THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Luke is an incredible account of the person and ministry of Jesus, and the way Luke presents his account is so easy to understand and follow. The book itself contains lots of parables and focuses a lot on how Jesus deals with and shows compassion for the poor and the oppressed.

AUTHOR

The book was written by Luke, but he doesn't claim to have been an eyewitness to our Lord's ministry, but to have gone to the best sources of information within his reach, and to have written an orderly narrative of the facts, Luke 1:1-4.
Luke was a Gentile and a literate, educated and intelligent man. He was educated in Science and Medicine. He travelled with the Apostle Paul. It is probable that he was a physician in Troas and was there converted by Paul, to whom he attached himself.

He accompanied him to Philippi, but didn't there share his imprisonment, nor did he accompany him further after his release in his missionary journey at this time, Acts 17:1.
On Paul's third visit to Philippi, Acts 20:5-6, we again meet with Luke, who probably had spent all the intervening time in that city, a period of seven or eight years. From this time, Luke was Paul's constant companion during his journey to Jerusalem, Acts 20:6-38 / Acts 21:1-18.
He again disappears from view during Paul's imprisonment at Jerusalem and Caesarea and only reappears when Paul sets out for Rome, Acts 27:1, where he accompanies him, Acts 28:2 / Acts 28:12-16, and where he remains with him till the close of his first imprisonment, Philemon 1:24 / Colossians 4:14.
The last notice of the 'beloved physician' is in 2 Timothy 4:11. There are many passages in Paul's epistles, as well as in the writings of Luke, which show the extent and accuracy of his medical knowledge.

THE BOOK

Luke wrote most of the New Testament, more than any other writer did, that is, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. The Gospel of Luke is the third and longest book in the New Testament. Luke is writing to one man, Theophilus, who means friend of God, a young man and a Roman official, possibly a Christian who wanted to know more.

Luke is the first of a two-part work dedicated to the 'most excellent Theophilus', Luke 1:3 / Acts 1:1. The Book of Acts forms the sequel to Luke, with the author explaining in Acts that Luke dealt with 'all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up', Acts 1:1-2. No other Gospel has a volume two. The book was written for Greeks and Gentiles, and he wrote an account for the world. His book contains Greek writings.
Some suggest that the four faces mentioned in Ezekiel 4:10 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.

Holman, in his dictionary, says the following.

'Luke's purpose was to present a historical work 'in order', Luke 1:3. Most of his stories fall in chronological sequence. He often gave time indications, Luke 1:5 / Luke 1:5 / Luke 1:26 / Luke 1:26 / Luke 1:36 / Luke 1:36 / Luke 1:56 / Luke 1:56 Luke 1:59 / Luke 2:42 / Luke 3:23 / Luke 9:28 / Luke 12:1 / Luke 12:1 / Luke 12:7. More than any other Gospel writer, Luke connected his story with the larger Jewish and Roman world, Luke 2:1 / Luke 3:1-2.'

DATE

No one knows the exact date the book was written, but it must have been written before the Book of Acts. The date of the book is generally fixed at about 63 or 64 A.D. This Gospel was written, therefore, probably about 60 or 63, when Luke may have been at Caesarea in attendance on Paul, who was then a prisoner. Others have suggested that it was written in Rome during Paul's imprisonment there.

OUTLINE

The Prologue. Luke 1:1-4
Birth and Infancy Stories. Luke 1:5-2:52
Preparation for Ministry. Luke 3:1-4:13
The Galilean Ministry. Luke 4:14-9:50
On the Way to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51-19:27
The Jerusalem Ministry. Luke 19:28-24:53

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

'Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I

myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.' Luke 1:1-4

Luke begins by informing us that many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled, Luke 1:1.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'It has been doubted who are referred to here by the word 'many'. It seems clear that it could not be the other evangelists, for the gospel by 'John' was not yet written, and the word 'many' denotes more than 'two'. Besides, it is said that they undertook to record what the 'eye-witnesses' had delivered to them so that the writers did not pretend to be eye-witnesses themselves. It is clear, therefore, that other writings are meant than the gospels which we now have, but what they were is a matter of conjecture.'

What Luke is doing is writing an inspired record, 2 Timothy 3:16 / 2 Peter 1:21, to give an accurate account of the life and teachings of Christ, to help give Theophilus a correct understanding of who Jesus was and taught. Notice that Luke says that the things, that is, the life and teachings of Christ, have been fulfilled among us, Luke 1:1 / Jude 3.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'By these words, Luke affirmed that his record dealt with nothing new or novel in the faith of the very extensive Christian community already established throughout the Mediterranean world. The word for 'fulfilled' in this clause means 'fully established', English Revised Version 1885 margin, and this means that the total content of Luke's Gospel was already the faith of the whole church at the time he wrote in 60 A.D.'

Remember Luke wasn't a personal witness of the life and death of Jesus, but here, he refers to those who were, Luke 1:2. This was probably Jesus' mother, Mary, and the apostles themselves, Acts 1:2. Luke himself personally made a point of investigating the life and teachings of Christ, from the beginning of Christ's ministry, Luke 1:3.
He did this to give Theophilus an orderly account, so that he may know for sure that the things he has been taught were true and accurate, Luke 1:3-4 / 2 Timothy 3:16-17 / 2 Peter 1:20-21. The word taught here means to be instructed by word of mouth, Acts 18:25 / Romans 2:18.
Who is Theophilus? Acts 1:1, His name means 'one who loves God', but when Luke addresses him in Luke 1:3, as 'most excellent Theophilus'. Theophilus is obviously a follower of Jesus, and he possibly helped Luke with finances.
When we look at other people in the Bible with the title 'most excellent', they are usually people who are a part of the Roman government. In Acts 23, when the Jews were planning and plotting to kill Paul.
Paul's sister's son heard about it and told Paul, and so Paul then told one of the centurions, who then went and told his commanding officer. Felix was a Roman governor, Acts 23:26, and Luke addresses the Roman governor Felix as 'most excellent,' in Acts 24:3. When the apostle Paul was standing in front of Festus, giving his testimony, Paul addresses Festus and calls him 'most excellent Festus' in Acts 26:25.
Was Theophilus a Roman governor? We simply don't know, but because Luke addresses him as 'most excellent', he certainly has a position of high ranking of some sort.

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD

'In the time of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.' Luke 1:5-7

Herod the Great, Luke 1:5, was the son of Antipater, an Idumean and descendant of Esau. He was proud, cruel, bloodthirsty, and unmerciful as a ruler of the Jews. 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.

The story of the birth of the one who came to be known as John the Baptist gives signs of the greatness to come. John's parents were an older couple named Zachariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah belonged to the priestly tribe of Abijah, Luke 1:5, who served in the tabernacle during the days of David, 2 Chronicles 24:1-10 / 2 Chronicles 8:14. Zachariah and Elizabeth were both descended from the priestly family of Aaron, Luke 1:5 / Genesis 29:34 / Numbers 36:7-8. It's a strong possibility that Elizabeth and Maty, Jesus' mother were cousins, Luke 1:36.

Both of them were righteous in God's eyes and obedient to God's commands, Luke 1:6. They were blameless in terms of doing everything they were supposed to do to keep right with God, this doesn't mean they were sinless, Romans 3:9-10 / Romans 3:23.

Luke informs us that they were childless because Elizabeth couldn't have children, Luke 1:7 / Luke 1:25. This was often frowned upon and looked upon as a disgrace in Jewish times. Luke also tells us that they both were old in age, Luke 1:7.

'Once when Zechariah's division was on duty, and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.' Luke 1:8-10

Because there were so many priests available from the priestly division of Abijah and because it was an honour and privilege to serve in the temple, Zechariah was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, Luke 1:8-9. He was chosen to go into the temple, enter the holy of holies and burn incense, Luke 1:8-9 / Exodus 30:6-8 / Exodus 30:34. Zechariah would have burned incense twice a day, Exodus 30:7. The burning of the incense was symbolic of prayer and praise, Psalm 141:2 / Revelation 5:8 / Revelation 8:3-4, and an aroma pleasing to God, 1 Samuel 2:28.

The time that Luke mentions for the burning of the incense, Luke 1:10, was probably around 3:00 pm. This was the time when all the worshippers gathered together outside for prayer, Exodus 30:6-8.

'Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:11-17

Then came the day when Zachariah, while burning incense at the temple, saw an angel, that is, Gabriel, Luke 1:11 / Luke 1:19. The altar of incense was part of the furniture within the temple and was situated near the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the temple, Exodus 30:2 / Exodus 27:2.

Zachariah was startled by the appearance of the angel, Luke 1:12, but perhaps he was even more surprised by what the angel told him. Elizabeth would bear a child in her old age! They would name him John, Luke 1:13 / Luke 1:57 / Luke 1:60 / Luke 1:63, and he would be set apart for a special purpose.

When John is born, many people will rejoice because of the miraculous events surrounding his birth, Luke 1:14-15. They would rejoice because his birth signified the hope of Israel was about to come, Malachi 3:1 / Luke 1:58.

John would be great in the sight of the Lord because he was going to be the greatest of all of God's prophets, Luke 1:15, he was the forerunner of the Messiah, that is Jesus, Matthew 11:11. John would conform to some of the Nazarite laws, Numbers 6:1-21, he would not drink any strong wine or drink, Luke 1:15 / Ephesians 5:18.
Ash, in his commentary, says the following.

'Some facets of the Nazarite vow are not specified here, e.g., allowing the hair to grow.'

John would have a miraculous relationship with God from the time of his conception, Luke 1:41. He was filled with the Spirit, Luke 1:15, in terms of God revealing to Him the message he was to deliver.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'It is impossible to avoid the significance of the contrast in this verse between intoxicating 'spirits' which John would renounce and the 'Spirit' who would be in him, filling him, even from his mother's womb, and for his whole life. The same contrast was evident on Pentecost when the apostles were not 'drunk with wine' but filled with 'the Spirit'. Paul wrote, 'And be not drunken with wine wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit', Ephesians 5:18. Strong drink is an unqualified curse upon the earth and, although Christ did not require the kind of abstinence which marked the life of John the Baptist, drunkenness is forbidden, as well as an association with a drunkard, 1 Corinthians 5:11.'
John's mission was simple; he had to prepare the way for the Lord and call the people to repentance, Luke 1:16-17 / Matthew 3:1-12. John would be the fulfilment of Malachi 4:5-6 / Matthew 3:2 / Matthew 17:9-13, in reference to Elijah.
John will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, Luke 1:17 / Malachi 4:5-6. In other words, John will prepare the hearts of people for the coming of the Messiah, Luke 1:7 / John 1:35-51.

'Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years." The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." Luke 1:18-20

Zachariah was shocked! And wanted to know how this could happen because he and Elizabeth were old in age, Luke 1:18. The angel reveals himself to be Gabriel, Luke 1:19 / Daniel 8:16 / Daniel 9:21.
Gabriel also reveals that he stands in the presence of God, Luke 1:19 / 1 Kings 10:8 / 1 Kings 12:6 / 1 Kings 17:1 / Proverbs 22:29, and he has been sent to speak to Zachariah, Luke 1:19 / Hebrews 1:7 / Hebrews 1:14, and tell him the good news, Luke 1:19, that is, the birth of his son.
Because Zachariah had doubted Gabriel's words, Gabriel gave him a sign that he wouldn't be able to talk until the birth of his son, Luke 1:20 / Luke 1:62. Zachariah also lost his hearing at the same time. Of course, the angel proved to be correct, and after nine months, the priest and his wife had a son, Luke 1:57.

'Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realised he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.' Luke 1:21-22

God's people had obviously been used to the timetable of how long a priest should take to do his job in the sanctuary, and so when Zechariah didn't come out at the proper time, they began to worry about him, Luke 1:21.
When he came out and was unable to speak, they then realised that he had seen a vision, Luke 1:22. They came to this conclusion because Zechariah kept making signs to them, Luke 1:22.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The word 'vision' means 'sight, appearance', or 'spectre', and is commonly applied to spirits, or beings from another world. When he came out of the temple, it is probable that they 'suspected' that something of this nature had detained him there, and that, on the inquiry of him, he signified by a nod that this was the case.'

'When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days, he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people." Luke 1:23-25

After completing his weeklong duties as a priest, Zachariah returns home, Luke 1:23. Later, Elizabeth became pregnant, Luke 1:24. In other words, despite being old in age, it was at this time that God opened up her womb and enabled her to conceive, Genesis 18:11-15.
She hid herself for five months, Luke 1:24, possibly because she was old in age, and she may have felt embarrassed. It's more likely, as the text implies, that she simply wanted to spend that time just praising God for what He had done. He had shown her His favour and removed the disgrace of not having children from her, Luke 1:25 / Genesis 30:23 / Psalms 33:18.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

'In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Luke 1:26-28

Elizabeth is now six months pregnant with John, Luke 1:26 / Luke 1:36, and the angel Gabriel, Luke 1:19, was sent by God to deliver a message to Mary, Luke 1:26. There are only two angels named in the Scriptures, Gabriel being one and the archangel Michael being the other.
But have you ever wondered why God sent Gabriel to Nazareth? Luke 1:26. Why didn't He send him to Jerusalem or Capernaum? I believe that Luke mentions Nazareth was a city of Galilee because most of his readers were Gentiles, and the Jews would already know where Nazareth was.
And when you think about it, no one would ever imagine that an angel would be commissioned by the God of all creation to visit a village like Nazareth. A village which was situated in a district, the very name of which announced it as a place of the despised Gentiles.

The name Galilee means 'the district of the pagans'. So why did God choose Nazareth? Not only to fulfil the prophecy that Jesus would be a Nazarene, but because, as we all should know by now, God doesn't do things the way we would do things.

He chooses people we would never choose, He chooses places we would never choose, and Nazareth is one of those places. When Philip was speaking to Nathanael concerning Jesus, Nathanael said to Philip, 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' John 1:46. So, Nazareth might not be our choice for the announcement of a King to be born, but it certainly was God's choice.
The pledging, Luke 1:27, or the betrothal, as the King James Version says, of one person to another for marriage was common practice amongst the Jews at this time. The Jewish engagement was not as binding as marriage, but it was more than a promise of marriage.
The engagement took place about one year before the couple actually lived together after a formal marriage. But it was a binding relationship in that it was established before the marriage vows were made and the union consummated.

Luke tells us that both Joseph and Mary were descendants of King David of Israel, Luke 1:27 / Luke 1:69 / Luke 3:23-32. But twice in one verse, he's quick to point out that the woman chosen was a virgin, Luke 1:27.
In today's society, a virgin is seen as someone who hasn't had sexual relations, but in Bible times, a virgin was seen as someone who had never been married. But because they had never been married, this usually meant that they had never had sex with anyone anyway.

But why would Luke mention that Mary, which was a common name in those days, was a virgin? Why would he mention it twice in one verse? Luke is emphasising that Mary would be the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, he's reminding his readers that the virgin would conceive a son in order to bring forth the Messiah, Isaiah 7:14.
In other words what God said to Satan a way back in Genesis was about to be fulfilled in Mary, Genesis 3:15. The long-awaited Messiah is coming and God is going to use Mary to bring Him into the world.
I don't know about you, but this would have scared the life out of me. You can imagine Mary going about her daily business, doing the same old things, being all excited and preparing for her upcoming marriage to Joseph.

When all of a sudden an angel appears in front of her, but not just any angel, this is Gabriel. I can imagine Mary being stunned and in awe, as Gabriel basically says to her, 'Mary, God has chosen you to give birth to the incarnate Son of God', Luke 1:28 / Matthew 1:23.

> 'Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." Luke 1:29-33

It's no wonder that at this point, Mary didn't understand all that was happening, and she didn't understand why she was being selected by God to bring the Messiah, the Son of God, into the world, Luke 1:29. No wonder she's troubled by this whole experience.
The awesome presence of the mighty Gabriel would be more than enough to strike terror into the heart of anyone, never mind this young maiden in the village of Nazareth.

Whatever an angel looks like, he's not a cute being who looks like a baby with a halo and wings. Angels were mighty beings, and whenever an angel appeared to anyone, the Jews believed that it was a sign that they were about to die. And so Gabriel had to reassure her first by telling her, 'not to be afraid', Luke 1:30.
Mary wasn't chosen because she was holier than any other woman who was around at that time. She wasn't chosen because she was especially good; she didn't earn the right to be chosen for this unique work of God to bring the Redeemer into the world.

She was chosen purely because of the grace of God; that's what Luke means when he writes that she has 'found favour with God', Luke 1:30. The word 'favour' is the Greek word 'Charis', which means grace. In other words, there was nothing special about Mary; she was simply chosen because of the grace of God.
And if Gabriel appearing and talking to her wasn't scary enough, imagine how she feels when he tells her that she's going to have a child? Luke 1:31. I can imagine her saying to herself, 'Hey Gabriel, you're telling me I'm about to become pregnant, I'm not even married yet, I'm about to get married to Joseph, and I dread to think what kind of explanation I'm going to have to give him, my whole life is about to be ruined.'
And so Gabriel continues and tells her that she was to name the child Jesus, Luke 1:31. We know that the name Jesus is the New Testament form of the Old Testament name Joshua, which means 'The Lord is salvation.'
Interestingly, Gabriel says that Jesus is called 'the Son of the Most High,' Luke 1:32. And I say that's interesting because in Mark 5, when Jesus went into the region of Gerasenes, he was met by a demon-possessed man, and what did he say when he saw Jesus? 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?' Mark 5:7.

A lot of people don't recognise Jesus for who He really is, but the demons know who He is. This suggests to me that this is one of the titles given to the Son of God throughout the unseen world of angels and demons.

Luke says, 'He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end,' Luke 1:32-33.
What he's doing here is reminding us of another prophecy in which Jesus would be the fulfilment, 2 Samuel 7:12-13.
The writer isn't talking about an earthly reign but a heavenly one.
After the ascension, Jesus began His reign, and He is now reigning and will reign at the right hand of God until He comes again, Daniel 7:13-14 / 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. And so Gabriel isn't talking about a physical reign of Jesus on this earth; he's talking about a spiritual reign in the hearts of men and women, John 18:36.
But what does Gabriel mean when he says that Jesus will 'reign over Jacob's descendants forever'? Luke 1:33. This is the house of Israel, the spiritual Israel of God as Paul describes, Galatians 3:7 / Galatians 6:16. In other words, among all things over which Jesus now reigns, He reigns over all those who have submitted to His word, Psalm 89:36-37 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14.
And according to Gabriel, this reign in this new kingdom wouldn't end until Jesus returned that reign back to the Father, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:28. We can only imagine Mary trying to digest all these words in her mind, and so it shouldn't be a surprise to us that Mary has a question for Gabriel.

'How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.' Luke 1:34-38

Remember when God promised Abraham and Sarah a child, Genesis 17: 1-8 / Genesis 17:15-19 / Genesis 17:21-22, but they were going to have to wait a few years. But here with Mary, she's just been told she is going to become pregnant straight away. And so what she's basically asking is, 'Gabriel, how can I become pregnant now when I'm not even married yet?' Luke 1:34.
Mary is astonished that she is to have a son before her marriage, Luke 1:27 / Matthew 1:23. And so Gabriel has to explain how this is going to work. This is not your everyday event; the Holy Spirit Himself would be the One who would make Mary pregnant.
And I love this idea of the 'Most High overshadowing Mary', Luke 1:35, because it takes our minds back to the time before the creation of the world when the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters, Genesis 1:2. It takes out mind back to the time when the cloud overshadowed the tabernacle during the wilderness wandering, Exodus 40:38.
In other words, this whole scene is talking about the conception of Jesus which was the miraculous work of God. Jesus would be the 'only begotten' Son of God, Luke 1:35 / John 1:14-16.
Many people don't believe in the miraculous conception of Jesus. But if Jesus was to be the Son of God, then we shouldn't expect any other kind of conception than the miraculous. It's impossible to accept Jesus as the Son of God without accepting His miraculous conception.

And so it's almost as if Gabriel wanted to settle the matter in Mary's mind and give her some kind of proof that this is going to happen. Even though Mary hadn't requested a sign, Gabriel gave her one.

The sign was that her relatives Zachariah and Elizabeth were going to have a child in their old age, Luke 1:36. In fact, by this time, Elizabeth was already six months pregnant. And if you remember back in Luke 1:5-25, God also miraculously opened the womb of Elizabeth in order that she conceive through her husband Zachariah.
But with Mary, it was going to be different because the Holy Spirit Himself would miraculously make it possible for Mary to conceive by the power of God. And Gabriel quickly points out to Mary that God never breaks His

promises, Luke 1:37 / Jeremiah 32:17. In other words, what man can't do, God can do, and it's only God who can bring the Saviour of the world into the world, by miraculous conception.
No wonder Mary totally humbly accepted God at His word and declared herself a servant, Luke 1:38. Mary tells the angel, 'May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her, Luke 1:38. But how is she going to explain her being pregnant to Joseph? What are the neighbours going to say?
She's facing the real possibility of being stoned to death, which was the punishment for having sex outside of marriage in Biblical times. She's going to have to demonstrate in her life what every single Christian has to demonstrate in their lives, and that is faith.

Before moving on, it would be helpful to look at Joseph and what happened to him. As I mentioned earlier, being pledged in marriage was a legal agreement that was as binding as a contract, Matthew 1:18.
If either one broke the agreement, they would be considered an adulterer. And like we read a few moments ago, Mary was pregnant with Jesus before Joseph and Mary had sexual relations. At the time Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit, despite her not being married yet.

And we could argue all day long about what was the greatest miracle recorded in the New Testament. We could argue that the virgin birth was the greatest, or Jesus walking on water, or His resurrection. But surely the greatest recorded miracle in the New Testament has to be Jesus Christ Himself.

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?'

We can only imagine how upset and disappointed Joseph must have been when he heard about Mary being pregnant, but Joseph didn't want to embarrass Mary, and since the pledge to be married was as binding as a marriage contract, Joseph sought to secretly divorce her in order that she would not be publicly shamed, Matthew 1:19.
Remember the word 'divorce' in Greek is the word 'apoluo', and it means to 'put away'. When Jesus talks to religious leaders of His day about divorce, He's not condemning them because they were practising divorce; He's condemning them for the manner in which they were practising divorce.

He was condemning them because they were divorcing without making it legal, and they were sending their wives away without giving them a certificate of divorce. Joseph desired to show mercy to the one who appeared, in his eyes, to be guilty of sin. But this tells us a lot about the character of Joseph himself, doesn't it?

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. People are always quick to expose other people's sins, Proverbs 11:13, but Joseph wasn't like that.
We don't know if the angel who came to Joseph was Gabriel or not, Matthew 1:20-21, but since Gabriel has just finished talking with Mary, the chances are it probably is. But when this angel appeared in his dream, Joseph was afraid, and so the angel wanted to calm Joseph's anxiety. And so he assured Joseph that God was at work in the conception, and that Mary wasn't involved in an adulterous affair.
Something to keep in mind is that most people don't name their children until they know what sex the child is. And remember that 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.

But here both Mary and Joseph are told not only what sex the child will be but what to name Him. The child inside of Mary was a boy, and His name was to be Jesus. And remember this was not 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 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.

Now, 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? Matthew 1:22-23.
The prophet in question is the prophet Isaiah, and he said back in Isaiah 7:14-15, 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.'
The Son of God was to be born of a virgin, 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'. It doesn't mean 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'. Was Jesus fully God? Was Jesus fully man? Well, yes, He was both. He was the God-man.

I'm sure the local gossip 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 him to do, Matthew 1:24-25.
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; that word 'until' implies that he did afterwards. And we know he did afterwards because Matthew 13:55-56 gives us the names of four of Jesus' brothers and even mentions his sisters.

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

'At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!" Luke 1:39-45

After speaking with Gabriel, Mary hurriedly leaves Nazareth, Luke 1:39 / Luke 2:4, to visit Elizabeth, where she stayed with her for around three months, Luke 1:40 / Luke 1:56. Notice that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, Luke 1:41. This signified that God was present in the pregnancy.

