 / Romans 8:23 / Philippians 3:20-21.
We know from these verses that we will be reconciled with our bodies at the resurrection, but they will be new, in terms of glorious. If we know this, then surely, it's possible that this is what Jesus meant when He spoke to Mary.

If we read 1 Peter 4:6 and come to the conclusion that Jesus went to hell to preach the Gospel to those who have already died, we would soon run into trouble with other Scriptures, especially Hebrews 9:27.
In other words, Peter is saying that the Gospel was preached to them, the dead, when they were very much still alive but by the time Peter writes this letter they are now well and truly dead, 1 Peter 4:5. There is no second chance Gospel, everyone is destined to die once and then face judgment, Hebrews 9:27, no second chance to repent and become faithful.
Notice in Ephesians 4:7-10, when Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18, that he doesn't even mention the word hell.
In Psalm 68:18, David is looking forward into the future, it's prophetic, David says, 'received gifts', but Paul says, 'gave gifts'. This is David looking forward, and Paul looking at the fulfilment of this passage.
The words, 'descended to the lower, earthly regions,' aren't a reference to hell, but to Jesus' birth. Paul is referring to Christ's coming to earth as a baby; he's speaking about Christ coming into Mary's womb.

Paul is saying that Jesus, who went up to heaven, that is, in His ascension, is the same Jesus who earlier came down from heaven. Paul isn't speaking about Christ going to 'hell', he's speaking about Christ's birth as a human.

Notice in Romans 10:6-7 that Paul quotes from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 30:12. Again, there is no mention of the word, 'hell' in these verses. In this context, Paul is simply asking these Christians not to ask these questions, why? Because Christ isn't far away, in fact, He is very near, and faith in him is as near as confessing with our mouth and believing in our heart, Romans 10:9.
When we read Acts 2:26-27 / Acts 2:31, we find the phrase, 'realm of the dead,' which is the grave, the place where the 'body' ends up. Notice it was Jesus' 'body' which went to the grave, not His soul.
It's obvious that Peter is using David's psalm, Psalm 16:9-10, to show that Christ's 'body' did not decay. In other words, Jesus wasn't like David, 'who died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day along with his remains,' Acts 2:29.
No longer is paradise just an anticipatory condition awaiting the messianic presence at the end of the age. Those who die in faith will 'be with Christ,' Philippians 1:23. The dead in Christ will not experience life diminished, but life enhanced, as Jesus' words to Martha in John 11 imply, John 11:23-26.
Note the term, 'Abraham's side', this is a Hebraism which the Jews understood to mean, 'the paradise of God,' Luke 16:19-22. So, clearly, once again the Bible teaches us that Lazarus was in 'paradise'.
It's a figurative phrase that appears to have been drawn from a popular belief that the righteous would rest by Abraham's side in the world to come, an opinion described in Jewish literature at the time of Christ.

The word 'bosom' or 'side' is 'kolpos' and literally refers to the side or lap of a person. Figuratively, as in this case, it refers to a place of honour reserved for a special guest, similar to its usage in John 13:23: 'One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.'
In the case of Lazarus, the reserved place is special because it's beside Abraham, the father of all the righteous. The phrase may be synonymous with the paradise promised to the thief on the cross, Luke 23:43. Together, these passages support the conviction that a believer enjoys immediate bliss at the moment of physical death.

When writing to the church in Ephesus, note what Jesus says, 'I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God,' Revelation 2:7. According to Revelation 2:7, the overcoming church will eat from the tree of life in the eschatological garden.
Sin and death through redemption are now cast out of the human experience. The way is open for the faithful to return to the garden of God. Paradise is the Christian's final home.

Notice that Paul says he was caught up to the 'third heaven', whilst in the same setting says, caught up to 'paradise,' 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Surely, the phrases 'caught up to the third heaven' and 'caught up to paradise' mean the same thing! Surely, the 'third heaven' and 'paradise' are one and the same place!
So where did Jesus' spirit go when He died? The 'third heaven', or 'paradise' is God's spiritual eternal home, which isn't physical and isn't created, this is the place where not only Paul found himself, but the place where Lazarus found himself when he died, the place where Jesus and the thief on the cross went to that day, Luke 23:43.
There is no Scriptural evidence which says Jesus went to or descended down to hell in any shape or form and there would be no purpose in doing so.

THE GUARD AT THE TOMB

'The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive, that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.' Matthew 27:62-66

Matthew is the only writer who mentions Pilate giving permission for a guard to be sent to guard the tomb of Christ.
The Preparation Day, Matthew 27:62, was the Friday before the Sabbath of the Passover, Exodus 16:22 / Matthew 26:17 / John 19:31, and it appears that the chief priests and Pharisees were becoming a little nervous.
They go to Pilate and tell Him that Jesus said, 'after three days, He will rise again', Matthew 27:63 / Matthew 16:21 / Matthew 17:23 / Matthew 20:19 / Matthew 26:61 / Mark 8:31 / Mark 10:34.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the deception.

'That is, the last 'deception', or the taking him from the tomb, pretending that he rose, will have a wider influence among the people than the first, or his pretending to be the Messiah.'

They are determined to stop any rumours that Jesus would rise and so they ask that His tomb be guarded, just in case one of Jesus' disciples stole His body, Matthew 27:64.
And so, to stop anyone from stealing the body of Christ, a security guard was granted, along with a Roman seal, Matthew 27:64 / Daniel 6:17. And that is what they did, Matthew 27:65-66.

CHAPTER 28

INTRODUCTION

‘After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 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. 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.” So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly, Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Matthew 28:1-10

THE EMPTY TOMB

When we put all the resurrection accounts together chronologically, a good, clear picture can be constructed.

1. It was very early on the Sunday morning, as the sun was coming up, Matthew 28:1 / Mark 16:2 / Luke 24:1 / John 20:1.
2. Mary Magdala and the other Mary were going to anoint Jesus with spices, Matthew 28:1 / Mark 16:1 / Luke 24:1 / John 20:1.
3. John records only the experience of Mary of Magdala.

She saw that the stone had been ‘taken away’ from the entrance of the tomb; the stone had been moved from the entrance during the night. The other Gospels say that the stone was ‘rolled back’, ‘rolled away’, clearly it was out of the groove in which it had to be to cover the entrance, Matthew 28:2 / Mark 16:4 / Luke 24:2 / John 20:1.
4. The guards had seen this occur and were much afraid; it was done by an angel and accompanied by an earthquake, Matthew 28:2-4.
5. The same angel spoke to the women, telling them the Christ had risen, Matthew 28:5-6 / Mark 16:6 / Luke 24:4-6.
6. Jesus had gone to Galilee, and they will meet him there, Matthew 28:7 / Mark 16:7.
7. This was in accordance with Jesus earlier statements, Luke 24:7-8.
8. The women went to tell the disciples as the angel had told them, Matthew 28:8 / Mark 16:7 / Luke 24:9 / John 20:2.
9. As they were afraid, they told no one else, Mark 16:8.
10. On meeting the disciples, Mary was distressed and didn’t seem to believe what she had heard from the angel, as she says, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him’, John 20:2. As we know, they hadn’t removed Jesus; Jesus had removed Himself.
11. Only Peter and John believed initially, both ran to the tomb, and found only the cloth Jesus had been wrapped in, Luke 24:11-12 / John 20:3 / John 20:7.
In keeping with the law of Moses, they had rested on the Sabbath and had returned to complete the burial rites of the Saviour, which they had begun on the day of His death.

Because it was after the Sabbath was over when the women proceeded to the tomb, Matthew 28:1. This tells us that the resurrection of Jesus happened on the first day of the week, that is, Sunday morning, Mark 16:2 / Mark 16:9 / Luke 24:1 / John 20:1.
Only Matthew records this earthquake, Matthew 28:2. There was a violent earthquake, when an angel rolled away the stone from Jesus’ grave, symbolising Christ’s power over death, which was obviously supernatural.
Note that Matthew 28:2 says there was only one angel at the tomb of Jesus, while Mark 16:5 says there was one young man clothed in a long white garment. Luke 24:4 and John 20:12 tell us there were two angels at the tomb.