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, Luke 1:41, and therefore, she exclaimed in a loud voice that Mary was blessed, Luke 1:42 / Luke 1:28, because she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, along with the child she was carrying.
Notice also that Elizabeth acknowledges that Jesus is Lord, Luke 1:43-44. In other words, she recognised that God was at work in and through Mary, Acts 6:3. When Mary believed the message which Gabriel shared with her, she had no doubts, and so she was blessed because she believed, Luke 1:45.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'Elizabeth's use of the word 'Lord' here in Luke 1:45 and Luke 1:43 is significant. There it means 'Messiah', and here it means the Father in heaven. This testifies at once to the oneness of God and Christ, and to the fact of there being two different persons; hence, there can be no valid ground here for denominating Mary as the 'Mother of God'.'

MARY'S SONG

'And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.' Luke 1:46-56

Mary now glorifies God, Luke 1:46 / Psalms 34:3, for considering her humble state and from this time forwards people would call her blessed, Luke 1:47-48 / Luke 11:27. She proudly sings that God's name is holy, Luke 1:49 / Exodus 3:14 / Exodus 6:3 / Psalms 83:18.
God's mercies are for those who fear Him, Luke 1:50 / Psalms 111:10, from generation to generation, Luke 1:50. In other words, God's mercy will descend on the children and children's children of those that fear him and keep his commandments, Exodus 20:6. God has done many powerful deeds with His arm, Luke 1:51, which is the symbol of strength. He scattered the proud in their inmost thoughts.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'He hath often done it in time of battle and war. When the proud Assyrian, Egyptian, or Babylonian had come against the people of God, He had often scattered them and driven them away from their armies. Those who were lifted up or exalted in their own view. Those who 'thought themselves' to be superior to other men.'

God didn't come to the proud and rich of this world; He came to the lowly and common people, Luke 1:52-53. God had visited His people, Israel, in fulfilling the promise that was made to Abraham, Luke 1:54-55 / Genesis 12:1-3 / Genesis 17:7 / Genesis 17:19. Jesus was the fulfilment of the seed-line promise, Genesis 3:15 / Genesis 49:10 / Isaiah 7:14 / Isaiah 9:6 / Daniel 7:13-14.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'There is a striking similarity between this song of praise by Mary and that spoken by 'Hannah,' 1 Samuel 2:2-9 / 1 Samuel 2.10. There are a few pieces of 'poetry', for this is poetry, and almost the only poetry in the New Testament, more beautiful than this. It is the language of a humble, thankful, pious female heart praising God. For his mercy to

her, Luke 1:46-42 / Luke 1.49. For his mercy to all people, his 'general' goodness, Luke 1:50-42 / Luke 1.53, and His special goodness to his people, Luke 1:54-42 / Luke 1:55.'

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home to Nazareth, Luke 1:56 / Luke 2:4.

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

'When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John." They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." Then they made signs to his father to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment, he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately, his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbours were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea, people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.' Luke 1:57-66

After nine months of pregnancy, Elizabeth now gives birth to John, Luke 1:57, and it's a time of great joy for her neighbours and relatives, Luke 1:58. They shared in her joy because the Lord had shown her mercy in her old age in being able to have a child, Luke 1:58 / Romans 12:15.

John was to be circumcised on the eighth day, Luke 1:59, which was in keeping with the law of God, Genesis 17:9-14 / Leviticus 12:3 / Romans 4:11 / Philippians 3:5. The reason for the eighth day is that vitamin K is at its highest level, vitamin K causes blood clots.

It was the custom of the Jews to name the son after the name of the father, Genesis 21:1-4, hence, why wanted to call the baby Zechariah, but Elizabeth objected and said his name was to be John, Luke 1:60, which means, 'the Lord's gift', just as Gabriel had told her too, Luke 1:13 / Luke 1:63.

They said to her, There is no one among your relatives who has that name, Luke 1:61. The people made signs to Zachariah, Luke 1:62, because if we remember at this point, Zachariah couldn't speak or hear because he didn't at first believe Gabriel when he was informed that Elizabeth would conceive, Luke 1:18-20.

After asking for something to write on, Zachariah writes that the boy's name will be John, Luke 1:63. Notice what happened after he wrote the name John, he opened his mouth and began to speak, Luke 1:64. Zachariah's first words were words of praise to God for the great things He was accomplishing through Elizabeth and himself, Luke 1:64.

As a result of him now being able to speak and praise God, everyone responded in awe, Luke 1:65, and spoke to everyone about what God had done and was doing through Zachariah and Elizabeth.

The people were wondering what kind of child John would be, Luke 1:66. It's clear that God was at work, since he had been conceived miraculously with his parents being old in age.

They may not have fully understood that the Lord's hand was with John, but they couldn't deny that the Lord was with him. It's possible that God providentially cared for John from the time of his conception and birth until it was time for him to die, Acts 11:21.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The word 'hand' is used to denote 'aid, protection, favour'. We stretch out our hand to aid those whom we wish to help. The expression here means that God 'aided' him, 'protected' him, or showed him favour. Some think that these words are a part of the speech of the neighbours, 'What manner of child shall this be? God is so evidently with him!'

ZECHARIAH'S SONG

'His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." Luke 1:67-79

Zechariah, now filled with the Holy Spirit, began to prophesy, Luke 1:67 / 1 Corinthians 14:3.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The twelve verses recording Zachariah's words could be briefly summarised as a thanksgiving for the arrival of the times of the Messiah. It was God's blessing and mercy manifested by his fulfilling, at last, the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament, his breaking the centuries of silence after Malachi, and his establishing the promised reality of the covenant with Abraham that dominated the major part of Zachariah's prophecy. Not until the last four verses did he speak of his precious son and the share he would have in such a glorious fulfilment of God's word.'

He thanked God for coming to redeem His people, Luke 1:68, but notice, that he doesn't speak of his own son, John, to begin with, speaks about Jesus in the past tense, even though Jesus hasn't been born yet, Luke 1:69.
Speaking in the past tense magnifies the fact the fulfilment was certain, it's as though it has already happened. Jesus is the horn of salvation, Luke 1:69. The horn signifies strength, Deuteronomy 33:17 / Daniel 7:7-27 / Daniel 7:21 / Psalms 148:14. The horn of salvation would come from the house of David, Luke 1:32.
God's holy prophets spoke of the Messiah from long ago, Luke 1:70 / Genesis 49:10 / Deuteronomy 18:15 / Isaiah 9:6-23 / Isaiah 53:1-23 / Luke 24:27 / Revelation 19:10. Jesus came to save us from our ultimate enemy, Luke 1:71-75, that is the devil, Genesis 3:15 / Matthew 1:21.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 1:72-73.
'These words show the connection between the old and the new covenants. The covenant with Abraham had envisioned the blessing of 'all the families of the earth' through the glorious Seed, singular, which is Christ, Genesis 12:1-3. Moreover, God had confirmed the covenant promise to Abraham with an oath, Genesis 22:16 / Hebrews 6:13-15. Just as God's promise to Abraham of a son was delayed of fulfilment until it seemed no longer possible, so also the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom had been held in abeyance for centuries, the last voice of prophecy having expired with Malachi, but wow, all was to be fulfilled. As to who was, and who was not, true sons of Abraham and thus entitled to the promise, there was a widespread misunderstanding. The materialistic, secular priests, and a majority of the people thought that mere fleshly descent from Abraham was all that mattered; but, of course, it was only to the 'spiritual seed', the people of like faith and character with Abraham, that the promise really pertained. It was the great mission of John the Baptist to enlighten Israel on this very point.'
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

The salvation brought by Jesus Christ consists of the following things.

1. We are to be delivered out of the hand of our enemies, and from all that hate us, so that sin shall neither have dominion over us nor existence in us.

2. We are to worship God, to render him that service and adoration which the letter and spirit of his religion require.

3. We are to live in holiness, a strict inward conformity to the mind of Christ and righteousness, a full outward conformity to the precepts of the Gospel.

4. This is to be done before God, under the continual influence and support of his grace, and with a constant evidence of his presence and approbation.

5. This state is a state of true happiness; it is without fear. Sin is all cast out, holiness is brought in, God's power upholds, and his approbation cheers and comforts the believing heart. Thus, misery is precluded, and happiness is established.

6. This blessedness is to continue as long as we exist, all the days of our life, in all ages, in all situations, and in all circumstances. What a pity to have lived so long without God in the world, when so much happiness and glory are to be enjoyed in union with him!

Zechariah, near the end of his prophecy, Luke 1:76-79, now speaks of his son John. John will be a prophet of the Most High, Luke 1:76 / Luke 1:32 / Luke 3:5-42. He will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, Luke 1:76 / Isaiah 40:3 / Matthew 3:3. In other words, John will be the forerunner of Christ, Malachi 4:5-6.
He was to teach people knowledge concerning salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, Luke 1:77 / Jeremiah 31:31-34, based upon God's mercy. The salvation which was about to be offered was that which was connected with the pardon of sin.
The rising sun, Luke 1:78 / Malachi 4:2, is clearly a reference to Christ Himself, Isaiah 60:1-23, who is the light of the world, John 1:9 / John 8:12 / 2 Peter 1:19 / Revelation 22:16. He is the light who shines in the darkness, Luke 1:79 / Matthew 4:16, He is the One who guides our feet into peace, Luke 1:79 / Ephesians 2:14.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 1:79.
'Here there is a certain reference to salvation for the Gentiles, as more pointedly stated by Matthew, who explained Jesus' residence in Capernaum as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, Isaiah 9:1-2.'

'And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.' Luke 1:80

Notice how Luke compresses thirty years of John's life into one sentence. He tells us that John grew, mentally, physically and spiritually, Luke 1:80 / Luke 2:40 / Luke 2:52.
John lived in the wilderness until he was spiritually prepared to appear in public in Israel, Luke 1:80. He lived in Hebron and in the hill country where his father resided, and he lived there until he was thirty years old, Matthew 3:1-10 / Luke 3:1-10.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

"In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register." Luke 2:1-3

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Caesar Augustus, Luke 2:1, was a name taken by Caesar Octavianus, who reigned as Caesar of Rome from 43 B.C. to A.D. 14. And as we know, the Roman Caesars who followed him adopted the name 'Caesar' as it embodied the concept of what the Roman head of state should be to promote unity and peace throughout the Roman Empire. Octavianus brought an era of peace to the Empire, and he established an environment within the Empire that was helpful for the growth of Christianity throughout the Roman-controlled regions of the world.

And so Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman world, and we know this happened because archaeologists have recovered the actual documents of censuses that were taken by the Roman government every fourteen years from A.D. 20 to A.D. 270.

Luke also tells us that a man named Quirinius was governor of Syria during this time, Luke 2:2, which again has been proven by some inscriptions discovered by archaeologists. Now, censuses were taken every fourteen years, and from 20 A.D. to 270 A.D., we possess actual documents from every census taken.
A series of inscriptions in Asia Minor shows that Quirinius was governor of Syria in 10-7 B.C., and again in 6 A.D. This is good news for all Christians because these documents actually prove the accuracy of the Scriptures.

And notice that everyone was to register in their own town, Luke 2:3, which simply means that the Jews had to register at the city where their ancestral records were kept.

"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child." Luke 2:4-5

I mentioned that the Jews had to register at the city where their ancestral records were kept. And for Joseph and Mary, this meant the city of Bethlehem, which is also referred to as the city of David, Luke 2:4. Both Joseph and Mary were of the lineage of David, and so both had to register in Bethlehem, Luke 2:5.
Don't underestimate the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem; this was a journey of about eighty miles. We can only imagine how treacherous this journey must have been, especially for Mary, who is heavily pregnant. The journey for most people would be a four-day journey, but for a pregnant woman, I can imagine it would have taken longer.

But I want to raise an important point that is often overlooked concerning this journey. Why did Mary go with Joseph on this journey? Like 2:5. It's certainly possible that her love for Joseph was the reason for her going on the journey.

It's also possible that she wanted Joseph to be around when she was giving birth. Neither Roman nor Jewish law required Mary to accompany Joseph for this registration; it wasn't a requirement of the decree.

So why did Mary go with Joseph? Mary was aware of Micah's prophecy, and so she was being guided by the Holy Spirit to fulfil this prophecy concerning the birthplace of the Messiah, Micah 5:2. There were carpenters, stonemasons, and different kinds of farmers residing in Bethlehem.
And what's more interesting is that the name Bethlehem actually means 'place of bread,' which is very appropriate when we think of Jesus as being the 'Bread of Life'. It was very appropriate that the Bread of Life should have been born in Bethlehem. It's very appropriate that the Son of David should be born in the village so intimately associated with the history of David, the shepherd king of Israel.

Notice, at this point and time, Mary and Joseph are still engaged, Luke 2:5. Jewish law considered the engagement legally binding to the point that the woman was considered a wife. However, their relationship was not a marriage in that it had not been fully consummated.

In other words, Mary was considered to be Joseph's wife, even though they had not been formally married according to Jewish law. And when Luke tells us Mary was expecting a child, Luke 2:5, what he's telling us is that Mary is about to give birth any day soon.

"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." Luke 2:6-7

If this tells us anything, it tells us that Mary was at least eight months pregnant when she made that eighty-mile, four-day journey with Joseph to Bethlehem. And when we think of this small town of Bethlehem, this little insignificant town of Bethlehem. How blessed is this little town going to become?

Bethlehem, the first home of David, who was Israel's greatest king and the Ephrathites, the descendants of David. How blessed was this little town, but now she's about to be blessed with the birth of the Messiah, Micah 5:2. Jesus, God in the flesh, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Messiah who brings hope, peace and salvation to all of mankind, is about to be born, Luke 2:6.

And so Jesus is born, Mary's firstborn son, Luke 6:7. and if Mary had no other children, then Luke would have used the Greek word 'monogene' which means 'only son.' But he didn't; he used the Greek word 'prototokos', which means 'firstborn', and that tells us that Mary did indeed have other children, as we looked at last time.

We can argue all day long as to the date on which Jesus was born, but that's not the issue. The question of the Bible is not, what date was Jesus Christ born? The real question the Bible asks is, will you accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour?

Mankind's greatest need wasn't food, drink and clothing. Mankind's greatest need wasn't socks, deodorant, a key ring, or a huge mug for your tea. Mankind's greatest need was and still is forgiveness and salvation from our sins.

Do you remember the first recorded words of Jesus? What did Jesus say just before He came? Jesus was born to do God's will, and God's will was for Him to die for you and me and take the punishment our sins deserved, Hebrews 10:5-10.

Mankind's greatest need was God's greatest gift, and that was Jesus. And while the world celebrates the birth of Jesus and gives each other all kinds of wonderful gifts. The church needs to share with people the real reason for Jesus coming into the world.

The most important gift we can give to the world is the gift that is going to last for eternity. The gift that is going to help them get through life, the gift that is going to tell them that there is hope in this life.

The gift that talks about a Messiah, the gift that talks about a Saviour, the eternal gift. The world will give its own interpretation of Christmas, but we need to give the world the greatest gift it will ever receive, the gift of Jesus.

And so Mary took that little baby Jesus, and she wrapped Him in clothes, Luke 1:7. Now those clothes were square and long, almost like a bandage. And the child was first wrapped in the square of the cloth, and then the long strip was wound round and round about him.

Notice Jesus has just been born, and there are already a few signs of Christ's final sufferings. When Jesus was born, He was wrapped in linen cloth, and at His death, they wrapped Him in linen cloth, Luke 1:7 / John 19:38-40. He was laid in a wooden manger, Luke 1:7, and He died on a wooden cross.

And isn't it interesting that Jesus was laid on the straw of a manger from which the animals fed, but in thirty years' time the world would be feeding on His teaching, even up to this very day. But why was He born in a place where the animals were kept? Why was He born in a manger?

Surely, God's Son deserved a high-profile birth in the most elegant of surroundings. We could say, 'Well, Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and so He was born in a place for shepherds, in a manger.'

We could say, ‘Well, Jesus was born in the manger because there was no room in the inn! It wasn’t something that was planned; it was just an accident.’ But with God, there are no accidents. God planned every little detail of this.

When we think of a manger we have to remember it was cold. It’s that damp kind of cold that chills us to the bones, and the only heat available was the body heat from Mary and Joseph and the animals in there.

But it’s not only cold in a manger, but it’s also dark. A manger was usually located underground, beneath the barn. So even when the sun is shining, it’s dark in a manger. But it’s not only cold and dark in a manger, but it’s also smelly and dirty. It’s full of mud, manure, dust and cobwebs, and it smells of must and mould.

It’s the place where the sheep and cows eat; it’s the place where they slobber and drool. In the summer, there are flies and spiders and insects and swallows nesting in the rafters.

There’s no such thing as a clean or hygienic manger, a manger is cold, dark, smelly and dirty. The truth is that Jesus was born in a place that was cold, dark and dirty.

But why was Jesus born in a place like that? Well, Jesus is always born in the manger, let me explain. Every time Jesus comes into our lives, He is born in a manger. The human heart is like a manger, it’s cold, dark, smelly and dirty.

The human heart is cold because we don’t know the love of God. The human heart is dark because we don’t have the light of Christ or the hope of salvation. The human heart is smelly and dirty because we are sinners, and our hearts stink, are stained, and soiled by sin.

But the miracle of Christmas, the real miracle, is that Jesus is willing to be born into hearts like that. No matter how cold your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there.

No matter how dark your heart is, Jesus is willing to be born there. No matter how smelly or dirty your heart is, or how sinful your life has been, Jesus is willing to come in, enter and clean your heart.

Jesus is always willing to meet us at the manger. He encounters us in that place where we feel utterly lost, hopeless and helpless. Jesus meets us in the darkness of our grief and sorrow, and Jesus meets us in the blackness of our despair.

He comes into our lives when we feel unloved, unlovable and alone, when inside we feel cold and half-frozen to death. Jesus meets us in all the mess and the filth of our sin, and when we’ve done unforgivable things. Jesus comes to people like that, the unloved, unlovable and alone.

He comes to people like you and me. Jesus was born in a cold, dark, smelly, dirty place because He knew He was going to offer salvation to all those who were hopelessly enslaved in the cold, dark, stench and dirtiness of sin.

Luke records that Mary placed Jesus in a manger ‘because there was no guest room available for them,’ Luke 1:7.
Remember why Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem in the first place. There was a Roman Empire-wide census going on, and everyone had to register.
And so the limited capacity of ancient inns, the influx of others for the enrolment, and the normal fluctuations in every business were probably among the conditions that made it impossible for them to have found better accommodations.

But, over and beyond all this, it was the will of God that the Saviour of all people should have been born in such humble circumstances. I wonder if the landlords would have made room for Jesus if they knew who was about to be born? Imagine the King of Kings has arrived to visit His children in Person and they have no room for Him!

We don't know if they would have taken Mary and Joseph into their home if they knew who was about to be born. But we know this much: people today still have no room for Him in their lives, Matthew 11:28-30.

THE SHEPHERDS

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified." Luke 2:8-9

The names of these shepherds are unknown, but how blessed they are about to be. And those shepherds were the perfect representatives of mankind because they didn't live in big houses or strong palaces. They lived in a field, Luke 2:8, which reminds us that life on earth has its limitations and that we only stay on Earth for a short time.
Notice they were watching their flock at night, Luke 2:8, which tells us that Jesus was born at night. But it also reminds us that the earth at this time was a place of darkness; it was dark because of man's sin.
But once again, we see that when the angel of the Lord appeared, they were terrified, Luke 2:9. But wouldn't you be terrified if you saw one of God's mighty messengers appearing above you?
What does the Lord's glory look like? Luke 2:9. Moses says the Lord's glory was in the form of a cloud, and when the Israelites saw the Lord's glory, they said, it looked like a consuming fire, Exodus 24:15-17.

"But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Luke 2:10

Whatever the Lord's glory looks like, it was enough to make people tremble to their knees, Matthew 17:5-7. And so these poor shepherds are understandably afraid, and so the angel has to reassure them, Luke 2:10.
The angel is about to make one of the greatest announcements ever made in the history of mankind. The angel is proclaiming to these shepherds the very message which is later going to be proclaimed to the world.

The coming of the Saviour of the world would be good news of great joy to all those who realise that they are captives of sin. In other words, the world has been waiting for this day ever since the fall of man in that garden back in Genesis 3:15.
Notice something important here: the good news announced by the angels was first announced to these shepherds, who were Jewish. Luke, who was a Gentile, records the first announcement of Jesus' birth, not to Gentiles, but Jewish shepherds. Matthew, who was a Jew, introduced Jesus' birth to the Jews through the message conveyed by a star. Who can understand God's ways? Isaiah 55:8-9.

"Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." Luke 2:11

The angel continues with his announcement, and in one verse, Luke 2:11, this angel has just described Jesus, the Son of God, in three very different ways.
1. They first describe Him as a Saviour.

Jesus the sin-bearer, Jesus the Man who brings and offers salvation to all of mankind, Jesus who came to restore that fellowship with God and mankind which was lost in Eden.

2. They describe Him as the Messiah, the Christ.

Jesus, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, the Shiloh, the Anointed One, the suffering Servant, and the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus, the lawful ruler of Israel, the promised Son of David, who would usher in the great kingdom.

3. They describe Him as The Lord, not just any lord but The Lord.

The Lord who is the head of His church and ruler of the universe, the Lord who has all authority, power and rule. The Lord to whom every knee will bow and confess His Name, the Lord of Lords, who will reign and rule people's lives.

Jesus is the Saviour, the Messiah and the Lord and how blessed these shepherds were to be the first to hear this good news, which would bring great joy to all people.

> "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." Luke 2:12-14

Just like Mary before them, they didn't ask for a sign, but the angel is going to give them one, Luke 2:12. And please don't make the mistake of thinking they were to look for a child who was wrapped in cloth, because this was the way most newborn children were clothed.

The sign was this baby would be 'lying in a manger', Luke 2:12. And if the sight of one angel was terrifying enough, Luke tells us that out of nowhere, a whole host of heavenly hosts appeared above them, Luke 2:13. A host of angels is represented in the Old Testament as forming the bodyguard of Deity Psalms 103:21 / Daniel 7:10.

What an amazing sight this must have been as these angels are singing praises to God. The birth of the Son was God's goodwill to man, for Jesus was the manifestation of the grace of God to all men, Titus 2:11. No wonder they say, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,' Luke 2:14. No wonder they say, 'peace on earth to those on whom his favour rests,' Luke 2:14.

The birth of Jesus certainly was and still is worth rejoicing about today. I can imagine those shepherds being in absolute awe of what they are witnessing. And although we don't know how long the celebrations went on, Luke continues with his account.

> "When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger." Luke 2:15-16

Notice how the word 'Lord' here is used as the title of the Father in heaven, but it's the same use of the word to describe Jesus, which again confirms the Deity of Jesus, Luke 2:15. So, leaving their flocks, the shepherds hurriedly made their way to Bethlehem to see the newly born infant, Luke 2:16.

Remember that during this time, the Jews had been following the prophecies of the prophets who prophesied events that would transpire during the inter-biblical period. They knew that what was prophesied concerning the coming of the Messiah was soon to happen.

Their acceptance of the signs surrounding the birth of Jesus was based on their expectation that God was bringing to pass the fulfilment of prophecy. The shepherds couldn't wait to see this newborn King, and they found Him lying in a manger exactly how the angel said they would.

> "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them." Luke 2:17-18

Having seen the child for themselves, Luke 2:17, they now had the evidence they needed that would satisfy others, Luke 2:18. I'm sure they would have been somewhat puzzled that the Saviour of the world was born in such a humble environment. But they believed, and they became the first preachers of the Gospel and went out and proclaimed to others that the Messiah had come.

And it's not surprising that everyone they spoke to was amazed at their message, but what isn't so amazing is that no one was amazed enough to go and check it out for themselves. The greatest news of all ages had broken out in their community, and the people just 'wondered' about it as the King James Version renders it.