Mark and Luke referred to their human appearance, Mark 16:5 / Luke 24:4, while Matthew and John referred to their angelic nature, Matthew 28:2 / John 20:12.
It's obvious there were two angels present, but only one of them spoke. The angel's appearance was so bright that the guards became like dead men, Matthew 28:3-4.
Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following concerning the angel.

'He does not appear to have drawn a flaming sword, nor even to have spoken to the keepers; but the presence of perfect purity overawed these rough legionaries.'

He tells Mary Magdalene, the woman who Jesus drove out seven spirits from her, Luke 8:2 / Mark 16:9, and the other Mary, not to be afraid, Matthew 28:5. This is because he knows why they are there, they are looking for the Jesus who as crucified, Matthew 28:5. The angel then proceeds to tell that Jesus is risen, and the angel invites them to look for themselves, Matthew 28:6.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the invitation.

'Come and see the niche in which he was laid-it is now empty; nor was there any other body in the place, for the tomb was a new one, in which no man had ever been laid, John 19:41, so there could be no deception in the case.'
He asked them to tell the disciples and Peter what had happened, and that Jesus would meet them in Galilee as promised, Matthew 28:7 / Mark 14:27-28 / Mark 16:7. Since Peter was himself a disciple, it seems unusual that he would be singled out and receive a special invitation.
Perhaps it was because the Lord knew that Peter would no longer feel himself worthy to be counted as a disciple after having denied Him, and therefore, Jesus gave him a special invitation to the meeting. What tenderness the Lord showed!

The women fled away very frightened, yet filled with joy, Matthew 28:8. The women went to tell the apostles what they had learned, Matthew 28:8 / Luke 24:10.
However on the way Jesus suddenly appears to them, and after He said, 'greetings', Matthew 28:9. The King James Version says, 'all hail' which represents the normal Greek greeting.
It wasn't that long ago they were mourning Jesus, but now they grasped Him and worshipped Him, Matthew 28:9.
Jesus tells them not to be afraid but go and tell his brothers He will meet them in Galilee, Matthew 28:10, just as the angel did earlier, Matthew 28:7 / Mark 14:27-28 / Mark 16:7.
Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'Not first to them who were the heads of the Church, as it were, but first of all to lowly women, did the Lord appear; and the apostles themselves had to go to school to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to learn that great truth, 'The Lord is risen indeed.'

JESUS APPEARS TO MARY MAGDALENE

John's account gives us the full story, John 20:10-18. Joyfully, the disciples returned home, no doubt to tell the other disciples of the good news, John 20:10. 'The beloved disciple' was the first one to believe that Jesus had risen, this without seeing Him, John 20:8.
Mary of Magdala was the first to see Him after His resurrection. She is the woman whom Jesus drove out seven spirits from her, Luke 8:2 / Mark 16:9. Mary, however, stayed at the tomb, even though she had seen the angel earlier on, Matthew 28:5-6; she still didn't understand or believe. Mary stood outside the tomb, 'crying', sobbing, weeping aloud, John 20:11.

As she sobbed, she glanced inside the tomb, and she saw two angels sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the corpse had lain. The angels looked like young men, Mark 16:5 / Luke 24:4 / John 20:11-12.
They asked why she was in such obvious distress, John 20:13. It's important to note that she makes reference to Jesus as 'My Lord', John 20:13, indicating continued faith in Him, even though He is no longer about.
With these words, she turned around and noticed Jesus standing, although she didn't know it was Jesus, John 20:14.
Jesus asked her, 'Woman, said Jesus, 'why are you crying? Who are you looking for?' John 20:15. Two things should be kept in mind here.
1. She was crying bitterly, blinded by grief.