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart". Luke 2:19

Mary is treasuring and thinking about not only the things the shepherds had just said to her, Luke 2:19, but also the things Gabriel said to her before and the things the angel said to Joseph.
When children are born today, the parents usually go nuts and take lots of pictures, and they begin to keep a photo album of every little moment of change in their child's life. Well, in a way, that's what Mary is doing, she's thinking, meditating, and thinking about what the outcome of these things will mean for her Son.

Mary, as well as others who had experienced all the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Jesus, didn't understand that the events surrounding Jesus' birth were actual events that pointed to Him as the Messiah, 1 Peter 1:10-12.

"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." Luke 2:20

I'm sure Mary and Joseph would have shared their story with the shepherds, and when the shepherds returned to their sheep, they just glorified and praised God for what they had seen and heard, Luke 2:20.
What a great privilege this was for them, you can almost imagine them singing, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, peace on earth to those on whom his favour rests', Luke 2:14.
And if this tells us anything it should tell us when we leave our place of worship after glorifying and praising God we too can go back to our normal daily duties but still be praising God as we go.

Although Luke doesn't mention the magi's visit, I think it would be useful to mention a few things from Matthew's account. There are a lot of theories concerning the date of Jesus' birth. And it's in Matthew 2:1-2, where we find the closest reference we can actually find.
Matthew says that Jesus was born 'during the time of King Herod'. Now 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.

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.

But like we said previously, knowing the exact date of Jesus' birth isn't important, but what is important is that He was born. These magi 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, but we simply don't know.

Some translations use the words 'wise men', which is good because we can imagine the truly wise of all ages are indeed those who bow down and worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

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.

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?' 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 national 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.

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.

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, Matthew 2:3-8.
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.
The Chief priests were the principal leaders of the Jewish religious system who were in charge of the temple. 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. Herod had probably heard over and over again talk about a coming Messiah, and so he wanted to know where this Messiah was to be born.

The magi 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 2:3-8. 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. It's obvious that the star in question was miraculous in nature because it appears again, Matthew 2:9-10. 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. And what was the outcome of them seeing the star again? It stopped. It was pure joy. There is always joy when we come to meet Jesus. And we can only imagine the magi's joy got greater and greater the closer they got to their destination.

By the time the magi had arrived, Jesus had been moved from a manger 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. But 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, Philippians 2:10-11.
Now it was a custom of the Orient to bring gifts to the newly born, 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.

The gift of gold 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. Yes, we know that gold can be a gift for anyone. Gold was a gift, especially for kings.

Frankincense was an incense that was made from the sap of a tree that grew 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.

The myrrh 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, an anaesthetic, and burial embalming, and it was used as an ingredient in anointing oil 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.
But the point is this, 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.

In everything surrounding the birth of Jesus, God was directing the movements of the Magi in order that they not be discovered by Herod, Matthew 2:12. God warned them in a dream, and they listened, which means the wise men refused to cooperate with Herod.
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.

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.
And notice that the magi returned another route, 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.

The events surrounding the birth of Jesus are fascinating, to say the least, but they all point to one thing. Jesus the Christ was born, and He came to save sinners and offer salvation to all those who would come to Him. Jesus is no longer this cute little baby lying in a manger; He's reigning with the Most High in heaven.

JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

'When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Luke 2:22-24

The time had come for Mary to go through the purification requirements because she had given birth to Jesus and was now classed an unclean, Luke 2:22. This tells us that Mary and Joseph observed all the legal requirements according to the law of Moses, Luke 2:23 / Exodus 13:2 / Exodus 3:12 / Leviticus 12:2-8 / Numbers 8:16 / Numbers 18:15.
Every firstborn male was to be consecrated to the Lord, Luke 2:23 / Exodus 13:2 / Exodus 13:13 / Exodus 13:15, and a sacrifice was to be offered, in this case, because Mary and Joseph were poor, either offered a pair of doves or two young pigeons, Luke 2:24 / Leviticus 12:2 / Leviticus 12:8.
Childers, in his commentary, says the following.

'His whole life shows that he identified himself with this sinful race, though he was sinless. Jesus always submitted to religious rites which were necessary for sinful men, even though they were not really necessary for him.'

'Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.' Luke 2:25-26

Simeon, who some believe was the son of Hillel, father of Gamaliel, and president of the Sanhedrin, was a righteous and devout man, who was patiently waiting for the consolation of Israel, Luke 2:25, that is, he was waiting on the arrival of the Messiah, Mark 15:43 / Acts 13:32-34 / Acts 26:6-8 / Acts 28:20.
The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would still be alive when the Lord's Messiah comes, Luke 2:26, which is an obvious reference to the coming of Jesus.

'Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." Luke 2:27-32

Simeon was moved by the Spirit to enter the temple courts, Luke 2:27. Joseph and Mary then took Jesus to Simeon, who, as was the custom of the Law, Luke 2:27 / Luke 2:21, took Jesus in his arms and praised God, Luke 2:28.
He praises God and is happy that he has indeed held in his arms the Messiah, Luke 2:29. He praises God because he has now seen the Lord's salvation, Luke 2:30, that is, Jesus with his own eyes.
He praises God because Jesus would not only bring salvation to all people, Luke 2:31 / Mark 16:15-16, but also bring salvation to the Gentiles as they would see the light of salvation in Jesus, Luke 2:32 / Isaiah 9:2 / Isaiah 42:6 / John 8:12.

'The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Luke 2:33-35

Joseph and Mary didn't really understand the significance of who Jesus would become, Luke 2:33, and so Simeon blesses them both, Luke 2:34. He proclaims that Jesus would be the reason for many who would fall because of His teaching, Luke 2:34 / Isaiah 8:14 / Matthew 21:42-43 / Acts 4:11 / Romans 9:33 / 1 Corinthians 1:23 / 1 Peter 2:7-8, and many who would rise because of His teaching, Luke 2:34 / Romans 6:4 / Romans 6:9 / Ephesians 2:6.
Jesus was to be a sign to the people, Luke 2:34, that is, His teaching would reveal what was inside people's hearts, Luke 2:35. People would have a choice either to listen and obey what He said or ignore Him and disobey what He said, Mark 7:1-9 / John 12:48. Mary's soul would be pierced, Luke 2:35, when she witnessed what happened to Jesus at His crucifixion, Psalm 42:10.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'This prophecy is a marvel. It foretold that Mary would live to see Jesus crucified, and of the bitter sorrow in her own heart at the things which would befall the Son. Joseph was not included in this. The specific purpose of Calvary is also seen in the revelation of men's thoughts, which would flow out of it. Calvary is God's divider and separator of the good from the bad. The life of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the New Testament, polarises the hearts of men, turning the wicked away and drawing the redeemed upward to eternal life. Along with Mary and Joseph, we marvel at such a prophecy.'

'There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.' Luke 2:36-38

The prophet Anna was the daughter of Penuel and was a part of the tribe of Asher, Luke 2:36. Asher was one of the tribes of the northern ten tribes of Israel that were taken into Assyrian captivity in 722/721 B.C. Judges 19:24.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'Why Anna was called a prophetess is not known. It might be because she had been the wife of a prophet, or because she was employed in celebrating the praises of God, 1 Chronicles 25:1-13 / 1 Chronicles 25:4 / 1 Samuel 10:5, or because she had foretold future events, being inspired.'
She lived with her husband for seven years and then became a widow until she was eighty-four, Luke 2:36-37. She was a widow, but it's difficult to tell from the text how long she has been a widow.
Some believe that eighty-four could be her current age, but it's more likely to refer to the length of time she has been widowed, which would mean that at this time she would be ninety-one years old.

She is pictured as a woman who is always in the temple fasting and praying, Luke 2:37 / Matthew 4:1-2 / Matthew 6:16-18 / Matthew 9:14-15 / Matthew 15:32 / Acts 13:1-3. Anna goes up to Mary and Joseph and speaks about the child, that is, Jesus, who would redeem Jerusalem, Luke 2:38 / Luke 2:25 / Acts 28:20.

'When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.' Luke 2:39-40

After Mary and Joseph had completed all the legal customs required by the Law, concerning Jesus, they returned to Galilee, their hometown of Nazareth, Luke 2:39.
We must note that Luke doesn't include the visit of the Magi, Matthew 2:1-12, the flight to Egypt, Matthew 2:13-18. We do know that they returned to Galilee when the news was brought to them that Herod the Great had died, Matthew 2:19-23.
It's in Nazareth that Jesus grew up as the son of a carpenter. He began to grow as a child, becoming strong. He is also now filled with wisdom, Luke 1:80 / Luke 2:52, and God's grace was on Him, Luke 2:40.

THE BOY JESUS AT THE TEMPLE

'Every year, Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.' Luke 2:41-42

It was customary that all Jewish males attend the Festival of Passover, Luke 2:41 / Exodus 12:1-48 / Deuteronomy 16:1 / Deuteronomy 16:16. We read that Jesus is now twelve years old, Luke 2:42, which may imply that this was the first time that Jesus attended the festival, Exodus 23:14-15.

'After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.' Luke 2:43-45

Remembering the Passover festival was a one-day event, but then it was followed by the festival of Pentecost, which lasted another seven days. And so, after both these celebrations were over, Mary and Joseph head off home, but didn't notice that Jesus was still in Jerusalem, Luke 2:43.
We may wonder how this is possible, but we must remember that Passover was one of the busiest times of the year for the Jews; there would be thousands upon thousands in attendance, many coming from long distances to attend.
I'm sure that Mary and Joseph thought that Jesus was with another family, Luke 2:44, as the text implies, which was also customary, even in today's society.

After looking everywhere for Him, Luke 2:44, they decide to go back to Jerusalem to see if they can find Him there, Luke 2:45. Were Mary and Joseph bad parents? No. Was Jesus being a disobedient child? No. He was going about His Father's business.

'After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them.' Luke 2:46-49

After three days of searching, which must have been deeply stressful, they found Jesus sitting in the temple courts, Luke 2:46. Please note that they didn't spend three days searching for Him in Jerusalem; they would have had one day travelling after the celebrations, another day travelling back to Jerusalem, and one day searching in Jerusalem.

Notice that Jesus is sitting among the teachers, listening and asking them questions, Luke 2:46. He's obviously listening to the Old Testament Scriptures and asking them questions concerning the Scriptures.

Everyone who heard him was amazed that someone so young had such an understanding of the Scriptures; they couldn't believe just how knowledgeable Jesus was, Luke 2:47 / Matthew 7:28 / Matthew 13:54 / Matthew 22:33. Remember, Jesus is now filled with wisdom, and God's grace was upon Him, Luke 2:40.

Mary and Joseph were astonished, Luke 2:48, because what Jesus did was out of character. Mary was astonished because she couldn't believe that Jesus would treat her and Joseph that way, Luke 2:48. This is understandable, as parents, they were clearly anxious as to the whereabouts of their son.

Jesus' response is one of amazement. He more or less tells His parents, 'Why are you stressing out trying to find Me, you should know that I would be in My Father's house,' Luke 2:49 / John 9:4. Jesus is concerned with the business of God the Father.

Jesus was aware of who He was, and He had His priorities right. He knew He had to honour his father and mother, but He also had to do what his Father in heaven wanted Him to do.

Mary and Joseph may not have understood what Jesus meant, Luke 2:50 / John 7:15 / John 7:46, but Jesus certainly did. Maybe Mary and Joseph forgot about who Jesus was to become, Luke 1:32 / Luke 1:35 / Matthew 1:20, but Jesus certainly didn't forget why He had come.

'Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.' Luke 2:51-52

Jesus returned with His parents to Nazareth, and notice the text says He was obedient to them, Luke 2:51 / Ephesians 6:1-2. Of course, the time is coming when all will be obedient to him, Philippians 2:8-11 / 1 Peter 3:22.

Mary treasured all these things in her heart, Luke 2:51 / Luke 2:19. Mary is thinking, meditating, and thinking about what the outcome of these things will mean for her Son.

Earlier, we read that Jesus grew, became strong and was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him, Luke 2:39-40. Here, we read that Jesus continues to grow in wisdom and stature and favour with God and man, Luke 2:52.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

‘In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.’ Luke 3:1-3

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 3:1-2.
‘Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to late 36 or early 37. Herod Antipas ended his reign as tetrarch of Galilee, which began in 4 B.C., by deposition in A.D. 39. His brother Herod Philip, who ruled territories to the northeast of Palestine from 4 B.C., died in A.D. 34. Present historical evidence does not enable scholars to date Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene, an area northeast of Damascus. Annas was Israel’s high priest from A.D. 6 to 15 until the Roman authorities deposed him. However, the Jews continued to regard him as the high priest, and he retained his title. His son-in-law Caiaphas served as the official high priest from A.D. 18 to the spring of 37. Thus, the general time frame when John began his ministry was between A.D. 26 and the spring of 37. The specific date, the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, is harder to pinpoint, but it was probably A.D. 29.’

It was during this time that the word of God came to John while he was in the wilderness, Luke 3:2 / Luke 1:80. John the Baptist 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. He preached in the wilderness of Judea, Judges 1:16 / Joshua 15:61 / Luke 1:80 / Luke 3:2.
John went into places around Jordan and preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, Luke 3:3. John’s baptism, though it required repentance, 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 looked forward to Jesus’ death, Matthew 3:3. This shows that John’s baptism cannot be the baptism that Jesus commanded people to receive under the Gospel, Mark 16:15-16 / Matthew 28:18-20.

‘As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God’s salvation.’” Luke 3:4-6

It’s interesting to note that out of all of the Gospels, Luke in Luke 3:4-6 is the only one that quotes Isaiah 40:3-5. These verses contained the preparations made for a royal visitor that were common in the Greco-Roman world, Luke 3:4-5. They also included the fact that all people would experience the salvation that God would provide, Luke 3:6. 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. Four hundred years had passed since Malachi made that prediction, 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, seven hundred years since Isaiah had spoken about the coming of ‘The Messenger’, but the time had now come.

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’, which means there are two People. One is the Messenger who prepares the way, that is, John.

In Matthew 11:14, Jesus tells us 'HE John, is Elijah who was to come!' The other is the messenger for whom the way is prepared, who is the bearer of the New Covenant, and that is Jesus.
Luke sums up the mission of John in one word, the word 'prepare!' Luke 3:4 / Luke 13:3 / Acts 3:19 / 2 Corinthians 7:10. John has a message concerning the kingdom of God: Isaiah 2:2-3 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14 / Matthew 11:11 / Matthew 19:23.
John came to prepare the people. But not for the purpose that the people imagined! 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, and 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 said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Luke 3:7-9

One thing that always stands out to me when I read about John is his simple, clear, and truthful message. His words were powerful; he struck right to the heart of the matter.

He wasn't afraid of offending people, he wasn't worried about their reaction, and the religious leaders did hate him. He called the Pharisees and Sadducees a 'brood of vipers', Luke 3:7.
What do you think about this? Were these words offensive? Should he have spoken more kindly? In fact, John realised that being politically correct wouldn't help anybody. Vast multitudes were pursuing John as he preached in 'the wilderness of Judaea,' Luke 3:7 / Matthew 3:1 / Matthew 3:5.
Among these were Sadducees, 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, 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,' Luke 3:7, 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, Luke 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, Luke 3:8 / Genesis 12:1-3 / John 8:33 / John 8:39.
The reference to 'even now the axe lies at the root of the trees,' Luke 3:9 / Matthew 3:10, but then, more remotely, to the final day of human reckoning, Matthew 3:12.
They didn't understand that a real Jew and 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.

'What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." Even tax collectors came to be baptised. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay." Luke 3:10-14

The crowd now ask what they should do, and John tells them anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same, Luke 3:10-11.
Luke tells us that even tax collectors came to be baptised and asked what they should do, and John tells them not to collect any more than they are required to, Luke 3:12-13.
Next we read of some soldiers asking what they should do and John tells them not to extort money and don't accuse people falsely, be content with their pay, Luke 3:14.

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.

John recognised that repentance would show up in everyday actions, and he gave practical tips to each group specifically targeted to their areas of weakness. Without the fruit of a changed life, Matthew 22:36-40 / Galatians 5:13-14 / Galatians 5:22-23, it would be evident that a person doesn't have a close relationship with God, Isaiah 58:7 / 2 Corinthians 8:14.

He wasn't preaching that these things could save a person, but that they were necessary for true repentance to take place. How would you respond to someone who bases their salvation on good deeds? Isaiah 64:6.

'The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptise you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words, John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.'
Luke 3:15-18

Notice the people were waiting expectantly and wondering in their hearts if John was the Messiah, Luke 3:15. This is something that John clearly denied, John 1:18-28. 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. John was telling his hearers that they had to reverse their life's direction to get ready for Christ; those unwilling to change could not 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, Luke 3:16 / Mark 1:1-8. This was an amazing declaration because one does not have to have much worth to untie somebody's shoes, Luke 3:16.

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.

Some interpret the baptism of fire, Luke 3:16, as referring to the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:2-3. Some believe that the baptism with fire refers to the Holy Spirit's office as the energiser of the believer's service, and the purifier of evil within, 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

The promise, 'he shall baptise you in the Holy Spirit,' Luke 3:16, 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 will hardly be denied that there is a connection between Acts 1:5 and Luke 3:16 / 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? The immediate context would suggest that it is an allusion to the final fate of the wicked. Luke and Matthew say that 'every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire,' Luke 3:9 / Matthew 3:10.

Then, at the conclusion of Luke 3:17, Jesus continues, 'whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor, and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.' Luke 3:17 / Matthew 3:11-12.

Why should the 'fire' of Luke 3:9 / Matthew 3:11 be viewed as something different from that referenced in Matthew 3:10 and Matthew 3:12 / Luke 3:17, without some sort of compelling justification? With many other words, John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them, Luke 3:18.

'But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.' Luke 3:19-20

John the Baptist didn't pull any punches; he called sin, sin. He criticised King Herod for marrying his brother's wife and was thrown in jail, Luke 3:19-20 / Matthew 14:3 / Mark 6:17. What was wrong with their marriage?
The story of Herod and Herodias is quite scandalous. Philip and Herod were brothers who were also uncles to Herodias. Apparently, Philip married Herodias, and they had a child together, Salome. Herod also had a wife during this time.

At some point, Herod and Herodias decided to divorce their spouses in order to 'marry' each other. The way we speak to people differs from one person to the next, and some people need to be told plainly that they are sinning and in need of a Saviour. Are we prepared to call sin, sin?

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

'When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22

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' to John, for a specific purpose, namely, 'to be baptised by him,' Matthew 3:13-17. This means that His baptism was an event that 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, Hear 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,' Luke 3:22 / 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, Luke 1:7.
His task was 'to make ready a people prepared for the Lord', Luke 3:4, 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.
Its special message to John the baptiser. In a lesser sense, the baptism of Jesus also carried a more personal significance for John the Baptizer 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, and he was aware of the sinless character of Jesus. How otherwise, when Jesus asked to be baptised, could John have said, '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 this, from John, wasn't so much a question as an exclamation of surprise, of amazement! That 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!

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.

What is meant by to fulfil all righteousness? 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', this message was unique in Jewish history, and 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 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 contemptuous 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 the first circumcision, then be baptised and then offer sacrifice, whilst the law for a female declared that she must first be baptised and then offer 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. 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' means 'to do everything commanded by God', because the Lord made it clear that John's baptism was commanded by God.

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 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, which 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 that heard such unlikely tales?

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.
Jesus was baptised 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, Luke 3:22, 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 2:47, and through many years had waited for the moment to arrive when His work should commence.
The 'forerunner' had come as promised by the Scriptures, 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 3:15. 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, Luke 3:22, as Christians, we too, at our baptism we receive the Holy Spirit to mark the beginning of our ministry for Him, Acts 2:38.

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

‘Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josek, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.’
Luke 3:23-38

Luke informs us that Jesus was thirty years old when He began in ministry, Luke 3:23. This is the age that a priest was to enter upon the full execution of their office, Numbers 4:3.

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, Matthew 1:1-17; 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. The term ‘son of’, Luke 3:23-38, 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.
Henry, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke’s genealogy.

‘Matthew designed to show that Christ was the son of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed, and that he was heir to the throne of David and therefore he begins with Abraham and brings the genealogy down to Jacob, who was the father of Joseph, and heir-male of the house of David, but Luke, designing to show that Christ was the seed of the woman, that should break the serpent’s head, traces his pedigree upward as high as Adam, and begins it with Ei, or Heli, who was the father, not of Joseph, but of the virgin Mary. And some suggest that the supply which our translators all along insert here is not right and that it should not be read which, that is, which Joseph was the son of Heli, but which Jesus, he was the son of Joseph, of Eli, of Matthat, and he, that is, Jesus, was the son of Seth, of Adam, of God, Luke 3:38 / Luke 3:38.’
Henry, continues in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke’s genealogy.

‘The difference between the two evangelists in the genealogy of Christ has been a stumbling block to infidels that cavil at the word, but such a one as has been removed by the labours of learned men, both in the early ages of the church and in later times, to which we refer ourselves. Matthew draws the pedigree from Solomon, whose natural line ends in Jechonias, the legal right was transferred to Salathiel, who was of the house of Nathan, another son of David, which line Luke here pursues, and so leaves out all the kings of Judah.’

Henry, continues in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke’s genealogy.

‘It is well for us that our salvation doth not depend upon our being able to solve all these difficulties, nor is the divine authority of the gospels at all weakened by them; for the evangelists are not supposed to write these genealogies either of their own knowledge or by divine inspiration, but to have copied them out of the authentic records of the genealogies among the Jews, the heralds’ books, which therefore they were obliged to follow; and in them they found the pedigree of Jacob, the father of Joseph, to be as it is set down in Matthew; and the pedigree of Heli, the father of Mary, to be as it is set down here in Luke.’

Henry, continues in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke's genealogy.

'And this is the meaning of hos enomizeto, Luke 3:23 / Luke 3:23, not, as it was supposed, referring only to Joseph, but uti sancitum est lege, as it is entered into the books, as we find it upon record, by which it appeared that Jesus was both by father and mother's side the Son of David, witness this extract out of their own records, which any one might at that time have liberty to compare with the original, and further the evangelists needed not to go; nay, had they varied from that, they had not gained their point. It's not being contradicted at that time is satisfaction enough to us now that it is a true copy, as it is further worthy of observation, that, when those records of the Jewish genealogies had continued thirty or forty years after these extracts out of them, long enough to justify the evangelists therein, they were all lost and destroyed with the Jewish state and nation; for now there was no more occasion for them.'
Henry continues in his commentary and says the following.

'One difficulty occurs between Abraham and Noah, which gives us some perplexity, Luke 3:35 / Luke 3:36. Sala is said to be the son of Cainan, and he the son of Arphaxad, whereas Sala was the son of Arphaxad, Genesis 10:24 / Genesis 11:12, and there is no such man as Cainan found there. But, as to that, it is sufficient to say that the Seventy Interpreters, who, before our Saviour's time, translated the Old Testament into Greek, for reasons best known to themselves inserted that Cainan; and St. Luke, writing among the Hellenist Jews, was obliged to make use of that translation, and therefore to take it as he found it.'
'The genealogy concludes with this: who was the son of Adam, the son of God.'

1. Some refer it to Adam; he was, in a peculiar manner, the son of God, being, more immediately than any of his offspring, the offspring of God by creation.

2. Others refer it to Christ, and so make the last words of this genealogy to denote his divine and human nature.

He was both the Son of Adam and the Son of God that he might be a proper Mediator between God and the sons of Adam and might bring the sons of Adam to be, through him, the sons of God.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

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, the 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.

JESUS IS TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS

'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.' Luke 4:1

Jesus had just been baptised by John and the 'Spirit of God descending upon Him', Luke 3:21-22 / 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, Luke 4:1. 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.
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', Luke 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.

'Where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.' Luke 4:2

The reason for Jesus being led into the wilderness was to be tempted by the devil, Luke 4:2 / Matthew 4:1. Remember the devil was thrown out of heaven because he wanted to be God, Jude 1:6 / 1 Timothy 3:6.