2. It was only when He spoke her name that 'she turned' towards him, John 20:16.
Until this moment, she wasn't looking at the speaker. These two facts alone would account for her not knowing it was Jesus. Perhaps Christ's body is so changed as not to be recognised at once even by those who had known Him well. It has new powers and a new majesty, John 21:4 / Luke 24:16 / Luke 24:37 / Matthew 28:17.
Notice here the words, 'Sir, tell me, and I will take Him away,' John 20:15. How was she to carry a corpse, and where would she take it? Her loving devotion does not measure her strength. This is a beautiful example of the self-forgetfulness of love.
Why she even turned around at that point is open to speculation, but she is now facing an unknown man. He asks why she is crying, the same question the angels had just asked, John 20:13 / John 20:15.
In her upset state, thinking Jesus was a gardener, Mary gives Him a brief answer, asking if He had anything to do with Jesus' disappearance, John 20:15. The whole conversation with this man is running along very similar lines to the one held moments before with the two angels, John 20:13-14.
Jesus now reveals Himself with one word, 'Mary', John 20:16. It must have been in the tenderness of His tone, or the gentleness of His voice, that sparks a memory in the mind of Mary, and she realises who she is addressing, John 20:16.
The word, 'Rabboni!' is the Aramaic form of 'Rabbi', and it means 'my great Master', John 20:16. Jesus tells her, 'do not hold me,' 'do not touch me,' John 20:17, but we must remember He allowed women to touch Him after His resurrection, Matthew 28:9. He even told Thomas to touch Him, John 20:27.
He isn't talking here about mere touching, but holding, in other words, He is saying, 'cease clinging to me'. Her instinctive desire would be to hold on to Jesus, to keep Him and not to let Him go; that wasn't possible. She couldn't keep Him physically with His disciples; a completely new period was to begin, involving His 'going to his Father and her God', John 20:17.
After that, His ascension, a new kind of fellowship, spiritual, would be available to all His followers. This couldn't be interrupted by any event. Conditions had changed, and the relationship between the disciples and their 'Didaskalos' and 'Kurios' must also change.

She must have run to Him and embraced Him, as He gently tells her not to hold to Him, not to cling to Him, John 20:17, referring also to the fact that His current reappearance was just a short and temporary stay.
What did Jesus mean when He said, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God?' John 20:17. Remember on the cross, Jesus promises the penitent thief, 'today you will be with me in paradise,' Luke 23:43.
The intermediate state was transformed by Jesus' emphasis on being with him 'today.' There's no denying where Jesus was going; He was going to 'paradise', Luke 16:22 / Luke 23:43 / 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 / Revelation 2:7.
If we say He went to heaven when He died, how do we understand what He said to Mary? Jesus is telling Mary not to cling to Him because there is work to be done. She needs to tell others what has happened, and so there's a sense of urgency. She wanted to hold on and not let go, but Jesus wouldn't allow her.

Remember, He allowed women to touch Him after His resurrection, Matthew 28:9. Later, Thomas was invited to touch Jesus, John 20:27. Could it be possible that when Jesus speaks to Mary, He is speaking in terms of now clinging onto His new glorified body?
He hasn't ascended to the Father in His new everlasting body. Isn't that what the resurrection is about? 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 / 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 / Romans 8:23 / Philippians 3:20-21.
We know from these verses that we will be reconciled with our bodies at the resurrection, but they will be new, in terms of glorious. If we know this, then surely, it's possible that this is what Jesus meant when He spoke to Mary in terms of Him going to the Father.

No longer is paradise just an anticipatory condition awaiting the messianic presence at the end of the age. Those who die in faith will 'be with Christ,' Philippians 1:23-24. The dead in Christ will not experience life diminished, but life enhanced, as Jesus' words to Martha in John 11 imply, John 11:23-26.
Jesus now charges Mary with the responsibility of telling the disciples this vital news, He is returning to God the Father, and her God, a reference to His victory, John 20:17.
Gladly Mary must have run the road to the disciples to tell them the news and the message, John 20:18. Jesus first appeared to the women, and He treated them as always beautifully, notice the first person to tell about the risen Christ was a woman.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

The importance of the resurrection of Jesus is summed up by Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:14-15 / 1 Corinthians 15:17. Jesus died to atone for our sins. But we could not know that He did so unless we also knew that He arose from the grave, for one who did not have the power to conquer death would not have the power to forgive sins. Only in the light of the empty tomb does the cross have significance.
Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus demonstrates the possibility of our resurrection. If He could conquer death for Himself, He could overcome it for His disciples. The Christian's hope of eternal life is inseparably connected with the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Christ also shows that Jesus brought an end to the old covenant and its law when He died on the cross. The Mosaic Age, in which Israel had been living for fifteen hundred years, ended at Calvary.