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.

Jesus is one of only three people in the Scriptures who are recorded to have fasted for forty days and forty nights, Luke 4:2. The other 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, Luke 4:2 / Matthew 4:2, and it's not surprising that Satan would come to Him now when He's at His most vulnerable.

Before we get into the temptations, it's important to note that Matthew, Matthew 4:1-11, or Luke records the temptations of Christ in chronological order, Luke 4:4-12.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION

'The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Luke 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', Luke 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, Matthew 4:3.

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, Luke 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.'" Luke 4:4

Notice how Jesus responds to the tempter, He says 'it is written', Luke 4:4 / 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

'The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours." Luke 4:5-7

How the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour is unknown, Luke 4:5-7.
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, Luke 4:5. The temptation here is that Jesus can rule the world with the devil, if Jesus would worship him, Luke 4:6-8, but Jesus knows that that the Father had already given all things into His hands, John 13:3 / John 17:2 / Matthew 28:18.
And that 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 answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Luke 4:8

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.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION

‘The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Luke 4:9-11

The place where the devil took Jesus next was the holy city of Jerusalem, Luke 4:9 / Nehemiah 11:1 / Nehemiah 1:18 / Matthew 27:53. Jesus stood on the highest point of the temple, Luke 4:9.
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, Luke 4:9. Notice again that 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, Luke 4:10-11. His quote is taken from Psalm 91:11-12.
Notice the three places these temptations took place: first, there was the wilderness, then a very high mountain, Luke 4:5 / Matthew 4:8-9, and now the temple, Luke 4:9. It appears that the devil tried to tempt Jesus in three different places and three different ways.
You will also notice that the devil took Jesus upon a very high mountain and he took Jesus up to the holy city, Luke 4:9. 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.

JESUS’ RESPONSE

‘Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Luke 4:12

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, Luke 4:12, hence why Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16.
If we learn anything from Jesus’ response 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.

‘When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.’ Luke 4:13

It was after the devil’s third temptation that Jesus commands him to get away and notice that Jesus calls him Satan, Matthew 4:10. 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, they came to attend to His physical needs after fasting for forty days and nights, Matthew 4:11. 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.

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 returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.' Luke 4:14-15

Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returns to Galilee, and news about Him spread everywhere, Luke 4:14. He went into the synagogue's teaching, and everyone praised Him, Luke 4:15. Jesus was indeed the Christ, a recognition that came at the very beginning of Christ's ministry, as more fully evident in John.

THE SYNAGOGUE

Notice that it is described as 'the Synagogue', indicating that at this time, Capernaum had only one synagogue, so we may be quite sure which synagogue is meant. In Luke 7:5, we hear the people of Capernaum speaking about 'our synagogue.'

They state that it had been built for them by a Roman Centurion, and it seems reasonable to conclude that the revelation in Mark's account that the synagogue was given to the town by a benevolent Roman soldier reveals that it was originally written for Roman readers.

Archaeologists are fairly certain that the ruins which may still be seen in the town are not those of the original synagogue in which Jesus entered and preached, but are the remains of a second-century building that had later been built on the same spot.

ITS PURPOSE

This means that we may accurately describe the Synagogue as 'a man-made expedient', for that is exactly what it was. But it served several significant purposes.

1. The Synagogue maintained the Jewish national consciousness and became the social centre for the life of the captives, so that even in captivity, they never forgot that they were Jews.

2. It promoted a renewed interest in and respect for the Scriptures and became the place where the collective study of the word of God was conducted.

3. Because it was no longer possible to observe the feasts, fasts and sacrifices prescribed by the Law, there being neither priesthood nor temple, the synagogue also became a place for communal prayer.

So effectively did this 'expedient' work that when the people returned to their homeland, they took it with them and developed it, so that with the passing of time, the Synagogue was accepted as a uniquely Jewish 'institution', and the Synagogue services became more formal and ritualistic.

As for the buildings in which the services were held, these varied in grandeur and style according to the congregation's size and affluence. Externally, the buildings weren't usually impressive, because in the Middle Ages, the height of synagogues was restricted by law; a manifestation of the anti-Semitism which was fairly common in those days.

But, whatever physical differences there may have been between the buildings themselves, there were certain items of furniture which came to be common to all of them and which can be identified to this day.

Since the Middle Ages, the sacred scrolls containing the Law have been housed in the 'Ark', a kind of cupboard or chest, which is always located on the wall which faces Jerusalem.

In front of this 'Ark', there is the 'Perpetual Light', symbolising the constant Presence of God, and which is said to remind the congregation of the fire on the altar which, in the days of the tabernacle and the temple, was never allowed to go out.

There is also the 'Bimah', a raised platform on which stands a reading desk from which prayers are led, the Scriptures read, and announcements are made. This used to be situated at one end of the Synagogue, but these days it is usually placed in the centre of the building.

Incidentally, one may be forgiven for supposing that those who attend the Synagogue have no problem in allowing their left hand to know what their right-hand does!

According to one rabbi, the Bimah is also the place where 'acts of benevolence are made, in the form of donations, which those who are called up to the Reading of the Law want to make'!

JESUS REJECTED AT NAZARETH

'He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Luke 4:17-19

This rejection of Jesus in Nazareth took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Luke 4:17. The rejection of Matthew 13:54-58 took place at the close of His ministry. The residents of Nazareth had two chances to hear Jesus, but they wouldn't listen on either occasion.

As was the custom of the Jews, Jesus went to the synagogue to listen to the reading of the Old Testament law, Luke 4:17-18. 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.

We have to remember that nothing that was done in the Synagogue could be condemned as a violation of the Law of God. Since the Law commanded worship, benevolence and obedience to God's Word, it could be argued that the Synagogue encouraged and assisted the Jews to understand and obey the Law. For this reason, the Lord Jesus would have no objection to it.

This particular scroll, Luke 4:17, was twenty-three feet long, seven meters, which length was determined by the length of the Isaiah Scroll that was discovered in the Dead Sea area in 1947. There are more prophecies concerning Christ in Isaiah than in any other prophet, Isaiah 49:8-9 / Isaiah 58:6 / Isaiah 61:1-2.
Some translations use the word 'book.' However, a scroll wasn't in the format of the books that we have today. A scroll was a roll of papyrus paper or leather on which the law was written. Jesus unrolled the scroll and read from the law.

Jesus says, 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, Luke 3:18-19.
Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following, concerning Isaiah 61:1-2 / Isaiah 58:6.
'This passage, in which the prophet declares to the exiles in Babylon their approaching deliverance, is now read in Jewish synagogues on the Day of Atonement, and may so have been read even at that time. The reading was very short (two verses only) because a sermon was to follow. When there was no sermon, the reading was made considerably longer.'

Dummelow continues in his commentary and says the following, concerning 'The Spirit of the Lord,' Luke 4:18.
'In Isaiah, this is a soliloquy of the Righteous Servant of Jehovah, whom our Lord identifies with Himself. The Jews generally regarded it as a soliloquy of the prophet himself. He hath anointed me at My baptism. He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted.'

Dummelow continues in his commentary and says the following, concerning 'freedom for the prisoners,' Luke 4:18.
'The original words have reference to the release of the Jewish captives from Babylon. Jesus applies them to the release of sinners from the guilt and bondage of sin, through His ministry. The blind, Spiritual blindness is here chiefly in view. To set at liberty them that are bruised, from Isaiah 58:6. Our Lord purposely inserted these words in the passage read according to a common custom. The rabbis said, 'The reader of the prophet may skip from one text to another, but he may not skip from prophet to prophet, but in the twelve (minor) prophets it is lawful.'
Dummelow continues in his commentary and says the following, concerning 'the year of the Lord's favour,' Luke 4:19.
'In Isaiah, this is the year of the return, but Jesus applies it to His earthly ministry. It is not to be inferred from this that Christ's ministry lasted only a year.'

The Jews knew that the Scripture from which Jesus quoted referred to the Messiah, Luke 4:18-19 / Isaiah 61:1-2 / Isaiah 58:6. When Jesus made this statement, they knew that He was making application of the Scripture to Himself.

Therefore, this would be the announcement and beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and work toward the cross in order to bring about what Isaiah had prophesied.

Their concept of the ministry of the Messiah was nationalistic, but Jesus' destiny was spiritual. They wouldn't be delivered from the occupation of foreign powers. They would be delivered from their bondage in sin. It was difficult for them to accept these words from the mouth of a carpenter's son, John 6:42.

'Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.' Luke 4:20-22

Every word which Jesus spoke from Isaiah pointed to the fact that He was the Messiah. With intense interest, Luke 4:20, therefore, they were 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, Luke 4:21.
Everyone knew who Jesus was. He had grown up in the town of Nazareth. 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, Luke 4:22. They also knew that He was one who had been very knowledgeable of the Old Testament Scriptures since childhood.

'Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" Luke 4:23

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the proverb, Luke 4:23.
'This proverb was probably in common use at that time. The meaning is this, suppose that a man should attempt to heal another when he was himself diseased in the same manner, it would be natural to ask him first to cure himself, and thus to render it manifest that he was worthy of confidence.'

They could accept Him as a good teacher, but not as the Messiah of Israel. Jesus spoke in a manner that was appealing. The eloquence of His speech commanded their attention.

They had heard of the healing of the nobleman's son that Jesus did in Capernaum a few days earlier, Luke 4:23 / Matthew 4:13 / John 4:46-54. They asked Him for such a miracle in Nazareth in order that the hearsay concerning His other miracles is confirmed in His own country.

'Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years, and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." Luke 4:24-27

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, Luke 4:24, though others throughout the world would receive Him.
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.

Jesus speaks of the many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah who went through a severe famine, Luke 4:25-27 / 1 Kings 17-18 / James 5:17. The widow of Zarephath was a Gentile. It was to this woman alone that Elijah, the prophet of God, was sent, Luke 4:26.

God sent Elijah to her because she accepted him. Jesus teaches that the messengers of God are sent to those who accept them. God's evangelists, therefore, should go to those who are receptive to teaching, Matthew 7:6.

Naaman was a Gentile, and it was by God's grace that he was cleansed while many Israelites at the time who were lepers remained unclean, Luke 4:27 / 2 Kings 5:1-14. His faith led him to Elisha, whereas those who ignored the prophet didn't seek him.

'All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.' Luke 4:28-30

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, Luke 4:28.

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 an attempted murder of Him, Luke 4:29 / John 8:37 / John 10:31. This same furious response to truth is something we see happening with Stephen, Acts 7:51-54, and Paul, Acts 22:22.

Notice that Jesus simply walked right through the crowd and went on His way, Luke 4:30. It's difficult to determine if this was done miraculously or not, but Jesus has done this before and will do it again later, John 8:59 / John 10:39 / John 18:6.

JESUS DRIVES OUT AN IMPURE SPIRIT

'Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority. In the synagogue, there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.' Luke 4:31-35

CAPERNAUM

For most of Jesus' ministry, He lived among fishermen and went back and forth from Capernaum, Luke 4:31. The Sea of Galilee isn't a sea but a lake and also called Gennesaret, Chinoreth Tiberius, because it was shaped like a harp; it was one of several fishing towns and villages.

Capernaum's population is believed to have been less than two thousand and had one long street on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. It had a fish market, the location of which has been discovered. Josephus records that, at one time, two hundred and thirty fishing boats worked on the Sea of Galilee.

Though small, it was important because of its location near the main highway running from Egypt in the South to the northern provinces of the Roman Empire. It also had a tax office, Matthew 9:9, where taxes were collected for both the occupying Romans and Herod, who ruled over Galilee.

You might imagine that Capernaum was a famous, large, ancient city, but it was not. Even though the name, Capernaum, means 'city of Nahum', it had nothing to do with the prophet Nahum, who lived about 740 BC, because it was only established about two hundred years before the birth of Jesus, and, consequently, it is never mentioned in the Old Testament.

However, even in these troubled times, Capernaum remains one of the most popular tourist attractions in Israel because of its many associations with Jesus, who made His home there. Matthew tells us, 'leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum', Matthew 4:13. Matthew also tells us that it was 'His hometown', Matthew 9:1, and points out that this was the fulfilment of the prophecy made by the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 9:1-2.
There are too many things that happened in and around Capernaum to mention them all, because most of the events concerning the Lord's ministry, recorded in the first nine chapters of Mark's account, occurred in and around Capernaum.

Notice that everyone was amazed at Jesus' teaching, because His words had authority, Luke 4:32. His words had authority because He was God. In the synagogue, there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit, Luke 4:33.
Notice that he cried out at the top of his voice, go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? Luke 4:33-34. Notice the spirit says 'us', plural. This spirit is very aware of who Jesus is, He, the Holy One of God, Luke 4:34.
Jesus tells the spirit to be quiet and commands the spirit to come out of the man, Luke 4:35. Then the demon threw the man down before them all and obeyed Jesus' command to come out of the man, Luke 4:35.

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', beating 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 those individuals joined the 'church', nothing but 'bad luck' has happened to other members.

Our television is filled with programmes that 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 this study is to try to compare what people believe is demon possession today with the Scriptures, and 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.

And please know that 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?

Well, 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?

Now, this is an important question which we'll get back to later but for now, we see in clearly 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. 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, 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 astonished 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. This verse, 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 that, 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 that 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 betides 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 that 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'.

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. Now Paul said these spiritual miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit would fail, cease, and vanish away, 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.
These miraculous gifts would cease when that which is perfect has come. This refers to the New Testament, which is called the perfect law of liberty, James 1:25.
As we noted a moment ago, 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, 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 to 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 that 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 do 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. 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 he 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.
Like I said at the start of this subject, the whole purpose of this is to try to compare what people claim is demon possession today with the Scriptures, in order for you to make your own mind up about the subject at hand.

And to know that 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.

'All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power, he gives orders to impure spirits, and they come out!" And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.' Luke 4:36-37

Notice that everyone was amazed and said to each other, 'What words these are! With authority and power, he gives orders to impure spirits, and they come out! Luke 4:36. And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area, Luke 4:37.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'This is a very elegant metaphor. The people are represented as struck with astonishment, and the sound goes out through all the coasts; in allusion to the propagation of sound, by a smart stroke upon any substance, by which the air is suddenly agitated, and conveys the report made by the stroke to distant places. So this miracle was told to others by those who saw it, and they to others still, till it was heard through all the coasts of Galilee, Mark 1:28.'
As a result of Jesus' teaching and miracles, great crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him, Mark 1:28.

JESUS HEALS MANY

'Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.' Luke 4:38-41

Jesus came into Simon Peter's house and found his mother-in-law sick in bed with a high fever, Luke 4:38 / Matthew 8:14 / Mark 1:29-34. 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.
He spoke to her, raised her up, and the fever left her, Luke 4:39. She then began waiting on Jesus and the disciples, Luke 4:39 / Matthew 8:15. Why sunset? Luke 4:40. They were confined to their homes and weren't allowed out until sunset, 6:00 am. He also healed many others who were brought to Him, Luke 4:40-41.
Several features of Jesus' healings are noteworthy.

1. He healed immediately, with no delay.

2. He healed everyone who came to Him regardless of their disease, Luke 4:40-41 / Matthew 8:16-17.
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, Luke 4:41 / Mark 1:24 / Mark 1:34 / Mark 3:12.

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

Jesus frequently sought solitude for prayer, Luke 4:42 / Mark 1:35. Prayer during the daytime was nearly impossible since the crowds continually pressed on Him, so He skipped sleep to be able to talk with His Father that He missed so much.
After finally finding Him that morning, the disciples reported that everybody in the town where He had been was seeking Him, Luke 4:42 / Mark 1:36-37.
Nevertheless, since He wanted to be able to get the message, the good news of the Kingdom of God, to as many people as possible, Luke 4:43, He insisted on moving on to other towns, to preach in their synagogues, Luke 4:44 / Mark 1:39.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

'One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink." Luke 5:1-7

JESUS CALLS HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

One day, as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God, Luke 5:1.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The dramatic scene here is emphasised by the last two clauses. It had been an unsuccessful night of fishing, and the men who were about to be called to the apostleship were cleaning up the gear and getting ready to store it for the next fishing trip. With marvellous insight, Jesus accomplished several things at once. By using one of the boats as a pulpit, he could avoid the press of the throng, and, by means of the great catch a little later, he could provide further insight for the men about to be called to accompany him as apostles. Luke did not record the sermon Jesus preached on that occasion, and thus we should look to what Jesus did, rather than to the unrecorded message. Like the apostle John, Luke recognised the deeply spiritual overtones of such an event as this.'

Jesus says two boats or ships, Luke 5:2, as the KJV renders it.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The ships used on so small a lake were probably no more than fishing boats without decks, and easily drawn up on the beach. Josephus says there were 230 of them on the lake, attended by four or five men each. That they were small is also clear from the account commonly given of them. A single large draught of fish endangered them and came near sinking them.'

Jesus takes full advantage of using Simon's boat as a pulpit to teach the large crowd who were following Him, Luke 5:1-2. After speaking to the people, Luke 5:3, He turns to Simon and tells him to throw his net into the deeper parts of Lake Gennesaret, Luke 5:4, that is, Lake Galilee. Simon, however, appears to be reluctant because they had been fishing all night and caught nothing, Luke 5:5.
Notice that Simon calls Jesus, 'Master', Luke 5:5. This is the first time that the word translated 'Master' occurs in the New Testament, and it is used only by Luke. The other evangelists call him Rabbi, or Lord. The word here used means a 'prefect', or one placed 'over' others, and hence, it comes to mean 'teacher' or 'guide'.
But because Jesus commanded him to do so and out of respect for Jesus, he went ahead and did so, Luke 5:6. The result of obeying Jesus' command was such a large number of fish that the nets began to burst, Luke 5:6. They had to call for James and John, Luke 5:10, to bring their boat, but even that wasn't enough, as both boats began to sink, Luke 5:7.

'When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.' Luke 5:8-11

After witnessing the miraculous catch of fish, Simon falls to his knees and confesses that He is a sinful man, Luke 5:8. Although Andrew isn't mentioned by Luke, Matthew 4:18-22, we can be sure that he was one of the ones who were astonished at the catch of fish, Luke 5:9-10.
Jesus tells Simon not to be afraid, not only He but also the other four disciples will become fishers of men, Luke 5:10, and so, without any hesitation, he pulls up their boats and leaves everything to follow Jesus, Luke 5:11.
These men recognised Jesus' greatness. Jesus was the one whose shoes John was unworthy to untie, John 1:27 / Luke 3:16. God had specially acknowledged Him by His own voice from heaven, Matthew 3:17, and at His transfiguration, Matthew 17:5 / Mark 9:7 / Luke 9:35.

So, when Jesus demanded radical action, to drop everything and follow Him, they responded immediately. Note the characteristics of followers of Jesus; these fishermen demonstrated the meaning of discipleship, Mark 1:16-20. When Jesus called, they.

1. Acted immediately.

2. Left both job and family.

3. Started following Him.

Christ calls today through His Word. When we perceive His greatness, we too will:

1. Obey immediately all He says.

2. Put Him ahead of everything, including our job and family.

3. Follow Him, allowing His example to direct every step.

People who know that Jesus wants them to change, but put it off, are not like these four fishermen.

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 they 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.

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.' Matthew 4:18-20. Later, Jesus is teaching the multitudes on the mountainside, and 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, which Jesus miraculously multiplied into enough food to feed everyone, John 6:8-9.
And it was Andrew who, during the Passover Feast, brought a group of Greeks, 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 chapter one, 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, 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. When Jesus called the brothers, James and John 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, 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 a 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.

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.

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 is here that John recorded what is written in the New Testament Book of Revelation.

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 worn out by old age, died at the age of sixty-eight after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city, Ephesus.

Peter and Andrew dropped their nets and followed Jesus. James and John left their nets and their father and followed Jesus too. 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 people.

JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH LEPROSY

'While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.' Luke 5:12-16

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. 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. This explains why they stood at a distance. 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 is willing, Luke 5:12. 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 doesn't rebuke him for the uncertainty in his words. Jesus didn't say, 'What do you mean, if? Luke 5:13. What kind of faith is that?' Compassion doesn't respond in that way. Jesus reaches out and touches him, Luke 5:13.
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 was more than willing, and with the words, 'Be clean,' the man was healed, Luke 5:13.
Notice he was healed of his leprosy immediately. 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,' Luke 5:14, 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, Luke 5:14.
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, Luke 5:14 / Deuteronomy 24:8 / Leviticus 13:1-6 / Leviticus 13:45- 49 / Leviticus 14:1-32.

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.

Despite Jesus trying to keep a low profile, the news about Him spread all the more, and as a result, many came to hear Him and to be healed of their ailments, Luke 5:15. Jesus often went to be alone and spend time in prayer with the Father, Luke 5:16 / Luke 4:42-44 / Luke 4:9-10.

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYZED MAN

'One day, Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. Some

men came carrying a paralysed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralysed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately, he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today." Luke 5:17-26

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, Luke 5:15. While He was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, Luke 5:17. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick, Luke 5:17.
So many wanted to hear Him that they filled the house in Capernaum where He was teaching and crowded around it, Mark 2:1-2. Just then, five men arrived, eager to see Jesus too. One of them was paralysed, and the other four carried him on a stretcher, Luke 5:18 / 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, Luke 5:19 / 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, Luke 5:20 / Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5, but He speaks directly to the lame man and tells him that his sins were forgiven, Luke 5:20 / Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5.
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, Luke 5:20 / 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, Luke 5:21 / Mark 2:6-7.
The scribes and Pharisees thought it blasphemy to assume the position of God by forgiving sins, Luke 5:21 / Matthew 9:3 / Mark 2:7 / 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, Luke 5:22 / Matthew 9:4 / Mark 2:8, and so, He read their minds and asked, 'Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or get up and walk? Luke 5:23 / Matthew 9:5 / Mark 2:9 / 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, Luke 5:24 / Matthew 9:6 / Mark 2:10 / 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, Luke 5:25 / Matthew 9:6-7 / Mark 2:11-12.
Jesus proved His power to conquer the invisible, that is, spiritual problems, by overcoming a visible, physical problem. The crowd was dumbfounded, Luke 5:26 / Matthew 9:8 / Mark 2:12. They had never seen anything to compare with Jesus, Luke 5:26 / 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?

JESUS CALLS LEVI AND EATS WITH SINNERS

'After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.' Luke 5:27-28

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, also called Levi son of Alphaeus, was a tax collector, Luke 5:27 / Mark 2:13.
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, Luke 5:27 / Matthew 9:9 / Mark 2:14, and immediately he left everything behind and did so, Luke 5:28 / Matthew 9:9 / Mark 2:14.

The word ‘followed’ is in the imperfect tense, and means that he ‘kept following’ Jesus. It was a defining moment in his life. Matthew was not moved by a passing curiosity in this remarkable Teacher. He made a commitment that day!

MATTHEW, ALSO NAMED LEVI

Matthew was named Levi before his call by Jesus. We don’t know whether Jesus gave him the name Matthew or whether he changed it himself, but it is a shortening of the name Mattathias, which means ‘gift of Yahweh,’ or simply ‘the gift of God.’

On the same day, Jesus invited Matthew to follow him. Matthew threw a great farewell feast in his home in Capernaum, inviting his friends so they could meet Jesus too, Matthew 9:10-13. From that time on, instead of collecting tax money, Matthew collected souls for Christ.
Despite his sinful past, Matthew was uniquely qualified to be a disciple; he was an accurate record keeper and keen observer of people, and he captured the smallest details. Those traits served him well when he wrote the Gospel of Matthew some twenty years later.

By surface appearances, it was scandalous and offensive for Jesus to pick a tax collector as one of his closest followers since they were widely hated by the Jews. Yet of the four Gospel writers, Matthew presented Jesus to the Jews as their hoped-for Messiah, tailoring his account to answer their questions.