There Jesus blotted out 'our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross,' Colossians 2:14. From that time forth, all men, Jews and Gentiles, have lived in the Christian Age and are subject to the laws of Christ as recorded in the New Testament.

THE GUARDS' REPORT

'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." 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.' Matthew 28:11-15

As the women left the site, the chief priests were told by the guards what had happened, Matthew 28:11, and as we can imagine, they weren't very happy. The chief priests and the elders decide to come up with some devious plan, that is, they would bribe the guards with a large amount of money, Matthew 28:12. They were to tell the governor that someone had come along during the night and stolen Jesus' body, Matthew 28:13.

There's no way the guards could deny what happened at the tomb, and under Roman law, the soldiers would have been executed for letting a sealed and guarded tomb be entered. This is why the chief priests and elders told them they would keep them out of trouble, Matthew 28:14.

The religious leaders basically promise that they will lie on behalf of the soldiers in order to discourage belief in the resurrection. This lying rumour succeeded, as it was spread among the Jews, Matthew 28:15.

The good news is the disciples believed, and they went on to preach about the resurrection of Christ, Acts 2:36, and later a Jew named Saul would have a personal encounter with the risen Lord, Acts 9:1-16.

KEEPING HIS APPOINTMENT

'Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.' Matthew 28:16-17

If you remember, Jesus had not long appeared to His disciples to reassure them that He had indeed been raised from the dead. During that time, He promised them that He would meet them at a mountain somewhere in Galilee, Matthew 28:16 / Matthew 26:32 / Matthew 28:7 / Matthew 28:10. It would have been a very long walk from Jerusalem to Galilee.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

Christ made an appointment to meet His disciples in Galilee, and that appointment He kept. He kept it in spite of the following.

1. His sleeping disciples. 2. His betrayal. 3. They're forsaking Him.
4. His death. 5. His burial. 6. Peter's denial. 7. The big lie. 8. The unbelief of many.

The only people who didn't meet Christ on that mount in Galilee are those who didn't go there to keep their appointment.

Coffman, in his commentary, goes on to say.

In like manner, now Christ keeps His appointments with His disciples, despite similar lapses on their part, and what are those appointments? They are to meet Christ in the following.

1. To meet him in baptism. 2. At the Lord's table. 3. In the trials of life. 4. In death. 5. In the judgment to come.

Only those who will not obey Him shall miss the joy of meeting the Lord in those appointments, but in the case of the judgment, all shall keep that appointment, whether they desire to do so or not.

The time for excuses is over. If Christ can keep His appointment after enduring everything He went through, then surely, we can keep our appointments and come together at the appointed time to worship Him and study His Word!

It's a sad truth that within many of our congregations, we always have those who are late, they're late for worship, late for Bible study, late for any event that the church has planned. They're never late for work or family events, which does beg the question of priorities.

However, I've learned over the years that I can't force anyone to come to worship on time; that's between them and God. If I begin to make a deal out of it, there is the strong possibility that I will become judgmental.

I become judgmental because I'm implying that those who come late to worship aren't as righteous as I am, which would be a big mistake, Matthew 7:3-5. It's interesting that when they saw Jesus, they worshipped Him, but some still doubted, Matthew 28:17.
Ellis, in his commentary, says the following.

'When the Eleven finally saw Jesus, they worshipped Him. Yet some of them still had unresolved questions about how they should respond to Him. The word 'doubted', 'edistasan' means 'hesitated', Matthew 14:31.'
Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Apparently, Jesus' resurrection did not immediately dispel all the questions that remained in the minds of His disciples. Perhaps, also, some of them still felt embarrassed about deserting Him and wondered how He would deal with them.'