Matthew displayed one of the most radically changed lives in the Bible in response to an invitation from Jesus. He didn’t hesitate, he didn’t look back. He left behind a life of wealth and security for poverty and uncertainty. He abandoned the pleasures of this world for the promise of eternal life.

The remainder of Matthew’s life is uncertain. Tradition says he preached for fifteen years in Jerusalem following the death and resurrection of Jesus, then went out on the mission field to other countries.

Why would Matthew be a good example of evangelism today? He’s been there and done that; he knows people and how they think. He never forgot where he came from; he was a sinner, and since following Jesus, he knew where he was going.

We need people who can relate and sympathise with other people. He basically threw a party and invited his old friends and his new Christ-following friends and let them mix.

‘Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:29-32

After deserting his Tax Office at the call of Jesus, Matthew called together ‘many tax collectors and sinners’ to a feast, Luke 5:29 / Matthew 9:10 / Mark 2:15. 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 Christians 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, Luke 5:29 / Mark 2:15.
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, Luke 5:30 / Matthew 9:11 / Mark 2:16.
When Jesus overheard their criticism, He asked, 'Who needs a doctor, the sick or the well?' Luke 5:31 / Matthew 9:12 / Mark 2:17. His purpose, He said, was not to call righteous, but sinners, Luke 5:32 / Mark 2:17. 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', Luke 5:31-32. I wonder what they thought when Jesus said those words!

JESUS QUESTIONED ABOUT FASTING

'They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking." Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast." He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'" Luke 5:33-39

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, Luke 5:33 / Matthew 9:14 / Mark 2:18. These events took place at a time of fasting when the disciples of the Pharisees and John's disciples were fasting and praying, Luke 5:33 / Mark 2:18.
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?' Luke 5:34 / Mark 2:19.
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, Luke 5:35 / Matthew 9:15 / Mark 2:20. 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, Luke 5:36-39 / Matthew 9:16-17 / Mark 2:21-22.
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.

ARE CHRISTIANS COMMANDED TO FAST TODAY?

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. 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 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.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

'One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Luke 6:1-2

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH

At that time, is 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, Luke 6:1-11 / Matthew 12:1-2 / 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, Luke 6:2 / Matthew 12:2 / 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.

'Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Luke 6:3-5

WHAT DID DAVID DO EXACTLY?

What David did was actually against lesser legalities of the law, Luke 6:3-4 / Matthew 12:3-4 / 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 national 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

'On another Sabbath, he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shrivelled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.
Luke 6:6-11

The events recorded here and in Matthew 12:9-10 took place on another Sabbath than the one in the previous verses, 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, Luke 6:6-11 / Matthew 12:9-13 / 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?' Luke 6:9 / Matthew 12:10, 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, Luke 6:10 / Matthew 13:13 / 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, Luke 6:10 / Matthew 12:13 / 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 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, Luke 6:11 / Matthew 12:14 / 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, Luke 6:11 / Matthew 12:14 / 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.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

'One of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.' Luke 6:12-16

Jesus needed to train apprentices to represent Him and preach the Gospel after His departure. He chose twelve of His followers for that job. The twelve He chose were an unlikely bunch, including four fishermen, a tax collector, a revolutionary, Simon the 'Zealot', a sceptic, Thomas, and a traitor, Judas Iscariot.

Jesus proved that He could work with and make something out of even the most unpromising material. Luke gives us a fuller account of the event, where we find the addition of very important facts.

The major event recorded by Mark is 'the choosing of the twelve' and the listing of their names, and we may be excused for thinking that the brevity of Mark's account is rather surprising, considering the importance of the occasion.

Mark 3:13, says that Jesus 'went up to a mountain', but doesn't mention that His purpose, which Luke reveals, it was 'to pray', Luke 6:12. He tells us in Mark 6:12, that before Jesus chose these twelve men, He spent the night alone on the mountain in prayer to God. Please note He wasn't talking all night long! Effective prayer is a two-way street; it involves both speaking and listening.

The next day, He called His disciples to Him, and He revealed the names of the twelve men who were later to be called 'Apostles', Luke 6:13. We cannot avoid thinking that the night spent in prayer had something to do with His choice.
Another thought-provoking thought is that to some of them, He gave new names. Simon, Luke 6:14, He named Peter in Greek 'Petros', which is masculine. It's important to notice this, because Jesus later said, 'Upon this 'petra', feminine, I will build My church', Matthew 16:18.

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.

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,' Matthew 4:18-20.
Later, Jesus is teaching the multitudes on the mountainside, and 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 multiplies into enough food to feed everyone, John 6:8-9.
And it was Andrew who, during the Passover Feast, brought a group of Greeks and 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 chapter one 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, 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. When Jesus called the brothers, James and John 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, 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 a 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.

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.

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 is here that John recorded what is written in the New Testament Book of Revelation.

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 after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city, Ephesus. Peter and Andrew dropped their nets and followed Jesus.

James and John left their nets and their father and followed Jesus too. 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 people.

PHILIP

Philip, the apostle, is not to be confused with the evangelist Philip in Acts. Like Peter and Andrew, Philip was from Bethsaida, John 1:44. Philip, whose name means 'lover of horses', is named in all three lists of apostles, Luke 6:14-16 / Matthew 10:4 / Mark 3:16, and in each he is the fifth apostle listed. He isn't mentioned again in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Everything else we know of him comes from the Gospel of John.
In John, Philip told Nathanael that they had found the Messiah and that he was from Nazareth. When Nathanael replied, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' Philip simply said, 'Come and see,' John 1:43-46. Shortly after, Nathanael became one of Jesus' disciples.
Later, before the miraculous feeding of the multitude, Jesus tested Philip by asking, 'Where will we buy bread for these people to eat?' Philip failed the test by replying, 'Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!' John 6:5-7.
Later, shortly before Jesus is arrested, He tells His disciples that 'If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him,' John 14:7.
But Philip's response again shows a lack of faith when he asks, 'Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.' Jesus sternly rebukes him and says, 'Philip, don't you know me, even after I have been with you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,' John 14:8-9.
Philip isn't mentioned again in the New Testament except in the list of apostles waiting in the upper room shortly after Christ's ascension, Acts 1:13. What lesson can we learn from Philip when it comes to sharing the good news with others? Philip was convinced about who Jesus was, as we must be. He was convinced enough to tell someone else about Jesus.

NATHANAEL, ALSO NAMED BARTHOLOMEW

His name means 'given' or 'gift of God'; he was one of our Lord's disciples, 'of Cana in Galilee', John 21:2. Jesus says he was 'truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit,' John 1:47-48.
His name occurs only in the Gospel of John, which, in his list of the disciples, never mentions Bartholomew, with whom he has consequently been identified. He was one of those to whom the Lord showed Himself alive after His resurrection, at the Sea of Tiberias, John 21:1-2.

Bartholomew's name appears with every list of the disciples, Luke 6:14 / Matthew 10:3 / Mark 3:18 / Acts 1:13. This wasn't the first name, however. It was his second name. His first name was probably Nathanael, whom Jesus called 'an Israelite in whom there is no deceit,' John 1:47.
The New Testament gives us very little information about him; tradition indicates he was a great searcher of the Scripture and a scholar in the law and the prophets. He developed into a man of complete surrender to the Carpenter of Nazareth, and one of the church's most adventurous missionaries.

He is said to have preached with Philip in Phrygia and Hierapolis, also in Armenia. The Armenian Church claims him as its founder and martyr.

However, tradition says that he preached in India, and his death seems to have taken place there; he died as a martyr for his Lord. He was lashed alive with knives.

If we're taking the good news to people, how important is it to be truthful with them? No deceit means don't do what Jacob did with his brother Esau. No alternative motives, Genesis 27:1-46.

MATTHEW, ALSO NAMED LEVI

Matthew was named Levi before his call by Jesus. We don't know whether Jesus gave him the name Matthew or whether he changed it himself, but it is a shortening of the name Mattathias, which means 'gift of Yahweh,' or simply 'the gift of God.'

On the same day, Jesus invited Matthew to follow him. Matthew threw a great farewell feast in his home in Capernaum, inviting his friends so they could meet Jesus too, Matthew 9:10-13. From that time on, instead of collecting tax money, Matthew collected souls for Christ.
Despite his sinful past, Matthew was uniquely qualified to be a disciple; he was an accurate record keeper and keen observer of people, and he captured the smallest details. Those traits served him well when he wrote the Gospel of Matthew some twenty years later.

By surface appearances, it was scandalous and offensive for Jesus to pick a tax collector as one of his closest followers since they were widely hated by the Jews. Yet of the four Gospel writers, Matthew presented Jesus to the Jews as their hoped-for Messiah, tailoring his account to answer their questions.

Matthew displayed one of the most radically changed lives in the Bible in response to an invitation from Jesus. He didn't hesitate, he didn't look back. He left behind a life of wealth and security for poverty and uncertainty. He abandoned the pleasures of this world for the promise of eternal life.

The remainder of Matthew's life is uncertain. Tradition says he preached for fifteen years in Jerusalem following the death and resurrection of Jesus, then went out on the mission field to other countries. Why would Matthew be a good example of evangelism today?

He's been there and done that; he knows people and how they think. He never forgot where he came from; he was a sinner, and since following Jesus, he knew where he was going.

We need people who can relate and sympathise with other people. He basically threw a party and invited his old friends and his new Christ-following friends and let them mix.

THOMAS

Thomas Didymus lived in Galilee. Tradition says he laboured in Parthia, Persia, and India, suffering martyrdom in India. Thomas was his Hebrew name, and Didymus was his Greek name. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us nothing about Thomas except his name. However, John defines him more clearly in his Gospel.

Thomas appeared in the raising of Lazarus, John 11:2-16, in the Upper Room, John 14:1-6, where he wanted to know how to know the way where Jesus was going.
In John 20:25, we see him saying unless he sees the nail prints in Jesus' hand and the gash of the spear on His side, he will not believe. That's why Thomas became known as Doubting Thomas.
By nature, Thomas was a pessimist; he was a bewildered man. Yet, he was a man of courage; he was a man who couldn't believe until he had seen. He was a man of devotion and faith.

When Jesus rose, he came back and invited Thomas to put his finger in the nail prints on his hands and his side. Here, we see Thomas making the greatest confession of faith, 'My Lord and my God,' John 20:28.
Thomas' doubts were transformed into faith. By this very fact, Thomas' faith became great, intense, and convincing. Remember, Thomas, although he may not have fully understood, was the only one who wanted to go with Jesus to Bethany in order for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. 'Let us also go, that we may die with him,' John 11:16.
Do we ever have doubts about our ability to share God's Word with others? We have to remember that the power is in the Word, not the speaker, Romans 1:16.

JAMES, SON OF ALPHAEUS

The title 'James the Lesser' or 'the Little,' helps to distinguish him from the apostle James, son of Zebedee, who was part of Jesus' inner circle of three and the first disciple to be martyred. James the Lesser may have been younger or smaller in stature than Zebedee's son, as the Greek word for 'the less', 'mikros', conveys both meanings.

Although it's argued by scholars, some believe James the Lesser was the disciple who first witnessed the risen Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:7, 'Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.' Beyond this, Scripture reveals nothing more about James the Lesser.

SIMON THE ZEALOT

Simon, the Zealot, one of the little-known followers called the Canaanites or Zelotes, lived in Galilee. Tradition says he was crucified. In two places in the King James Version, he is called a Canaanite, Matthew 10:4 / Mark 3:18. However, in the other two places, he is called Simon Zelotes, Luke 6:15 / Acts 1:13.
The New Testament gives us practically nothing on him personally except that it says he was a Zealot. The Zealots were fanatical Jewish Nationalists who had a heroic disregard for the suffering involved and the struggle for what they regarded as the purity of their faith.

The Zealots were crazed with hatred for the Romans. It was this hate for Rome that destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Josephus says the Zealots were reckless persons, zealous in good practices and extravagant and reckless in the worst kind of actions.

From this background, we see that Simon was a fanatical Nationalist, a man devoted to the Law, a man with bitter hatred for anyone who dared to compromise with Rome. Yet, Simon clearly emerged as a man of faith.

He abandoned all his hatred for the faith that he showed toward his Master and the love that he was willing to share with the rest of the disciples, especially Matthew, the Roman tax collector.

Simon, the Zealot, the man who once would have killed in loyalty to Israel, became the man who saw that God would have no forced service. Tradition says he died as a martyr.

His apostolic symbol is a fish lying on a Bible, which indicates he was a former fisherman who became a fisher of men through preaching. Simon left everything in his previous life to follow Jesus.

Are we zealous to take Jesus to the world? Galatians 6:9. If someone desires to become a Christian, how do we teach them that there is a cost involved? Luke 14:25-33.

JAMES, SON OF JAMES

Sometimes he is called Thaddaeus or possibly named Jude. Little is known about Thaddeus, but Bible scholars generally agree. However, the four names used for him all refer to the same person.

In lists of the twelve, he is called ‘Thaddeus’ or ‘Thaddaeus’, a surname for the name ‘Lebbaeus’, Matthew 10:3, which means ‘heart’ or ‘courageous.’ The picture is further confused when he is called ‘Judas’ but is distinguished from Judas Iscariot.
Church tradition holds that Thaddeus founded a church at Edessa and was crucified there as a martyr. Thaddeus preached the Gospel as a missionary following Jesus’ resurrection. Thaddeus learned the Gospel directly from Jesus and loyally served Christ despite hardship and persecution.

Like most of the other apostles, Thaddeus abandoned Jesus during His trial and crucifixion, Mark 14:43-52. How can we encourage someone to study the Bible if they already claim they are Christians? Acts 18:24-26.

JUDAS ISCARIOT

Judas Iscariot is remembered for one thing: his betrayal of Jesus Christ, Matthew 26:13-15. Even though Judas showed remorse later, his name became a symbol for traitors and turncoats throughout history, Matthew 27:3-5. His motive seemed to be greed, but some scholars speculate that political desires lurked beneath his treachery.
Judas Iscariot travelled with Jesus and studied under him for three years. He apparently went with the other eleven when Jesus sent them to preach the Gospel, cast out demons, and heal the sick. Judas was a thief; he was in charge of the group’s money bag and sometimes stole from it, John 12:4-6.
He was disloyal. Even though the other apostles deserted Jesus and Peter denied him, Judas went so far as to lead the temple guard to Jesus at Gethsemane, and then identified Jesus by kissing him, Luke 22:47-48.
Some would say Judas Iscariot made the greatest error in history, Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18. If Jesus chose Judas despite Him knowing what Judas would eventually do, what can we learn about anyone who comes to Christ? John 13:34-35. When we reflect upon the apostles, we need to remember what kind of people Jesus could use.

The very fact that Jesus chose them suggests that, although He was the Son of God, in His humanity, He felt the need for companionship and support. Indeed, the Scriptures tell us that there were several reasons why in Mark 3:14-15. He chose these twelve for the following reasons.

1. To be with Him.

2. That He might send them out to preach.

3. To have the power to perform miracles of healing.

He 'ordained' them and gave them power and authority, Mark 3:14-16. There are several Greek words for 'ordain' so that it has several shades of meaning, 'to appoint, to set in place; to point out, to indicate by pointing the finger.' Note the difference between power and authority, Mark 3:14-15. It's possible for a person to have 'power', but lack the 'authority' to use it. Jesus gave the men whom He chose power and the authority to exercise it.

BLESSINGS AND WOES

'He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there, and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.' Luke 6:17-19

Please note this is not the same event we have recorded in Matthew, on that occasion, Jesus spoke 'On a mountainside', Matthew 5:1. Here Jesus spoke on 'a level place', Luke 6:17.
Many people came from far and wide to hear Jesus speak and to be healed of their diseases, Luke 6:17-18. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all, Luke 6:19 / Mark 5:30.

'Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.' Luke 6:20

The word 'blessed' simply means happy, Luke 6:20 / Matthew 5:3 / 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' or '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 you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.' Luke 6:21

Jesus declared that those who hunger, Luke 6:21, that is, hunger for righteousness, Matthew 5:6, feel an intense desire for righteousness, that which is right or just, shall obtain it.

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is an attitude, a frame of mind, which realises God's Word, is 'righteousness', Psalm 119:172. It is spiritual food that is needed to grow stronger, 1 Peter 2:2 / Matthew 4:4.
What type of person doesn't get hungry or thirsty physically? The person who is either sick or dead! The same is true spiritually. 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. Luke uses the word 'weep', while Matthew uses the word 'mourn', Matthew 5:4. In the Greek language, the strongest word for 'mourn' is used here.
This term indicates a type of mourning that cannot be hidden. 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 that separates them from God spiritually, Isaiah 59:1-2.
Luke uses the word 'laugh', Luke 6:21, while Matthew uses the word 'comforted', Matthew 5:4. 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 you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.' Luke 6:22-23

Luke says that people will be blessed when people hate you, exclude you, insult you, and reject your name as evil because of Christ, Luke 6:22. Matthew says 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. 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. 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.
Though Christians should live joyfully here on Earth, their ultimate reward will be 'in heaven,' Matthew 5:11-12. 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. Persecution should be embraced, not resisted, as a way to further develop our character through suffering, James 1:2-4 / Romans 5:3-5.

'But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.' Luke 6:24-26

Jesus now gives us four woes.

1. The rich have already been comforted, Luke 6:24.

2. The well-fed will go hungry, Luke 6:25.
3. Those who laugh will mourn and weep, Luke 6:25.
4. Those who are well spoken of will be treated like false prophets, Luke 6:26.

These four woes are for those who have materially satisfied themselves at the expense of others. The wealthy had collected a lot of riches but forgot about the basic needs of their fellow man, James 5:1-6.

They were obsessed with materialistic living and ate the finest food, and rejoiced at the same time, all of which was done without a second thought for the poor around them, Proverbs 14:13 / James 4:9.

They loved it when people spoke well of them, in terms of what they taught, and just like their ancestors before them, they pretend to be of God, but they delivered their own doctrines as the truth of God, and who accommodated themselves to the desires of the people.

Boles, in his commentary, says the following.

'These words were not the expression of anger, but lamentation and warning. 'Woe unto you,' or 'alas for you!' Jesus is not uttering condemnation as a judge, but as the great Teacher and Prophet, he declares the miserable condition of certain classes and warns them against it.'

LOVE FOR ENEMIES

"But to you who are listening, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.' If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.' Luke 6:27-36

The law commanding love for our neighbour, Luke 6:27 / Matthew 5:43, 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, Luke 6:27 / Matthew 5:44, 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, Luke 6:27-28 / Matthew 5:44. 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, Luke 6:29 / 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, Luke 6:29 / 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.

If someone is in need and asks for help, we should not refuse to give what we can, Luke 6:30 / Matthew 5:42 / 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.

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.

'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 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!

JUDGING OTHERS

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.' Luke 6:37-42

Jesus, in Matthew 7:1-5, 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, Luke 6:37 / Matthew 7:1, 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, Luke 6:38 / Matthew 7:2.

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, Luke 6:36 / Matthew 7:2. 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, Luke 6:41-42 / Matthew 7:3-4. Common sense tells us that both need to remove the foreign objects, that is, sin from their eyes, 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, 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, Luke 6:42 / Matthew 7:5.
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 Luke 6:37 / Matthew 7:1 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 are 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 condemningly 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.

Matthew adds Jesus words concerning dogs and pigs, 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 be given to dogs, and pearls are not 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, 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!

A TREE AND ITS FRUIT

'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognised by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.' Luke 6:43-45

It would be unwise to interpret Jesus' statement in Luke 6:43 / 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', Luke 6:43-45 / Matthew 7:19.
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.
Jesus here speaks about what comes out of our hearts; in other words, a person behaves according to what they have in their heart. If they have evil in their heart, then they will act with evil intentions; however, if they have good in their heart, then they will act with good intentions, Luke 6:45 / Galatians 5:13-14.
Matthew, in his account, gives us an extra warning. 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

'Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?' Luke 6:46

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!' Luke 6:46 / Matthew 7:21-22. The idea of saying, Lord twice gives us the impression that 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! Luke 6:46 / Matthew 7:21.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

'As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed, and its destruction was complete." Luke 6:47-49

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, Luke 6:47 / John 13:17 / 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, Luke 6:48-49 / Matthew 7:25. 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'! Luke 6:48 / Matthew 7:25.
Who or what is the rock? The rock is nothing more nor less than 'these words of mine,' namely, the words of Christ, Luke 6:47 / Luke 6:49 / Matthew 7:24 / Matthew 7:26. 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, Luke 6:48 / Matthew 7:26, making 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, Luke 6:49 / 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, Luke 6:49 / Matthew 7:26. That house will be crushed in a storm, Luke 6:49 / Matthew 7:27.
The one who hears the Word of God and obeys it is like a wise man that builds his house on solid rock, Luke 6:47-48 / Matthew 7:24-25. 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,' Luke 6:49 / Matthew 7:24. 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.

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

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, Luke 7:1-10 / Matthew 8:5-13, 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, Luke 7:1 / Matthew 8:5.
2. They both record the centurion, Luke 7:2 / Matthew 8:5.
3. They both record the centurion's servant who was seriously ill, Luke 7:2 / Matthew 8:6.
4. The centurion's unworthiness is recorded in both accounts, Luke 7:6-7 / Matthew 8:8.
5. The centurion recognises his own authority and the authority of Jesus in both accounts, Luke 7:8 / Matthew 8:9.
6. The centurion's faith is recorded as great, and Jesus' response of amazement is recorded in both accounts, Luke 7:9-10 / Matthew 8:10.

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, as 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.

We're going to look at Luke's account, where we read that the faith of the centurion is incredible. This man, who was a Gentile and a Roman soldier, should have been one of the last people to trust Jesus, yet we read about him putting all of his trust in Jesus.

THE CENTURION

'When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There was a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, who was sick and about to die. 'The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.' Luke 7:1-3

CAPERNAUM

Capernaum, Luke 7:1, was a large Galilean fishing village and busy trading centre, and it appears that word got out that Jesus was in Capernaum because a Roman centurion sent Jewish elders to find Jesus. 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 and most of them appear to have more than the Jews did, Matthew 27:54 / Acts 10:1 / Acts 27:3 / Acts 23:17-18 / Acts 27:43 / Acts 21:32. It appears that many of these Roman centurions showed more faith in God than the Jews did.

THE CENTURION'S LOVE FOR HIS SERVANT

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, 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. When the Jewish leaders meet Jesus, they beg Him to come to heal a servant on behalf of the centurion, Luke 7:3.

THE CENTURION'S LOVE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

'When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue. So Jesus went with them.' Luke 7:4-6

Not only did he love his servant, but he also loved God's people and even built a synagogue for them, Luke 7:4-5. A Gentile building a Jewish synagogue, who would have thought it? The Jews saw the Gentiles as unclean, but here, they are friends with a Gentile. It's certainly possible the centurion used to be Jewish.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'In this appears one of the differences in the two similar miracles. The first centurion was a heathen; this one was evidently some kind of proselyte to Judaism, for it is hard to believe that he would have built the Jews a synagogue unless he was a follower of Judaism. This officer enlisted the elders of the people to convey his request to the Lord. In the case in Matthew, the centurion himself went to Jesus and made the request.'

The synagogue he built was probably the same synagogue where Jesus was confronted by a demon while He was teaching, Mark 1:21-27, and probably the same synagogue where Jesus gave His sermon on the bread of life, John 6:35-59. It appears that the centurion's love for his servant and his love for the Jews motivated Jesus to follow them, Luke 7:6.

THE CENTURION'S UNWORTHINESS

'He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.' Luke 7:6-7

The centurion says that he was the least worthy of people in the eyes of the Jews, Luke 7:6-7. Instead of going on about his own worthiness or achievements, the centurion acknowledges Jesus as worthy and all-powerful. 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

'For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.' Luke 7:8

The centurion not only recognises his own unworthiness and how worthy Jesus is, but he also recognises that Jesus has supreme authority, Luke 7:8. Remember, this centurion had one-hundred soldiers under his command; he knows all about giving commands, he knows all about people obeying his commands.