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The reason for the doubt here is possibly because Jesus must have been a little distance away, maybe some of them didn't recognise Him at first, as we shall see in Matthew 28:18. It's important to point out that the 'doubting' here isn't in relation to their faith but in relation to identifying Jesus from a distance.'

THE GREAT COMMISSION

'Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' Matthew 28:18

It's here we find the possible reason for the doubting of some, Matthew 28:17. Notice Matthew records, 'then Jesus came near', Matthew 28:18, this suggests that He was a little distance away.
This would explain why some doubted; they didn't recognise Him from a distance, whilst others recognised Him straight away. The good news is that when He did come closer to them, the doubts would have gone, and all would have believed.

ALL AUTHORITY

When Jesus says, 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, Matthew 28:18, He means exactly that, all authority, not some but all. The word 'authority' comes from the Greek word 'exousia', which Thayer defines as, 'the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed.'
It was Jesus who gave up the riches of His heavenly home to become human, 2 Corinthians 8:9 / Philippians 2:5-8 / John 1:1-14. It was Jesus who was tempted but didn't sin, Hebrews 4:15.
It was Jesus who remained faithful to God the Father all the days of His life, despite going through the suffering and shame of the cross, Philippians 2:8-11 / Hebrews 12:2.
As proof of His faithfulness, God raised Him from the dead, which is why He can now say that He has been given all authority over heaven and earth, Matthew 28:18.

Because Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, then surely this speaks loudly about His Deity, He really is God, He really is the Son of God, John 1:1 / John 20:28 / Acts 20:28 / Romans 9:5 / Philippians 2:6 / Hebrews 1:8 / Titus 2:13 / 2 Peter 1:1 / 1 John 5:20 / Revelation 1:8 / Colossians 2:9 / John 14:9.

This means that every person is subject to Jesus' authority with the exception of the Father, 1 Corinthians 15:27.

When Jesus ascended to the Father, He sat down on His right side. Then He poured out the Holy Spirit onto His apostles, which proved that His reign as King had begun, Acts 2:1-36.

The kingdom, which is His church, began on the day of Pentecost, and Jesus is its head on both the earth and in heaven, Ephesians 1:22-23. He has all authority over heaven and earth, hence why He's called the 'King of kings and Lord of lords', 1 Timothy 6:15.

The Scriptures clearly teach that He is reigning over His kingdom right now with all authority and that He will hand over His kingdom to the Father when He comes again, 1 Corinthians 15:24-34.

He will continue to reign until all His enemies have been put under His feet, notwithstanding that the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, 1 Corinthians 15:24-25.

'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.' Matthew 28:19

In all four Gospels, we see that Jesus commissions the disciples to take the good news to the world, Matthew 28:19 / Mark 16:15-16 / Luke 24:46-47 / John 20:21-23.

GO

The word 'go', Matthew 28:19, carries with it the idea of continuous action. They were to continually go; it wasn't a one-off act but a continuous act. to keep on going.

MAKE DISCIPLES

Notice that they were to make disciples, Matthew 28:19. The word 'disciple' comes from the Greek word 'matheteuo', which Thayer defines as 'to be the disciple of one; to follow his precepts and instruction; to teach'.

In other words, a disciple is someone who is taught and follows the teaching of another. Surely this teaches us that people need to be taught before they become disciples, Luke 14:25-33.

ALL NATIONS

The Greek words 'ta ethne' mean every ethnic group. Jesus wants the disciples to make disciples in every ethnic group of the world, Matthew 28:19 / Mark 16:15 / John 20:21.

And please know that 'all nations' means exactly that, we can't pick and choose who we share the Gospel with, it means all people from every country there is in the world, despite their ethnicity or background. No one is to be exempt from hearing the good news, Acts 10:34-35 / Galatians 3:28-29 / Colossians 1:6 / Colossians 1:23 / 1 Timothy 2:4 / 2 Peter 3:9.

BAPTISING THEM

For the life of me, I simply don't understand why so many people are resistant to being baptised when Christ clearly teaches here, Matthew 28:19, and in other places, Mark 16:16, that they need to be baptised. If baptism is an option and not really needed, then why would Christ command it?

Why does the New Testament teach the importance of baptism over and over again if it wasn't necessary for salvation? Anyone who wants to truly follow Jesus must be baptised in order not only to have their sins forgiven but also to receive the 'gift', not 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38.

THERE ARE FOUR REASONS WHY WE MUST BE BAPTISED

1. We must be baptised if we want to be saved, Mark 16:16, and 1 Peter 3:21.
2. We must be baptised to have our sins forgiven. Acts 2:38.
3. We must be baptised if we want to be 'in Christ', which means to be a Christian. Galatians 3:27.
4. We must be baptised if we want to become a part of the body of Christ, His church, Ephesians 1:22-23, and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Notice that there are not three names we baptise people into but one name, Matthew 28:19. In other words, God is one in essence, He has one Name but exists as three distinct persons.

In the Book of Acts, we see that people were baptised 'in' the Name of Jesus, Acts 2:38 / Acts 10:48 / Acts 19:5, which simply means by the authority of Jesus. But here Jesus says people are to be baptised 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.

Take a moment to look at the word 'in', Matthew 28:19, and then look at the footnote in your Bible where it tells us that the word used is actually the word 'into'. Do you see the difference this makes?

In Acts, the Greek word used is the word 'en', which refers to a person being with the authority of the name of Jesus. Here in Matthew 28:19, it's the Greek word 'eis' which is used, which means 'into', in other words, when a person is baptised, they are baptised 'into' a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And so, when a person is baptised, they are baptised with the authority of Christ and at the same time they enter a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Please note that although three names are given, they are one name. In other words, the unity and oneness of God are being taught in this verse. There are three persons in the Godhead, and each has a name, but their name is one.

TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU

'And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' Matthew 28:20

If anyone claims to be a Christian, the proof is seen in their obedience to Christ's teachings, John 14:15 / 1 John 4:19. It's such a shame that some so-called Christians just pick and choose which teachings they will follow. Obeying everything means obeying everything, Matthew 28:20 / 1 Corinthians 4:6 / 2 Peter 1:3 / Jude 1:3.
We also see that everything which Christ taught His disciples was to be taught to others. This shows us the importance of Bible study and getting to know exactly what Christ taught, in order words, for us to teach others what Christ taught.

Yes, it's true, in its context, the Great Commission was given to the apostles, but we still have a responsibility to share that same good news with others today, 2 Timothy 2:2.
Let me ask you, why are people to be taught, and then taught again? Remember, Jesus taught His disciples, and when He left, the Holy Spirit was going to continue to teach His disciples, John 14:26. Paul went on to teach Timothy, and now Timothy is to teach others, 2 Timothy 1:1-2.

DO YOU SEE WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

The disciple has now become the teacher. And guess what those whom Timothy had taught were to do? They were to go on and teach others. One of the church fathers is a man named Polycarp, who lived between 69 and 155 A.D But more importantly, he was a disciple of the apostle John, and what did he do?

Another church father is a man named Irenaeus, who lived around 120/140 A.D. He was the disciple of John and also Polycarp. Do you see what I'm getting at here?

What started off as Jesus teaching His disciples and then the Holy Spirit teaching His disciples, His disciples went on to make other disciples who went on to teach others to become disciples.

The teachings of Jesus have been passed down through the centuries from one person to another. And we are blessed to have our Bibles today so that we can carry on teaching others. It's important to teach, baptise and teach again so that those who are taught can then go on to teach others what they have learned.

That's one reason why John tells his readers that they must 'continue in the teachings of Christ', otherwise, they will lose their relationship with God and His Son, 2 John 1:8-9. In other words, it's not enough to start with the teachings of Christ; we must continue in His teachings, otherwise, we will lose our salvation.
Before His ascension, Jesus gave His disciples this commission. It's recorded in different forms in the first three Gospels. Although He had previously given them a limited commission to go only to the Jews, His new commission was worldwide in its scope, Matthew 28:20 / Mark 16:15-16.
Unlike the law of Moses, the Gospel story is intended for those of every race or nationality who will accept Jesus as their Saviour. Christians cannot allow racial prejudice to confine their efforts to proclaim Christ.