He was wealthy enough to own at least one slave; he was wealthy enough to build a synagogue, 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 at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.' Luke 7:9-10

When Jesus heard what the centurion said, he was amazed. 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, Luke 7:9.
Notice that Jesus declared His amazement of the centurion's faith to the crowd, Luke 7:9, just as He was amazed at the other centurion's faith, Matthew 8:10, 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.
Notice that Jesus didn't even have to go to the servant's house for the miracle to happen, Luke 7:10. Many so-called 'faith healers' today tell us that they can't heal anyone unless they come to their services; 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 they would do it because the disciples didn't have enough faith, Matthew 17:19-20.

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. 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 RAISES A WIDOW'S SON

'Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her, and he said, "Don't cry." Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.' Luke 7:11-17

Jesus now moves to a town called Nain, closely followed by His disciples and a large crowd, Luke 7:11.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'There are many ancient remains of Nain, proving that the place was once of considerable size. It is located 'on the north-western edge of 'Little Hermon', where the ground falls into the plain of Esdraelon'. Just east of the city are the remains of rock sepulchres, and the extensive ruins disprove the notion that the place was merely 'a humble village of mud-built houses near Nazareth'. Luke was altogether correct in calling the place a 'city'. Today, the village is a rather insignificant place called Nein.'

As he approached the town gate in Nain, he witnessed a funeral procession, where a dead boy was being carried out, Luke 7:12. He was the woman's only son, and she was a widow. With her husband being dead and now with the death of her son probably meant that all her means of support were gone.
It's not surprising that the Lord's heart went out to her and He tells her not to cry, Luke 7:13 / Zechariah 12:10, that's because with Jesus is hope, real hope, 1 Thessalonians 4:13.
Notice that Jesus then goes on and touches the biers the boy was being carried on and the bearers stood still, Luke 7:14. Because He touched the biers, the object the boy's body was being carried on, He would have made Himself unclean by doing so, Leviticus 21:11.
Maimonides, in his commentary, says the following.

'They carry the dead upon their shoulders to the grave, and the bearers of the bier are forbidden to put on their sandals, lest the latchet of any one of them should fail, and should be found to hinder him doing his duty.'

Jesus simply told the young dead boy to 'get up', Luke 7:14 / Mark 5:41 / John 11:43 / Acts 9:40, and the dead boy obeyed the command, Matthew 11:5. The miracle happened immediately as the young man sat up and began to speak, Luke 7:15. We can only imagine the joy that was going through the mind of the young man's mother and Jesus gave him back to her, Luke 7:15 / Isaiah 63:9.
All those who witnessed the miracle were filled with awe and simply praised God, Luke 7:16. There was no doubt in their minds that God was behind the miracle.
Jesus was indeed a prophet, Luke 7:16, but He was the prophet whom God spoke about to Moses, Deuteronomy 18:15. There was no doubt in their minds that God Himself had come to help His people, Luke 7:16.
After this miracle of raising this young man back to life, news about Jesus and what He did spread like wildfire throughout Judea and the surrounding country, Luke 7:17 / Matthew 3:5.

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

‘John’s disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else? When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’” At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses, and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.” Luke 7:18-21

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, Luke 7:18-35. Whilst Jesus was preaching in this area, John the Baptiser, who was still in prison, 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, Luke 7:18-21.
Earlier in John’s ministry, he had no doubts whatsoever that Jesus was the Messiah, John 1:29 / 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.

‘So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are 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.” Luke 7:22-23

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, Luke 7:22.
The miracles which Jesus was performing, such as the bling receiving their sight, the lame are now walking, the leprous 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, Luke 7:22 / 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.’
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, can 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.’

Jesus says, blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me, Luke 7:23.
Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘John was in danger of stumbling, namely, drawing the wrong conclusion and thereby falling into a trap, Gr. skandalisthe, Isaiah 8:13-14. Stumbling is the opposite of believing here.’

‘After John’s messengers left, 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 expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Luke 7:24-27

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, Luke 7:24. He asks a series of questions, concerning the character of John.
Jesus declares that John wasn't an unstable man in his beliefs, like reed being swayed by the wind, Luke 7:24 / Ephesians 4:14. John wasn't a rich man dressed in fine clothes which were fit for a king to wear, Luke 7:25. John wasn't just a prophet, he was more than a prophet, Luke 7:26 / Matthew 14:5 / Matthew 21:26 / Luke 1:76 / Luke 20:6. He was the very prophet that Malachi prophesied was to come, Luke 7:27 / Malachi 3:1.
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 greatest also in his proximity to Christ, which is the final, ultimate test of greatness.'

'I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." Luke 7:28

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the kingdom.

'By the kingdom of heaven in this verse is meant the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel of peace, which fullness was not known till after Christ had been crucified and had risen from the dead. Now the least in this kingdom, the meanest preacher of a crucified, risen, and glorified Saviour, was greater than John, who was not permitted to live to see the plenitude of Gospel grace, in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.'

1. That the kingdom of heaven here does not mean the state of future glory, Matthew 3:2.
2. That it is not in holiness or devotedness to God that the least in this kingdom is greater than John.

3. That it is merely in the difference of the ministry.

In Matthew 11:11-15, Jesus declares that there 'has never' been a greater 'man' than John the Baptist, Job 14:1 / Job 15:14 / Job 25:4. The prophets pointed out a Christ that was coming, John showed that Christ was then among them and the preachers of the Gospel prove that this Christ has suffered, and entered into his glory and that repentance and remission of sins are proclaimed through his blood.
There is a saying similar to this among the Jews, 'even the servant maid that passed through the Red Sea, saw what neither Ezekiel nor any other of the prophets had seen'.'

McGarvey, in his commentary, says the following.

'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 themselves sought to make in its walls.'
The prophets and the law both told the Jews that John would come, 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 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 13:9 / Mark 4:9 / Luke 8:8 / Revelation 2:7.

'(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)' Luke 7:29-30

It's interesting to note that everyone, including tax collectors, believed Jesus' words and acknowledged that God's way was right, Luke 7:29, except for the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, Luke 7:30. These were the very people who should have known better, Matthew 11:16-19, refused to listen to John and Jesus.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'In this passage lies the reason why the publicans and harlots entered into God's kingdom, whereas the Pharisees did not enter it. Another significant reason also appears in the next episode where the sinful woman is presented as 'loving' Jesus more than the proud Pharisee and, as Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments', John 14:15.'

'Jesus went on to say, "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.' For John, the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by all her children." Luke 7:31-35

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, Luke 7:31-32.
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, Luke 7:32.
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, Luke 7:33. 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, Luke 7:34.
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.'

Wisdom would tell people that both John and Jesus were carrying out the will of God and teaching God's will to the people, Luke 7:35 / Matthew 11:19.

JESUS ANOINTED BY A SINFUL WOMAN

'When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.' Luke 7:36

Before we get into the text, we must remember that this account of Jesus being anointed isn't the same account we read of John 12:1-8. John's Gospel records that it was Mary who anointed Jesus' feet in Bethany just before Jesus' death.

We know that from reading the Gospels, Jesus spent a lot of time with the downtrodden and the outcasts of society. However, there are other Gospel stories where Jesus was with the well-heeled or the well-to-do of society. Just because Jesus was interested in the rejection of society, didn't mean he was uninterested in the respect of society.

The Pharisees tried to keep away from anything non-Jewish, but they also separated themselves from the mass of the people, the vulgar crowd, which they called "The people of the land." Yet, Simon invited Jesus to dinner. But why? Why did He invite Jesus to dinner? Luke 7:36.

Well, we don't know why, possibly to find fault, as we know the Pharisees were continually trying to find fault with Jesus. Or maybe he was just curious and wanted to find out more about Him. The thing is, we just don't know, but we know this much: the parable itself shows us that Jesus wasn't invited out of a heart of friendship and love.

Let's look at the woman in the story; she is unnamed and unknown. Some people like to think it was Mary Magdalene, and others think it is Mary, the sister of Lazarus.

Now, we can presume all we like, but the text doesn't tell us who she is except for one fact: she was a sinner, and her sins were many, Luke 7:37 / Luke 7:47. So, what I want to do is share with you three points that we can learn from this parable.

'A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them.' Luke 7:37-38

1. Christ's love for us has no conditions.

Notice that Jesus didn't stop this woman from approaching Him; He didn't stop her from doing what she was about to do. And that's because Jesus was willing to receive affection from a corrupt woman. Make no mistake about it, she is known as a sinner in her town.

She's the one that people would point to in the street and say, 'Hey, there's that woman, who is always involved in some sort of sin.' She would be the one that people would talk about in the local cafe if they had one.

And as we know, the Pharisees would have nothing to do with the common people, never mind having someone who is the worst of them all in their home. And when she walks into a Pharisee's house, can you imagine the look on their faces?

And when she began to 'cry over his feet and got His feet wet from her tears and then dried them with her hair', Luke 7:37-38. Can you imagine what was going through the Pharisee's mind?
Oh, but she doesn't stop there, 'she kissed His feet and then poured perfume all over them,' Luke 7:38. And remember that this whole scene is enacted in public, before the very eyes of those who are so critical of the Law.
When it comes to women, Jesus was always upsetting people by talking to them, wasn't He? He did it with the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4:27. And He's doing it again here in the Pharisee's house. The culture of that time very much suppressed women, and it was unheard of for a Jewish Rabbi to speak to a woman in public.

'When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.' Luke 7:39

Notice that those present said, 'if He were a prophet He would know what kind of woman this was', Luke 7:39.
These are the words of judgement concerning Jesus, not just the woman.
He was right in judging that a true prophet would know the character of the past life of the woman. However, he was wrong in assuming that Jesus didn't know, Luke 7:39 / Luke 15:2.
The Pharisees were fuming; in fact, they started to whisper among themselves. But Jesus did know what kind of woman this was, but even so, He didn't stop her, and He wasn't ashamed or embarrassed by her conduct. And what this woman did took courage; nothing was going to stop her from approaching her Lord, nothing.

What about you? We are all sinners because nobody comes to the cross sinless, Romans 3:23. But what's stopping you from being cross-examined? You're past sin! Your present sin! If I can just stop drinking heavily, then I will come to Christ! If I can just give up that one sin in my life, then I will become a Christian!
Some people don't come to Jesus because of their sin, and so what they tend to do is wait. And what they're doing is trying to cleanse themselves in order to be worthy of Christ's love.

But what you need to realise is that we cannot cleanse ourselves. Because when you do cross-examine yourself, you will see that you are a sinner, through and through, because that's what the cross was about.

It was a symbol of death, Romans 6:23, and there's only one thing that can cleanse us, and that's the blood of Christ, Ephesians 1:7 / 1 Peter 1:18-19. So give up trying to cleanse yourself before you come to Christ because you won't succeed.
The only thing that can cleanse us is the precious blood of Christ, and your sin doesn't have any conditions in it that can't be cleansed. Many people that I know and people that you know won't come to Christ because they have sin in their lives that they just don't want to give up.

They can say it is because of this and that, but the truth of the matter is that they don't want to give up their present lifestyle. They love having sex with lots of people before they are married, they love taking drugs, and they love talking gossip about people.

And let me tell you, there's not a person I know who didn't love doing these things. The difference is that the Christians I know recognised that they couldn't clean themselves from their sins. They recognised they needed a Saviour to do that for them.

God's grace is poured out on all who will receive it. Only God can forgive sins because it is against God that sin is committed. Therefore, in forgiving sins, Jesus was claiming to be God. God's forgiveness through grace motivates a loving response, 2 Corinthians 4:15.

Christians love because God first loved them, 1 John 4:19. The disciples of Jesus are motivated into action because of the loving action by which God moved toward them, 1 Corinthians 15:10 / 1 John 4:19. Love is the primary motivation that moves one toward obedience to the commandments of God, John 14:15 / 1 John 5:1-3.

'Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said. 'Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now, which of them will love him more? 'Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said.' Luke 7:40-43

2. Our love for Christ is in proportion to our consciousness of sin.

Christ now addresses Simon and tells him He has something to tell him, and Simon gladly wants to hear what Jesus has to say, Luke 7:40. There's a radical difference between Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Simon wasn't aware of his sins, but the woman could never forget that she was a sinner.
Simon was a man who thought he didn't need much forgiveness, but the woman knew she needed much forgiveness. And so the difference between the two was basically a consciousness of sin and a need for a Saviour.

And this parable doesn't teach that a person must be forgiven for great sins in order to have a great love for Christ. A person may spend thirty years in prison and appreciate their freedom more than a person who has just spent one night in a police station cell.

If someone is truly seeking forgiveness, they cannot at the same time be loving sin, Romans 6:1-4. It's not the amount of sin but the awareness of sin that makes people appreciate Jesus. That's why Jesus is about to tell Simon a parable. In other words, until we learn what Christ has done for us, we will never be able to see the people around us, who are in so much need of the grace that you and I received when we became Christians.

3. Love can do things that other things cannot do.

The parable teaches us about the greatness of love. Jesus asked Simon, 'Which of the two men would love his creditor more?' Luke 7:41-42. Simon judged correctly, Luke 7:43. Now, why did Jesus ask him this question? It wasn't a trick question; Jesus was simply trying to show Simon how important love was.

'Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not kiss me, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Luke 7:44-48

Jesus asks Simon in Luke 7:44, 'do you see this woman?' I mean, how could he not see her? She's standing there, right in front of him? Jesus was asking Simon to look within himself and see that he needs as much forgiveness as she does.
Simon saw a wretch of a woman, a woman he wouldn't normally go to within five-hundred yards of. This sinful, evil woman who everybody talks about. Simon saw a woman who didn't deserve the grace of God. We all need His grace, don't we? And so, Jesus goes on to appeal to Simon's heart.

Simon had failed to perform the customary duties of a host that showed respect to a guest. The humble actions of the woman went far beyond what even a host would perform toward his guest, Luke 7:44-46.
She did more for Jesus than those who considered themselves righteous in the eyes of God. She manifested her great love, and thus, she received forgiveness, Luke 7:47-48.
Jesus wanted to make public His patience and mercy for sinners, but Simon didn't think that this was a display of patience and mercy. Simon thought it was a spectacle of shame and compromise.

Simon's view of righteousness demanded that you keep yourself away from sinners like her. And to Simon, the whole scene was an amazing disgrace. In fact, Simon concluded that Jesus' offer of grace was disgraceful. He thought it was disgraceful that he would be in the company of that kind of woman.

He annoyed Jesus over how grace should be extended, and Simon isn't alone. Not only does he have a lot of company in the Bible, but he also has a lot more company today. People are constantly confused over how grace should be extended to others.

Remember in Matthew 20, the story of the vineyard workers? Some worked all day, some only worked a few hours, and they were all paid the same amount. But those who worked all day complained that it was unfair.
The owner had been too gracious, and he says to them in Matthew 20:15, 'Can't I do what I want with my own money? Or do you resent my generosity towards others?' The owner tells them he can do what he wants with his own money and asks, are you envious because I'm so generous? Is that the problem?
Some people today are annoyed because Christ is just too generous with the wrong kind of people. That's exactly how the older brother felt in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

He thought it was disgraceful that his dad was giving grace to his sinful brother, who had squandered money on women and booze. The older brother was absolutely fizzing with anger, and he was bitter about the grace his father had given to his younger brother.

It was exactly the same with Jonah. In the Old Testament, Jonah disobeyed God's command to go to Nineveh to get the people to repent, because Jonah was afraid that God would forgive those people. Jonah accused God of being irresponsible to people who didn't deserve it, Jonah 4:1-2.
He's telling God that grace is too good for some people, and he's telling God that he and his friends are down here to make sure that God doesn't get irresponsible with grace. Just like Jonah, Simon believed that grace was just too good for some people. He thought to himself, 'Jesus didn't know what kind of a woman she was.'

Well, guess what? Not only did Jesus know what kind of woman she was, but He also knew what kind of man Simon was. And for every person that disagrees with God about how He dispenses grace, He has one question, 'What right do you have to be angry?' Jonah 4:4.
Those of us who had a lot of sin in our lives before we came to Christ are usually the ones who appreciate our salvation more than others. We understood our great need for forgiveness, and we are forever thankful to God for forgiving us. When we feel truly forgiven, we live truly thankful lives, 2 Corinthians 4:15.
Who are we to say that it's disgraceful the way God dispenses grace when we need it so much ourselves? That's what Jesus was trying to say when he said, 'Simon, do you see this woman?' That's a weird question. How could Simon not see the woman? She was right there!

But there was another way Simon saw the woman. Simon saw a tramp, Simon saw a sinner, Simon saw a woman that wasn't good enough for the love of God. Jesus was saying, 'Simon, you think you see this woman, but you don't see the woman. And the reason you don't see the woman is that you still don't clearly see yourself.'

Remember this: nothing so blinds a person as a vision of their own sufficiency. Jesus said earlier in the parable that, 'neither man had the ability to pay'. It doesn't matter what size of debt we have individually accrued before the Lord; we don't have anything to pay it off. Nothing.

When anyone responds to the grace of God that was revealed on the cross, Titus 2:11, and then obeys the Gospel by immersion in water, God forgives that person's sins, Acts 2:38 / Acts 22:16.

'The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.' Luke 7:49-50

There were evidently other Pharisees who were guests at this particular meal. They thought it presumptuous of Jesus to forgive sins, Luke 7:49 / Luke 5:21 / Matthew 9:6.
The woman's faith in who Jesus was moved her to submit to Jesus. She didn't have a simple belief in Jesus. Her actions were the manifestation of her great faith, Matthew 9:2 / Matthew 9:22.
Jesus said, 'Your faith has saved you,' Luke 7:50. Somewhere in the past, she had heard Jesus teach. She has heard the Good News, that God loves sinners, that God wants people to be with Him, that people matter to God, and she believes it.
She came to find Jesus because when you really believe in God and receive His gift, the response is always praise and worship and love. Always. That's what she was doing; she was pouring out on Jesus.

Look at something else here, the things that she used to seduce men with, she used her hair, she used her lips, and she used her perfume, and now the things she used to sin, she's given to honour God, Luke 7:47. She lavished love on Jesus because of what she had received from Jesus.
Simon's been counting the wrong things, just like you and me. He'd been counting on how many times he'd been going to worship, how much money he'd given to the temple, how many verses of the Bible he knew, and all of these things are good and noble, but Paul says that we need faith which expresses itself through love, Galatians 5:6.
The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Simon didn't love much because he didn't think he needed much. That woman knew she needed a lot, and she received it, and her love was overflowing.

The irony is, if Simon and that woman walked into any one of many churches today, he would be made an Elder, and she wouldn't even be allowed to teach Sunday School. In the eyes of Jesus, which one was the amazing disgrace?

Our misunderstanding of how God sees us determines how we see others. How we think God sees us affects how we see other people. Anyone who sees themselves as a good person paying off a small debt will look down on others.

On the other hand, those who see themselves as debtors in need of grace to be saved will be a friend to sinners, Ephesians 4:32 / 1 John 10-11. It is disgraceful for a Christian not to look at others, as we want God to look at us.
'Be merciful as your Father is merciful,' Luke 6:36. When we see an unsaved person, just remember this, 'there but for the grace of God go I'. Any other view is a disgrace.

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

'After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene), from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable.' Luke 8:1-4

As Jesus travelled from town to town, He preached the good news concerning the kingdom of God as He went, Luke 8:1. He had the twelve with Him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases, Luke 8:2.

Mary called Magdalene, was from Magdala, Jesus had driven seven demons from her, Mark 16:9. We know nothing about Joanna and Susanna, Luke 8:3, except for what is written here but it does appear they were wealthy as they used their own resources to support Jesus and His disciples, Luke 8:3.
They would go on to become great witnesses for Christ, Matthew 28:10 / Mark 16:1. Large crowds gathered from many towns and so, he is about to share a parable with them, Luke 8:4.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.' "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing, they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.' Luke 8:5-15

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,' Luke 8:8 / Matthew 13:18 / 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, Luke 8:5 / Matthew 13:3 / Mark 4:3, and four different kinds of soil.
1. The first type is like hard-packed soil, Luke 8:5 / Matthew 13:4 / 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, Luke 8:6 / Matthew 13:5-6 / 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, Luke 8:7 / Matthew 13:7 / 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, 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, Luke 8:8 / Matthew 13:8 / 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.

It's clear that His disciples and others didn't understand the parable, Luke 8:9 / Matthew 13:10 / 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? Luke 8:4-7 / Matthew 13:3-8 / 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,' Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:11 / Mark 4:11.
And the parable He shared did exactly what the parable was designed to do. They were designed to get a response, Luke 8:9-10 / Matthew 13:13-15 / Mark 4:10-12. It split the people into two groups: those who were interested in truth and those who weren't, Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:13-15 / 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,' Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:13-15 / 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, Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:13-15 / 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', Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:13-15 / 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? Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:13-15 / 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 to whom the Word of God is being preached; 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, Luke 8:5-8 / Matthew 13:3-8 / 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 Luke 8:5 / Matthew 13:4 / Mark 4:4 are a picture of the devil himself, who comes down and takes the seed away, Luke 8:12 / Matthew 13:19 / 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, Luke 8:5 / Matthew 13:4 / 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, Luke 8:6 / Matthew 13:5 / Mark 4:5, but they have no root in themselves, Luke 8:13 / Matthew 13:20 / 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, Luke 8:6 / Matthew 13:5 / Mark 4:5. And so when the sun comes out, it's quickly burnt up because it has no root and lacks moisture, Luke 8:6 / Matthew 13:5 / Mark 4:5.

Jesus is saying there are hearts out there that will receive the truth with great readiness and joy, Luke 8:13 / Matthew 13:20 / 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 baptized 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, Luke 8:7 / Luke 8:14 / Matthew 13:7 / Matthew 13:22 / 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, Luke 8:14 / Matthew 13:22 / 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, Luke 8:14 / Matthew 13:22 / 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, Luke 8:14 / Matthew 13:22 / 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, Luke 8:14 / Matthew 13:22 / 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, Luke 8:8 / Luke 8:15 / Matthew 13:8 / Matthew 13:23 / 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,' Luke 8:15 / Matthew 13:23 / 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?' Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:11 / 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 by 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.

A LAMP ON A STAND

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

Luke isn't the only one who recorded this teaching of Christ; Mark does too, Mark 4:21-25. Jesus had just emphasised the concealment of His teachings using parables, Mark 4:11-12, but this reference to the lamp shows that the concealment will end.
Our Lord has just been speaking the Parable of the Sower and the disciples ask Him for an explanation, which He gives point by point. I'm pretty sure the disciples were feeling pretty good about themselves after hearing Him tell them that He was hiding His truth from the masses while privately helping them to understand it, Luke 8:10 / Matthew 11:16-17 / Mark 4:11.
'Inside information' can be a powerful thing, but it can also be dangerous, 1 Corinthians 8:1, more importantly, knowledge brings with it responsibility, and this is what Jesus is dealing with in these verses.
Jesus is talking to His disciples, and it's an everyday illustration He uses. Night is coming, and the small house is getting dark, and then the master of the house takes and trims the lamp and brings it in. What do we do with the lamp?

Should we put it under a bowl, which would hide the light? Matthew 5:15. Do we hide it under the bed, which would dim the light? Luke 8:16 / Mark 4:21. Or do we put it on the lampstand, which would display the light for all? Luke 8:16 / Matthew 5:15 / Mark 4:21. We could do any of these, but the real purpose is to light the house.
It is very important that we understand what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is the light, John 8:12, and His word of the kingdom is light. And because Jesus is the Word, John 1:1 / John 1:14, I think we can safely say that the lamp here is the Word of God, just like the seed in the previous parable, Psalm 119:105.
Jesus is saying you don't take a lamp and light it and put it under the bed or put it under a bowl. The whole purpose of having the lamp is to put it on the lampstand and let it shine. He's saying that God hasn't revealed to them these incredible truths about Himself in order for them to hide them, Luke 8:17 / Mark 4:22.
Just as natural light illuminates the darkness and enables us to see visually, so the light of Christ shines in the hearts of believers and enables us to see the heavenly reality of God's kingdom. In fact, our mission is to be light-bearers of Christ so that others may see the truth of the Gospel and be freed from the blindness of sin and deception.

The whole purpose of a lamp is simply to produce light, and so obviously it's always placed in a position which helps it accomplish its purpose. In other words, placing a lamp under a bowl or under a bed defeats the purpose of the lamp in the first place. They exist simply to bring light, in this case, light to men.

Jesus taught and warned against hiding a lit lamp on many occasions but notice how many different places He mentions where a lit lamp shouldn't be put in a jar, under a bed, Luke 8:16, under a bowl, Mark 4:21 / Matthew 5:15, in a cellar, Luke 11:33.
It's clear that Jesus is making an application to the Parable of the Sower, Luke 8:1-15 / Matthew 13:1-22 / Mark 4:1-20, and He's saying that the preaching of the Gospel will bring to light the true nature of the hearts of everyone who hears it, Luke 8:18 / Mark 4:23.
Some commentators believe there is a connection between the things which hide the light and the thorns which choke out the word. They believe that the clay jar stands for the worries of this world. The bowl stands for wealth, and the bed and a place, which is the cellar, stand for desires.

According to all those references, the lamp shouldn't be hidden but placed on a stand, but who or what is the stand? The lamp which is lit is the Christian, and their lamp should be displayed on the stand, which is in the

church, Revelation 1:20. But we're not just to be lights in our meeting place; we need to be lights of the world, Matthew 5:14-16.

The purpose of light is to reveal everything which is present in the house. It's the light that both enlightens and brings to light, John 3:17-18 / John 5:34 / John 6:40 / John 12:48. Those who hear will be revealed to have open hearts and those who reject the word of God will be revealed to have hardened hearts.

The secrets of all people shall be made evident on judgement day. People must understand and respond to what they hear; they must be like the good soil that grew and produced a multiplying crop, Luke 8:8 / Luke 8:15 / Matthew 13:8 / Matthew 13:23 / Mark 4:8 / Mark 4:19-20.

Where does the moon get its light from? How does it shine? The moon doesn't give off any light in and of itself; it simply reflects the light from the sun. We know that Jesus is the light of the world, John 8:12, and as Christians, our light is a reflection of His light, Matthew 15:16 / John 1:4-5.

Jesus Christ is the light, and He revealed God and made Him known. He brought the character and the truth of God to all who believed in Him, John 1:9. It's through Jesus Christ that the true knowledge of God is made known. He brought the light and revealed the character and person of God. Jesus Himself is the light of the world, John 8:12. Christians don't produce the light, but like the moon that reflects the light of the sun, we too reflect the light of His indwelling life, Revelation 21:23. Christians are supposed to display the character of God; that's why we were called in the first place, 1 Peter 2:9 / Ephesians 5:8.

While Christians are light, the world is in darkness. This is the term used to describe the lost condition. John tells us that there is no darkness in God, 1 John 1:5, which means that there is no sin, no moral question marks, and no blame in even the slightest degree.

He uses the word 'darkness' as an alternative word for the world and the unregenerate condition, 1 John 2:8-9. Our Lord uses the same word to describe the whole world in rebellion against God, John 3:19. His saving work is the only way to be delivered from this darkness. John 12:46.

What does darkness do? Darkness impairs vision; we can't see clearly. In a spiritual sense, the kind of darkness that the Bible speaks of impairs a person morally. They cannot see, they don't understand the effects of sin or even the root of it in the corruption of the human heart.

Their entire way of thinking is warped by the darkness. Their understanding has been switched off when it comes to grasping moral issues related to their own lives. But Christians are the light, and our purpose is to make God known.

If an unbeliever comes in contact with us, they ought to see in our lives the reflection of the character of God. They ought to hear from our lips truth and that which is good. We are to be proclaiming the truth of His salvation, Luke 8:18 / Mark 4:24-25.

Inherent in the purpose of a lamp is that it produces light. It's therefore placed in a position to accomplish its purpose. Lamps exist for the very purpose of bringing light to men, Matthew 5:15-16.

The function of light is to reveal that which is present in the house. There is nothing hidden that will not be manifested. In reference to the preceding parable of the sower, the preaching of the Gospel will bring to light the true nature of the hearts of everyone who hears it.

It's the light that both enlightens and brings to light, John 3:17-18 / John 5:34 / John 6:40 / John 12:48. Those who hear will be revealed to have open hearts. Those who reject the word of God will be revealed to have hardened hearts. They must understand and respond to what they hear. They must be like the good soil, Mark 4:8, that brought forth abundantly.

Jesus has just finished saying, 'if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear,' Mark 4:23, then He goes on and warns His disciples to take great care with how they listen, Luke 8:18 / Mark 4:24.

We have to remember that the Gospel is so precious, because the Gospel contains the message of eternal life and the message of eternal death, depending on how a person responds to it.

The words, 'it will be measured to you,' Mark 4:24, mean that those who are of a humble nature are receptive to the teachings of Jesus. They hear with the intention of producing. As a result of their willingness to hear, they will grow. To the ones who grow, therefore, more will be given, Luke 8:18 / Mark 4:24-25, in the sense that the righteous will receive far more in eternal glory than they expect, Romans 8:18.
The words, 'whoever does not have,' Luke 8:18 / Mark 4:25, mean those who aren't of the nature of the good soil will not produce. They will thus not receive the bounty of more.
That which unrighteous hearts possess will be lost in the final reckoning of all things. Their good works will be in vain because they aren't in Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:58. The unrighteous will lose whatever they had. These measures are the kind of judgments people give of others, resulting always in their being judged in the same fashion, Matthew 7:1-2 / Luke 6:37-38.
If people listen to the Gospel carelessly, then they will find that they don't have what it takes to remain faithful unto death, Revelation 2:10. If we take the Gospel lightly, even what little we have gained will be taken from us. But if we receive the whole Gospel and obey it, then we will gain more than we can imagine.
And so, Jesus is saying, the more the Christian studies God's Word, the more they will learn as it's revealed to them through His Word, but those Christians who don't study God's Word will not learn anything new, and what they do already know will be taken away from them.

We see this in action when Jesus shares the Parable of the Talents, where the one-talent man buried his talent, instead of putting it to good use, then it was taken from him and given to the man who had ten talents, Matthew 25:19-28.
The Christian needs to shine whenever they find themselves; they need to continually grow through studying God's Word, 2 Peter 3:18. The Bible is a light, but it's useless if it remains closed on the bookshelf.
In order to receive profit, we must open it up and read it. Although studying the Scriptures is essential, many read the Bible in vain because they don't read it correctly.

It's significant that in the middle of a text stressing the importance of hearing the word, Jesus emphasised the need to be careful how we hear, Luke 8:16 / Mark 4:24. The fact that people who read the Bible come to markedly different conclusions about what it means demonstrates that many do not understand it properly.
Some are careless and simply don't put much effort into their study. Others twist the Scriptures intentionally, misinterpreting them to try to confirm the beliefs and practices they have already determined to follow.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE?

Some common-sense principles can help us understand the Scriptures as we study. First, learn to study in context. The Bible has two main divisions. The Old Testament, the first thirty-nine books, and the New Testament, the last twenty-seven books.

The New Testament is the part that directly relates to us today since it contains the teachings of Christ and the apostles. The Old Testament gives the background of God's preparation of the Jewish nation for the coming of Christ.

These Testaments are subdivided into books, sixty-six in all. It is probably best to study book by book. This study was designed to take a person through the gospel of Mark step-by-step. We need to concentrate on what we read in the Bible to be able to understand it.

Since each book is divided into chapters, it is helpful to approach our Bible study by working with a chapter at a time. Read through the chapter two or three times.

On the first reading, work to simply discover what the chapter contains, but on the second reading, we can begin to try to analyse the main points. Keep a notebook handy.

Jot down a note or two about the main ideas or events of the chapter. A notebook is a good place to write down questions that arise as we study. Writing them down so that we won't forget them allows us to progress in our study without getting sidetracked. Later, we can search for the answers to these questions ourselves, or we can ask someone else to help us.

JESUS' MOTHER AND BROTHERS

'Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." Luke 8:19-21

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, 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 have heard a lot about what has been going on, but it's also clear that Jesus' family didn't understand Him. They came to try to talk to Him, Luke 8:19 / Matthew 12:46 / Mark 3:31, perhaps to persuade Him to take a break, Mark 3:31-35.

Jesus is told that his physical family wanted to see Him, Luke 8:20 / Matthew 12:47 / Mark 3:32. He refused to give them a private hearing, explaining that His family no longer had a special claim on His attention, Luke 8:21 / Matthew 12:48-49 / Mark 3:33-34.

Jesus' true family consists of those who hear and do His will, Luke 8:21 / Matthew 12:50 / Mark 3:35 / 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.

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

'One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement, they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." Luke 8:22-25

This event is also recorded by Mark in Mark 4:35-41 and Matthew in Matthew 8:23-27. 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 used a specific boat for Jesus' ministry, Matthew 8:23 / Mark 4:36.
A great storm arose, Luke 8:23 / Matthew 8:24 / 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, Luke 8:23 / Matthew 8:24 / Mark 4:38.
In desperation, they awoke Jesus, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' Luke 8:24 / Matthew 8:25. 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, Luke 8:24 / Matthew 8:26 / 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, Luke 8:24 / Matthew 8:26 / 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?' Luke 8:25 / Matthew 8:27 / 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 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 A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

'They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time, this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.' Luke 8:26-39

Jesus and His disciples went to the eastern shore of Galilee, a place called Gerasenes, Luke 8:26 / Mark 5:1 / Matthew 8:28. 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, Luke 8:27 / Matthew 8:28 / 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?’ Luke 8:28 / Matthew 8:29 / Mark 5:7. He asks Jesus a question, but in doing so, he revealed 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, and 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 of 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 Luke 8:32 / Matthew 8:31 / 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, Luke 8:32 / Matthew 8:30. 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, Luke 8:32 / Matthew 8:31 / 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, Luke 8:33 / Matthew 8:32 / 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 the 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, Luke 8:34-35 / Matthew 8:33 / 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, Luke 8:37 / Matthew 8:34 / Mark 5:17 . But think about what they had just lost; they 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, Luke 8:37 / Matthew 8:34 / 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.

JESUS RAISES A DEAD GIRL AND HEALS A SICK WOMAN

'Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.' Luke 8:40-42

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 hometown. 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, Luke 8:41 / Matthew 9:19 / Mark 5:22. His willingness to fall upon his knees before the Son of God emphasises the heartbreak which was crushing his soul, Luke 8:41 / Matthew 9:18 / 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

'As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." Luke 8:43-48

On the way to Jairus' home, Jesus heals a woman with bleeding issues, Luke 8:43-48 / Matthew 9:20-22 / 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, Luke 8:43-44 / Matthew 9:20 / Mark 5:27. She had been bleeding for twelve years, Luke 8:43 / Matthew 9:20 / 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, Luke 8:44 / Matthew 9:22 / Mark 5:29.
Like all male Jews, the outer garment of Jesus, something like a shawl, 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!' Luke 8:48 / Mark 12:34 / Matthew 9:22 / 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'! Luke 8:48 / Matthew 9:22 / 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.

'While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore." Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.'
Luke 8:49-56

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,' Luke 8:52 / Matthew 9:23, 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', Luke 8:52 / Matthew 9:24 / 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, Luke 8:53 / Matthew 9:24 / 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, Luke 8:54 / Matthew 9:25 / 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, Luke 8:43 / Matthew 9:20 / 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 the storm 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.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

'When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.' Luke 9:1-6

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, Luke 9:1-6 / Matthew 10:1-15.
They were given the power to heal as well as to cast out impure spirits, Luke 9:1 / Matthew 10:1 / Mark 6:7. Jesus gives the twelve the authority to work miracles in the lives of anyone they met, Luke 9:1 / Matthew 10:1 / 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 to go 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.

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', Luke 10:9 / Matthew 10:7 / Matthew 3:2 / Matthew 4:17 / Mark 9:1. The words, 'Come near' means 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.

The mission was urgent, so Jesus forbade them to take extra provisions, Luke 9:3 / Matthew 10:9-10 / Mark 6:8-9. 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, Luke 9:3 / Matthew 10:9-10 / Mark 6:8-9. 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 one.

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 'ktaomi' in his account because he nearly always used 'ktaomi' in a different sense than Matthew and Mark did, Mark 6:8. 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', 'merimnao', in Matthew 6:11, and Matthew 6:25-34, 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 10:9-11. 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? Luke 9:4 / Matthew 10:11 / 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, Luke 10:5-9 / Matthew 10:12-13 / 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? Luke 9:5 / Matthew 10:14 / 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.

'Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, "I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?" And he tried to see him.' Luke 9:7-9

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, Luke 9:7 / 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, Luke 9:7-8 / Matthew 14:2 / Mark 6:14-16 / Matthew 16:13-14.

Herod's conscience may have been bothering him because he had killed John, Luke 9:9 / Matthew 14:3 / Mark 6:17. 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.

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 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 that of 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. 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.

According to Old Testament law, it was unlawful for Herod to be married to Herodias, 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. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. She divorced Philip in order to marry Herod Antipas.

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.

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

'When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him, and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. Late in the afternoon, the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here." He replied, "You give them something to eat." They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.' Luke 9:10-17

The feeding of the five thousand is the fourth sign recorded by John, and it is recorded in all four Gospels: Luke 9:10-17 / Matthew 14:13-15 / 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, Luke 24:1-12 / Matthew 28:1-10 / Mark 16:1-15 / John 20:1-20.

We don't know the time that transpired between the sending of the twelve in Luke 9:1 / Mark 6:12, and their reporting back to Jesus, Luke 9:10 / Mark 6:29. 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, Matthew 14:13 / Mark 6:30. They had been so busy they hadn't even had time for meals, Mark 6:31. 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.

The people saw that Jesus entered a boat to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, Matthew 14:13. When Jesus arrived at the other side, the multitudes had already arrived there on foot, Matthew 14:13.

A large crowd had followed Jesus because of the signs He performed by healing the sick, Luke 9:11 / Matthew 14:14 / Mark 6:33-34 / John 6:1-2. 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. 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, Luke 9:12 / Matthew 14:15 / 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, Luke 9:13 / Mark 6:38 / Matthew 14:17. The loaves, Luke 9:13 / Matthew 14:17 / 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, Luke 9:16 / Matthew 14:19 / 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, Luke 22:19-20 / Matthew 26:26-27 / 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, Luke 9:16 / Matthew 14:19 / 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, He never once blessed the actual bread and wine, Luke 22:19-20 / Matthew 26:26-27 / 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 for providing 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, Luke 9:17 / Matthew 14:20 / 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, John 6:15 / Matthew 14:25. 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.

PETER DECLARES THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

'Once when Jesus was praying in private, and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "God's Messiah. Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone." Luke 9:18-21

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, Luke 9:28-36 / Matthew 17:1-8 / 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, Luke 9:18 / Matthew 16:13 / 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?' Luke 9:18 / Matthew 16:13 / 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, Luke 9:19 / Matthew 16:14 / Mark 8:28. One disciple pointed out that many believed Jesus was John the Baptist reincarnated, Luke 9:19 / Matthew 16:14 / 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, Luke 9:19 / Matthew 16:14 / 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, 'your 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 multitudes' 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,' Luke 9:20 / Matthew 16:15-16 / 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, Luke 9:20 / Matthew 16:15-16 / 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 proclaim, '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 17:17 / Matthew 14:33 / 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, Luke 16:22-23 / Matthew 13:41-43 / 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, Luke 9:21 / Matthew 16:20 / 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

'And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Luke 9:22

Jesus teaching to His disciples up to this point was mainly about His identity but from here on in, Jesus' teaching ministry changes. He now focuses on His upcoming death, burial and resurrection, Luke 9:22 / Luke 18:31-33 / Luke 23:46 / Luke 24:46 / Matthew 16:12 / Mark 8:31 / Matthew 16:21 / 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 17:9 / Matthew 17:12 / Matthew 17:22-23 / 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, Luke 9:22 / Matthew 16:12 / Mark 8:31.
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. He couldn't imagine the Lord being killed, and so, he began to correct Jesus, telling Him that this would never happen! Luke 9:22-25 / Mark 8:31-37.
'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; 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 he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." Luke 9:23-27

After speaking about His own future sufferings, Christ now informs the disciples of their upcoming suffering, Luke 9:23 / Matthew 16:12 / 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, Luke 9:23-26 / Mark 8:34-38 / Matthew 16:24-27 / Luke 9:57-62. Jesus said that you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, Luke 9:23 / Matthew 16:24 / 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, Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:34 / Matthew 16:24. 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, Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:34 / Matthew 16:24. 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 daily. 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, Luke 9:23 / Mark 8:34 / Matthew 16:24. 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, Luke 9:24-25 / Mark 8:35-36 / Matthew 16:25-26 / 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, Mark 8:38 / Matthew 16:27 / 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, Luke 9:27 / Mark 9:1 / Matthew 16:28 / 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.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

'About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.'
Luke 9:28

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, Luke 9:28 / Matthew 26:37 / 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, Luke 9:28 / Matthew 17:1 / 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, and 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, Luke 9:18-20 / Matthew 16:13-20 / 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

'As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)' Luke 9:29-34

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, Luke 9:29 / Matthew 17:2 / 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, Luke 9:30 / Matthew 17:3 / Mark 9:3.

MOSES AND ELIJAH

Elijah and Moses appeared, and the disciples were awestruck, Luke 9:30 / Matthew 17:3 / 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, Luke 9:3 / Matthew 17:3 / 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', Luke 22:31-34 / Matthew 26:31-35 / Mark 14:27-31.

And the Lord finally had to say, 'Peter, will you just hush up, put that sword down, Luke 22:49-51 / John 18:10-15 / Matthew 26:51-55, 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,' Luke 9:33 / Matthew 17:4 / 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,' Luke 9:33 / Matthew 17:4 / 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 speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone.' Luke 9:34-36

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', Luke 9:34-35 / Matthew 17:5 / Mark 9:7. The voice of God is very seldom heard in the New Testament, in fact, only three times, Mark 9:7 / Matthew 3:17 / 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, Luke 9:36 / Matthew 17:8 / 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 assumed to be the Son of God.

THE DESCENT

'The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.' Luke 9:36

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 believing 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.
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

'The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not." "You unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.' Luke 9:37-43

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, Luke 9:37 / Mark 9:14-15. Notice that 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.

The father of the tormented boy asked Jesus to do something, if He could, the man obviously feels hopeless and helpless, Luke 8:38. The demon caused this poor boy to lose his speech, threw him to the ground in convulsions, foaming at the mouth, his teeth gnash together, he screams and becomes rigid, Luke 9:39 / Mark 9:17.
Mark also says that the demon caused epileptic fits that would cause the boy to be cast into fires, Mark 9:20. He begged the disciples to help, but they couldn't, Luke 9:40 / Matthew 17:16 / Mark 9:18.
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. 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? Luke 9:41 / Mark 9:19 / Matthew 17:17.
Jesus asks that the boy be brought to Him, 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, Luke 9:42 / Mark 9:25.
The Jews believed that no one could cast out a mute spirit unless you knew its name. Mark gives an extended account of the events surrounding the exorcism, Mark 9:25-26.
Jesus rebuked the demon, Luke 9:42 / Matthew 17:18 / Mark 9:25 / 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, Luke 9:42 / Matthew 17:18 / Mark 9:26. 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, Mark 9:28. Jesus explained that they weren't relying on God enough, but on their own power, Mark 9:29. 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.'

Perhaps their 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 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, 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.

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

'While everyone was marvelling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.' Luke 9:43-45

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for the tragedy that was nearing. He warned them for the second time, Luke 9:22 / Mark 8:31 / Matthew 17:22, that He would be betrayed into men's hands and be killed, Luke 9:43-44, but encouraged them by announcing that three days later He would rise again, Mark 9:31.
The disciples didn't understand, Luke 9:45 / Mark 9:32, 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? Luke 9:45 / Mark 9:32. 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

'An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest." Luke 9:46-48

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, Luke 9:47-48 / Mark 9:36-37 / Matthew 18:2-5.

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 the disciple of Jesus; we should always be willing to serve and put others before us, not thinking too highly of ourselves, Luke 9:48 / Matthew 18:4 / 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, Luke 9:48 / Matthew 18:5 / 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.

"Master," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you." Luke 9:49-50

John related how he had seen someone expelling demons in Jesus' name and had forbidden him to do so, Luke 9:49-50 / Mark 9:38. Evidently, John thought that no one should have been doing any work for the Lord who wasn't following in their immediate company, Philippians 1:15-18. But Jesus had commissioned many to go out, preach, and expel demons. He was pleased with those who were faithfully serving Him in other places.
There seems to be some arrogance on the part of the disciples here against one they considered unauthorised to work miracles in the name of Jesus. This one may have been one of the disciples who was previously sent out by Jesus to cast out demons, Luke 10:1-17.
We aren't told who this person was; he was simply doing this work in the name of Jesus. Whatever the case, the disciples weren't happy with his work. Because he wasn't in what the disciples considered to be the inner circle of disciples, Luke 9:49, they thought that he should be discouraged from his work. They thus manifested their sectarian attitude, thinking that this disciple should be a member of their party before he could truly represent Jesus.
Notice, Jesus didn't condemn the work of the disciple who was casting out demons in His name. It was the enemy of righteousness about whom the disciples must be concerned, not someone who was giving glory to Jesus by his works.

Jesus wants the disciples not to discourage the good works of those who are not of their social group. It is interesting in this context to note that this exorcist was doing what the disciples couldn't do for lack of faith, Mark 9:18-19 / Mark 9:29. Therefore, the effective work of the unknown disciple may have intimidated the disciples concerning their weak faith.
Jesus' teaching on this matter went beyond good works. His teaching focused on acceptance, not rejection. The disciples of Jesus must be known for their willingness to accept, not eagerness to find occasions for rejection. The disciples must learn how to receive those with whom they may disagree.

Jesus says, for no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever isn't against us is for us, Mark 9:39-40. 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, Mark 9:41 / Matthew 10:39 / 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, Mark 9:41 / Matthew 10:42 / Matthew 25:40 / 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.'

SAMARITAN OPPOSITION

'As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village.' Luke 9:51-56

The time for Christ to go to the cross was fast approaching, Isaiah 50:7 / Mark 16:19 / Acts 1:2, hence, why he resolutely set out for Jerusalem, Luke 9:51. Jesus was in total control of His destiny and He was in total control of when and where He would give up His own life for mankind, Isaiah 53 / Psalm 22 / Revelation 13:8.
Jesus sent messengers ahead to prepare His entry into a village of the Samaritans, but the people didn't welcome him simply because He was heading for Jerusalem, Luke 9:52-53. We don't know why the other apostles aren't mentioned, but James and John clearly wanted permission to destroy the Samaritans with fire, Luke 9:54.
The sons of thunder wanted to act immediately against those who rejected Jesus, Mark 3:17. However, this is not the way to act towards those who show hospitality towards them, 2 Kings 1:10-12. Hence, why does Jesus turn around

and rebuke them, Luke 9:55 / Romans 8:15 / 2 Timothy 1:7. Jesus and His disciples now move on to another village, Luke 9:56.

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

'As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "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." He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luke 9:57-62

Before Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, a teacher of the Jewish law came to Him, Luke 9:57 / Matthew 8:18-19. 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, Luke 9:58 / Matthew 8:20.

By referring to Himself as the Son of Man, He declared that He was the Messiah, Luke 9:58 / Matthew 8:20. 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, Luke 9:59 / Matthew 8:21. 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, Luke 9:60 / Matthew 8:22. 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.

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION

'After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.' Luke 10:1

JESUS SENDS OUT THE SEVENTY-TWO

The sending out of the seventy-two gives us a sense of the urgency in that Jesus wanted the good news told to as many people and in as many places as possible before He went to the cross.