The conditions of salvation as given in the commission are simple. A sinner must believe in Christ, repent and then be baptised. Baptism is to be into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit rather than into the Name of Jesus only.

The blessings of forgiveness of sins and salvation come as a result of one's baptism rather than preceding it. Jesus states, 'He that believes and is baptised shall be saved,' Mark 16:16.

Notice that Jesus gave them 'signs' to confirm their message, Mark 16:17-18. It's very important to remember that Jesus is speaking to His disciples, and He gave them signs to confirm the message.
What was the purpose of miracles in the ministry of Christ, or the apostolic age? Their design must be consistent with the lofty theme of redemption. Of the early disciples who were endowed with spiritual gifts, Mark declares, 'Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it,' Mark 16:20.
The function of the 'signs' was to 'confirm' the revelatory process, i.e., the word of truth being communicated from God to man, Hebrews 2:3-4. Of special interest in these passages is the term 'confirm,' 'bebaioo'. The word denotes evidence that establishes the validity of the divinely given word.
The supernatural gifts of the primitive age, therefore, had as their design the establishment of the credibility of Christ and His spokesmen, and so ultimately, the validation of their message, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world!

Now observe this very important point. If it can be established that those early miracles do corroborate the testimony of Christ, and those commissioned by Him, and further, that the recording of these events in the New Testament was designed to perpetually accomplish that function, then it stands as demonstrated that the repetition of such signs is not needed today.

The fact is, that's exactly what is affirmed by the apostle John. He declares that the 'signs' of Christ, which he records in his Gospel account, 'are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,' John 20:31. Even those who claim that God is working miracles today when asked if they believe that the recorded miracles of Christ in the New Testament are sufficient to establish faith in Him will answer affirmatively.

It ought to be abundantly clear, therefore, that since the miracles of the Bible continue to accomplish their original purpose, there is no need for a repetition of them today. They are not being replicated in this age!

If these verses only apply to the apostles, then what about the Great Commission? Would that only apply to them and not to us today? Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16.
Well, the apostles have given the Great Commission, but we have the responsibility to share that good news with others, too, even today, 2 Timothy 2:2.
The Gospel of Mark closes with a note about the results of the great mission Jesus entrusted to the apostles. After He had ascended back to heaven, they went out and began to preach everywhere, just like Jesus told them, Mark 16:19-20. The Lord blessed their revelation of the Gospel message with signs to confirm it, just as He said He would.

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

Jesus knows exactly what's coming next for the apostles. It wasn't going to be easy; prison, persecution, and even death were all awaiting them in the not-too-distant future, and so Jesus promises them that He will be with them through it all, He wouldn't abandon them, Matthew 18:20 / Acts 12:1-2 / Acts 18:10.
The same promise is for us today as Christians, God is omnipresent and powerful, He knows exactly what's going on in each of our lives, Hebrews 1:3, and He promises never to abandon us, Romans 8:28 / Hebrews 13:5-6 / 1 Peter 3:12.

TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE

Jesus here isn't saying that He will be with His disciples until they die, this promise goes way beyond this, after all, wouldn't He be with them when they do eventually die anyway? Luke 20:38 / John 14:1-3 / 2 Timothy 1:10. He's referring to the end of the Christian age, judgment and the end of the world, Matthew 28:20.
The time is coming when the world will come to an end, 2 Peter 3:1-13. No one knows when this will happen, Matthew 24:36, but until it does, the church has the huge responsibility to take that good news, concerning Jesus, out to the masses, Mark 16:16. Although at times this seems like an impossible task, we need to remember that Jesus would never have commissioned it, if it weren't possible.
It's all too easy to get comfortable with the salvation that we have in Christ and to look forward to eternal life, but at the same time, there is a sense of urgency to try to reach the lost. When we look at our world, it can sometimes feel overwhelming, and we begin to think there's no way we can reach everyone.

Maybe we should focus on the people who are in our 'world', our families, friends and neighbours, our work colleagues, etc., whilst remembering we're not responsible for making Christians, Acts 2:47 / 1 Corinthians 3:7-8, we're responsible for sharing the message.