This is a completely different mission from the one the apostles were given by Jesus in Matthew 10. The sending out of the seventy-two and all the teaching surrounding them being sent out is only found in Luke's Gospel.
Some early manuscripts and the KJV state that the Lord appointed 'seventy', whilst others state 'seventy-two', Luke 10:1, but this isn't a problem, as it doesn't affect the event or the teaching as a whole.
We know that Jesus didn't just prepare the twelve for preaching the Gospel; He also prepared other people for the task of preaching and here in Luke's account, he tells us that these disciples were prepared not only to preach but also to heal the sick, Luke 10:9.

WHY SEVENTY OR SEVENTY-TWO?

Some scholars believe that the number was 'seventy' because of the symbolism involved with that number. For example, they suggest that the Jews believed that the Gentiles were made up of seventy nations and at the feast of Tabernacles, seventy young bulls were offered on behalf of the Gentile nations, to make atonement for them.

WHY TWO BY TWO?

Mainly for protection, we have to remember that Palestine could be a dangerous place, and so, you are less likely to get attacked if there are two of you. There's also the encouragement side of being with someone; anyone involved in mission work knows how lonely it can be at times, and so encouragement is always needed for each other.

Another reason could be to increase their credibility; it's one thing when someone alone proclaims one thing, but the proclamation is more credible if there are two people proclaiming the same thing.

Remember that Jesus' earthly ministry is fast coming to an end, hence why He wanted the Gospel proclaimed in every town and every place before He went to the cross.

It's also important to note that Jesus followed up their mission trip by personally going back to these places, which were mainly Gentile towns. Getting the word out that He was the Messiah was fundamental; in this way, everyone who witnessed His crucifixion would come to realise what happened at the cross, Acts 2:41.

'He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' Luke 10:2

The disciples are told to pray for more workers because the harvest is plentiful, Luke 10:2. In other words, there are a lot of people to reach with the Gospel, and they need as much help as possible. I find it interesting that most churches employ a single evangelist and expect him to go out alone into the harvest field.
The church as a whole will often pray about reaching the lost, but doesn't do much in terms of evangelism to actually do something to reach the lost, 1 Corinthians 3:9 / 2 Thessalonians 3:1. We must remember that the harvest is still plentiful even today, but it will take a congregational effort to really reach out to them.

'Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. 'When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.' Luke 10:3-6

Their mission was going to be a dangerous one and Jesus was well aware that many would try to destroy the disciples, Luke 10:3. The reason for taking so little was because of the urgency to get the message out, they didn't need any extra baggage slowing them down, Luke 10:4. Again, this is about putting their trust in God, to take care of their needs, Matthew 6:25-34.
Notice again the sense of urgency in getting the Gospel proclaimed. Jesus told them not to greet anyone on the road, Luke 10:4. In other words, they haven't got the time to chit chat to anyone; getting the message out needs to be a priority. Jesus is basically saying, 'just go as you are.'
'Peace', Luke 10:5-6, was the greeting that let the disciples know if they would be welcomed into a house and if they were welcomed, then God's blessing would be upon those who live there.
This is an area where some Christians struggle; fellowship is so important for every Christian, especially when it comes to preaching the Gospel, 3 John 1-8.
Notice they were to greet the owner of that household, not the house itself, Luke 10:5-6 / Matthew 10:12-13 / Mark 6:10. If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you, Luke 10:6.

'Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. 'When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you.' Luke 10:7-8

Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages, Luke 10:7. Do not move around from house to house, Luke 10:8. In today's society, teenagers, especially, have become very fussy about what they eat; maybe that's because of the number of different choices we have these days.
In Bible times, when someone offered you something to eat, this was seen as an honour, but it would also be highly disrespectful to complain about the food being offered to you, Luke 10:8.

In the church where there is an evangelist, the church should support him in any way they can, and the evangelist should readily receive that support, Matthew 10:10 / 1 Corinthians 9:4-8 / 1 Timothy 5:18.
Now remember that these disciples were Jews who were about to go into Gentile areas, the Gentiles may offer them foods that were forbidden in the Old Testament law.

What were they to do in those circumstances? In order not to cause any unnecessary trouble, they were to become all things to all men, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.
They weren't to move from one house to another as if they were some kind of convenience hotel where they could pick and choose the best accommodation; they were simply to accept what hospitality came their way. After all these food restrictions were soon to come to an end when Christ died on the cross, Colossians 2:14.

'Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' Luke 10:9

Here we see the purpose of healing and driving out demons, Luke 10:9 / Luke 10:17, the purpose to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom of God. Just as a side note, they weren't commanded to raise the dead as the twelve were in Matthew 10:8.
The kingdom of God had come near in the sense that Jesus, the King, was on earth ministering among people. A little later, He would ascend to the throne of David in heaven to receive all authority, Matthew 28:18 and His kingdom would be established, Acts 2.

'But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.' Luke 10:10-11

What does shaking the dust from your feet mean? Luke 10:10 / 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, Luke 10:10-11 / Nehemiah 5:13 / Acts 13:49-51.
It was customary for the Jews to wipe off the dust of another land, a land which they considered to be polluted, Amos 7:17 / Ezekiel 45:1. It was a symbol of rejection of all those who lived in that land.
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. Here, Jesus tells His disciples to do so as a symbol that the disciples themselves wouldn't be responsible for those lands that would reject the Christ, Acts 13:51.
The disciples were to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God was near and would soon be established, Luke 10:11. We must remember that Christians are only responsible for sharing the Gospel, Matthew 28:19-20, but Christians aren't responsible for what the hearers do with the message.

'I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.' Luke 10:12

When we read through the Gospels, we see that time and time again Israel as a nation had opportunities to repent whilst Christ was on Earth, and it's quite clear that their judgment would be greater because they rejected Christ.

The 'that day', Luke 10:12, statement is interesting, as some believe Jesus is referring to A.D. 70 when the destruction of the temple, Jerusalem and Israel as a nation would come.
However, since Jesus is speaking about the Gentile cities, the 'that day' would make more sense in terms to mean judgment day, Hebrews 9:27 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

SODOM

When you mention the name Sodom to almost anyone, even today, most people know that this was a city that was famous for its sinful behaviour, and some people are aware that it was destroyed by fire from heaven, Genesis 19:1-26.

But why would judgment day be more bearable for Sodom than these other towns? Luke 10:12. Simply because these towns rejected the Christ, the good news, they had the opportunity to see the Christ, hear the Christ, hear the good news about His kingdom.

This is something that Sodom never had the opportunity of hearing and witnessing. In other words, these towns have no excuse for not accepting Christ and believing His message.

'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, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you.' Luke 10:13-14

CHORAZIN AND BETHSAIDA

What I find interesting about these two cities is that there are no 'miracles', that is, more than one miracle recorded anywhere in the New Testament that were done in these two cities, Luke 10:13.

Yes, we have the healing of the blind man who lived in Bethsaida recorded in Mark 8:22, but that's it, Chorazin is only mentioned in one other place, Matthew 11:21, but no miracle is recorded happening there. Please note that just because they aren't recorded, that doesn't mean that they didn't happen, John 20:30-31 / John 21:25.

TYRE AND SIDON

Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities, Luke 10:13 / Genesis 10:15 / Genesis 49:13 / Isaiah 23 / Ezekiel 26-28 / Ezekiel 29:18. These cities, just like Sodom, were notorious for their sinful behaviour.

Sackcloth, Luke 10:13, was a very coarse material that was often made of goats' hair and was black in colour, Revelation 6:12, and the Jews wore it for different purposes, Genesis 37:34 / 2 Samuel 3:31 / Nehemiah 9:1.

Sitting in ashes, Luke 10:13, was also seen as a sign of repentance, Job 2:8 / Jonah 3:6.

Jesus' point is simply this: the cities of Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had the opportunity the cities of Israel had during the personal ministry of Jesus.

They would have repented because they would have recognised they were not right with God. Chorazin and Bethsaida believed they were already right with God and didn't see the need to repent.

But why would judgment day be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon than these other towns? Luke 10:14. Chorazin and Bethsaida heard the good news about Jesus' kingdom, like Sodom, this is something that Tyre and Sidon never had the opportunity of hearing and witnessing. In other words, these towns have no excuse for not accepting Christ and believing His message.

'And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hell. 'Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.' Luke 10:15-16

CAPERNAUM

Capernaum was a popular and busy city; people travelled back and forth from Palestine to the East, and it had a strong Roman military presence. You may remember that it was in Capernaum that Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead, Luke 8:40-56 / Matthew 9:18-26 / Mark 5:21-43.
It was here that the centurion's son and servant were healed, Luke 7:1-10 / Matthew 8:5-13. It was in this city that the nobleman's son was healed of a fever, John 4:46-54.
Capernaum must have thought that they were indestructible, which is a glorious future, but Jesus says the opposite. He says it will be utterly destroyed because of its religious arrogance in rejecting Christ and His message. They think they will be exalted to the heavens, but Jesus says they will go down to Hell, Luke 10:15, which is the place of eternal punishment hell, Luke 16:19-31.
I believe it's important to remember that rejection isn't personal; people usually reject the message we're proclaiming, not you as an individual. Jesus takes this one step further by reminding the disciples that if people reject them, they are actually rejecting Jesus Himself, likewise, if people accept them, they accept Jesus, Luke 10:16.
Remember when Saul was persecuting Christians, Jesus tells him he was actually persecuting Jesus Himself, Acts 22:8. Once again, we're reminding you that we're responsible for delivering the message but not responsible for how it's received.

THE SEVENTY-TWO RETURN

'The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.' Luke 10:17-18

The seven-two disciples Jesus sent out earlier, Luke 10:1-12, seem to be really happy with their efforts, especially since the demons obeyed them because of the authority of Jesus, Luke 10:17.
It's important to remember that even the demons recognised Jesus' authority and obeyed Him. Jesus' reply is an interesting one, to say the least, but it's important to remember that He is speaking metaphorically.

He isn't focusing so much on Satan himself, but on the fall of his power, Luke 10:18. In other words, He's speaking about how Satan was slowly but surely being disarmed by Jesus.
Satan's power to influence people through sin would fall when Christ died on the cross, 1 Corinthians 15:3, and his power through physical death would fall through the resurrection of Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 / Hebrews 2:14.
One commentator suggests that in Jesus' reply, we see Jesus reminiscing and prophesying. Satan had suffered some major defeats, notably in connection with Christ's temptation, but Jesus was also looking forward to Satan's final fall, his complete defeat at Christ's hands.

'I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' Luke 10:19-20

The authority Jesus gives these disciples speaks about the many victories they will have over the works of Satan, Luke 10:19 / 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 / Ephesians 6:10-18.
By telling them that 'nothing will harm them', Luke 10:19, Jesus is giving them the much-needed confidence they will need to continue to preach the Gospel, especially after Jesus has died and gone back to the Father. Mark 16:15-20 / Matthew 28:19-20.

But Jesus also reminds them that this miraculous power they were given by Him wasn't as important as their salvation, which was given by Him, hence why their names are written in heaven, Luke 10:20 / Philippians 4:3 / Hebrews 12:23 / Revelation 13:8 / Revelation 20:12. They must never forget that the victories they have over Satan are actually Jesus' victories.

THE HIDDEN THINGS

'At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. 'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Luke 10:21-22

The joy in Jesus' words can't be missed here, as He rejoices through the Holy Spirit, meaning that they are in agreement, Luke 10:21. His rejoicing is simply an outpouring of thanks to the Father.
It seems that God was revealing the mystery, Luke 10:21, that is, the Gospel that had been hidden from mankind since the beginning of the world, Ephesians 3:8-13 / 1 Peter 1:10-12.
Jesus says that even though some people call themselves wise, the Gospel would be hidden from them, not because God hasn't revealed it, but because of their own arrogant attitude towards Jesus and His message, Romans 9:11-17 / 1 Corinthians 1:22-27.
Surely if a little child can understand the message, the wise and learned should also be able to, Luke 10:21 / Mark 10:15-16. As humans, we're reminded that we're not omniscient, all-knowing, and the truth is we didn't really know the nature of the relationship between the Father and Son, Luke 10:22 / John 1:18 / John 6:44-46.
We didn't really know all that God is, but this is why Christ came in the flesh, to reveal all these things to us, to reveal the Father to us, John 1:1-5 /John 17:6 / John 17:25-26.

'Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.' Luke 10:23-24

IMAGINE!

Imagine being one of those disciples, imagine what it would have been like to be in the presence of Jesus, Luke 10:23. Imagine what it would have been like to heal the sick and have demons obey your word! Imagine what it would be like to live your life by fact and not by faith! What a blessing that would have been.
Today, however, we believe what they saw and wrote, but we're more blessed than they are. Why? Simply because of what Jesus told Thomas in John 20:29, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' Oh, how blessed they were! Luke 10:23.
Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Solomon, David, Hezekiah, all those Old Testament prophets and kings didn't receive the glorious revelations that these guys received through Christ, Luke 10:24. By faith, they looked forward to the mystery, the Gospel, being revealed, but they didn't understand it, 1 Peter 1:10-12.

There is a great need for workers today, saints who are zealous to get out there and share the good news with people. Yes, some will receive the message, and we will rejoice with them, and yes, some will reject the message, but that's not the Christian's problem.

We simply can't be content with just having our own names written in the Lamb's book of life; we must take great efforts to reach the lost, so that their names will be written there too.

We possess the Gospel, something which those Old Testament heroes didn't have; the time to take that message out is now because Judgment Day is ever getting closer. The time for excuses for not sharing that message is over!

'On one occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this, and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Luke 10:25-29

A scribe stood up to test Jesus and asked about what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Luke 10:25. However, Jesus asks him what was written in the Law and how he interpreted it, Luke 10:26.
We can imagine that man standing back and waiting for the answer from Jesus. And Jesus deliberately quotes from the Old Testament a passage of Scripture that every faithful Jew would recite twice every day. It's known as 'The Schema', from Deuteronomy 6:5 / Leviticus 19:18.

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 heart? 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 heart rejoices. 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 heart does much more than we might have thought. In addition to sensing the wide range of human emotions, our heart thinks, 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 the word 'courage' in Philippians 4:11-13. The root word for courage is 'cor', which is Latin for 'heart'. Living with courage in our heart is a good way to remind ourselves to love God. Living with courage in our heart 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: Nought 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 mind. 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 heart loves many other things besides God.

So what do we do to make sure we continue to love God with all of our heart? 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 heart 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, 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 heart, 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, which 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 says who can say, 'My soul thirsts for God, for the living God', Psalm 42:2. Its only man who is encouraged to 'Seek after Him, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him,' Acts 17:27.
Its 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 our 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 soul, 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 soul 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 soul take us much farther than our heart 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 heart to the Lord, when we turn to soul 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 might 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 anymore, 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 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 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 will all of our strength is going 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 mind has 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 mind 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.

Jesus tells the scribe that he was correct in quoting the schema and then tells him that if he does this, he will live, Luke 10:28 / Matthew 7:21-27 / Matthew 19:17 / Luke 18:20 / 1 John 4:19.

The scribe, who wanted to justify himself, then asks Jesus another question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Luke 10:29. And so the Master teacher shares a parable concerning a Samaritan.

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:30-37

Remember, the man asked Jesus the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Luke 10:29, and so, Jesus is now going to go on to tell him the parable we call 'The Good Samaritan'. And I say we call it 'the good Samaritan' because never once does Jesus call the Samaritan good.

Notice that a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,' Luke 10:30. It's important to note that they were leaving Jerusalem to go to Jericho because this will remove any false ideas later concerning why the priest and Levite didn't help the man. It's been well documented that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was an infamously dangerous road.

This poor man was attacked by robbers, and they stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead, Luke 10:30. In other words, they were ruthless in their attack and left the man in a hopeless, life-or-death situation unless someone helped him.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, we would think he would have stopped to help but he didn't, he passed by on the other side, Luke 10:31. The priests served in the temple at Jerusalem twice a year for a week at a time, 1 Chronicles 24:1-19 / Luke 1:5 / Luke 1:8-9.

Next, we read of a Levite, a descendant of the tribe of Levi who served as the assistants and helpers for the priests in the various activities within the temple, 1 Chronicles 23:24-32.

When he came to the place and saw him, we would think that he would stop and help the man, but he didn't; he, too, like the priest before, passed by on the other side, Luke 10:32.

As I mentioned at the start there is a false idea that the priest couldn't help the man because he was on his way to serve in the temple and if he touched the man he would become unclean, Numbers 19:11.

However, as I mentioned at the start, he's not going to temple to serve, he's leaving Jerusalem to go to Jericho, Luke 10:30. He's going down the same road in the same direction, Luke 10:31-32.

Next a Samaritan, who was a descendants of the mixed race of people who inhabited the northern region of Israel following Assyrian captivity, 2 Kings 17:25-34, came where the man was and when he saw him, he took pity on him, Luke 10:33.

But he didn't stop there, he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, Luke 10:34. Oil and wine were used in Bible times for soothing and as a form of antiseptic. But he didn't stop there; he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him, Luke 10:34.

Taking care of him probably meant taking care of all his provisions. The Samaritan continued to look after the man, and the next day he took out two denarii, which was around two days' work of pay.

He gave the money to the innkeeper and tells him to look after him, and when he returns, he will reimburse him for any extra expense the inn keeper may have, Luke 10:35.
It's interesting to note that the inn keeper appears to be happy with his arrangement, suggesting that he may know the Samaritan and he could be trusted to do what he says he will do.

Jackson, in his commentary, says the following.

'A day's lodging would cost about one twelfth of a denarius; hence, he left expenses for about three weeks' care.'

It's now that Jesus asks the expert in law this question, 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' Luke 10:36. And the expert in law whom Jesus is addressing replies, the one who had mercy on him,' Luke 10:37.
Every parable had a point or a purpose; they were told to get the listeners to think for themselves. They were always designed to get a response, a change in attitude or a change in action in those who heard them.

And so, Jesus gets to the point, and He tells the man, 'Go and do likewise, Luke 10:37. Jesus is saying to that man, I know you understand how to get eternal life, Luke 10:35, because you answered the question correctly, Luke 10:27-28. I know you understand what I've just said to you through this parable, but here comes the hard part: go and do it, Luke 10:37.
Love all people, have mercy on all people, not just the Priests, not just the Levites, but all people. Love even those Samaritan people that you can't stand to be around.

And notice the Law expert never even mentioned the word 'Samaritan'. He answers correctly to Jesus' question, but he says, 'the one who had mercy on him,' Luke 10:37.
We don't understand just how much the Jews hated the Samaritans. This guy hated them so much he wouldn't even use the word 'Samaritan', never mind call him a neighbour, Luke 10:29.
Remember in John 4, when Jesus is speaking to the woman at the well? After the disciples went away to buy some food, it says 'just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?' John 4:27.
Now, why were the disciples surprised? Well, not just because she was a woman but also because she was a Samaritan woman. Even she was surprised when Jesus, a Jew, was willing to speak to her, a Samaritan.

That's why she said to Jesus 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" For Jews do not associate with Samaritans,' John 4:9. The Jews hated the Samaritans. This man's answer to Jesus must have hurt his Jewish pride so much that he couldn't even say the word 'Samaritan'.
To understand a parable, we first need to understand the original text. In other words, what did the parable mean for those who first heard it? Some people have become experts at making every little detail mean something in a parable.

For example, people will say that the priest and the Levite couldn't help the man because of religious reasons. They will try to find out who the robbers were and who they stood for.

People fail to see the point, and we get so tangled up in the text sometimes, trying to get a point from every little detail, we end up missing the main point. We forget to ask the first question: what did it mean to those who were listening?

When Jesus was telling this man this parable, the man wouldn't listen and then think to himself, who's the man who was robbed? Who were the robbers? He knew exactly what Jesus was talking about.

The lawman forgot the Law because of traditions. The lawman was just like the Priests and the Levites; they paid lip service to the Law. They forgot what God said to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will

have compassion on whom I will have compassion,' Exodus 33:19. Mercy to a Samaritan was the last thing in that Jewish man's mind.
But by the time Jesus had finished, the lawman knew that Jesus was saying to him, 'I don't want lip service, I don't want sacrifice.' So what did Jesus really want him to understand?

The parable was about the Jews getting rid of their racist attitude towards the Samaritans, that is, the Gentiles, and instead of treating them as outcasts, getting them to treat everyone justly and with mercy, Matthew 23:23. It's about loving your neighbour as you love the Lord and yourself.
The Samaritan did exactly what the priest and the Levite should have done. The Samaritan did what the lawman now needs to go and do. In other words, he needs to practice what he preaches. But my point is this: not all parables can apply to us today, but we can still learn many lessons from them.

So now that we understand what the parable meant to that lawman, we can go on and see what we can learn from it ourselves. The lawman only asked Jesus the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' for this reason, he wanted to justify himself, Luke 10:29.
In other words, he wanted to make himself out to be a blameless and a Law-abiding Jew. And so what Jesus did in the way of this parable was to get him to look at himself. So that the lawman could see his own sinfulness and see just how far from the Law he really was.

When it comes to justifying ourselves of sin, we have all become experts. And that's because we all have different standards about the Law or God's Word. In other words, we can all give a good reason for not doing something we shouldn't be doing.

Or in the case of the lawman, something he should have done. Sin isn't just about the things that you shouldn't do, like gossiping and drunkenness. But sin is also not doing the things that you should be doing, James 2:2-5.
There may be poor people in the world's eyes, but they may be richer in faith than we are. Poor people have as much right into the kingdom of heaven as you and I do. The lawman had to learn to treat all people the same, whether they were a Jew, a Samaritan, or a Gentile.

Because the Gospel is not just about believing, it's about doing, and if you don't do for one, which you would do for another, then that is sin in God's eyes. It's all very well preaching and talking about the needy; it's all very well having our after-worship chats about those in need. But if we just talk the talk and don't walk the walk, we're sinning, James 2:15-17.
That's what the priest and the Levite did in the story, Luke 10:30. They were going somewhere, but so was the Samaritan. The only difference was that the Samaritan stopped to help.
We can stop and help people, we can stop and share the gospel with people because wherever we are going to can wait. We may not be able to stay long with them, but you can arrange to catch up with them again later. That's what the Samaritan did, Luke 10:35.
He didn't just help the man and then leave him to it; he went back to make sure he was OK. Let's not make excuses for not helping people and try to justify ourselves. Let's practice what we preach because we love our Lord and show our neighbours how much we love them.

The real question the lawman should have asked Jesus was, 'Master, how do I love my neighbour?' But he didn't ask that, he asked Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' Luke 10:29.
And we should be asking the question that the lawman should have asked. Jesus, how do we love our neighbours? We love our neighbours by helping our neighbours with the love the Lord has shown us, Galatians 5:6.

AT THE HOME OF MARTHA AND MARY

‘As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:38-42

Jesus and His disciples came to a village where a woman named Martha lived, Luke 10:38. There’s no doubt this is Bethany, Mary was her sister, and Lazarus was her brother, John 11:1 / John 12:2-3. Notice that Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, Luke 10:39. This was the position of a student about to be taught by the teacher, Acts 22:3.

While Mary is getting taught by Jesus, her sister Martha is being distracted by all the preparations which had to be made, Luke 10:40. There was nothing wrong with what she was doing, but now wasn’t the time to be doing it. Her priorities weren’t right because the teacher was in their midst, and it was time to listen to Him.

Martha then asks Jesus if He cared that she was left to do the work and asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her, Luke 10:40. Jesus’ response is beautiful; we can almost see Him smiling as He answers Martha, Luke 10:41-42. There was only one thing needed at this moment and time, and that was to sit down and listen to what Jesus had to say.

Mary appears to sense that Jesus’ days are coming to an end, and because she chose to sit down and listen, rather than serve, Jesus says that she has chosen better, Luke 10:42. Mary chose that spiritual portion that endures forever, and which shall not be taken away from her, Luke 10:42.

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION

‘One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: “‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’” Luke 11:1-4

JESUS’ TEACHING ON PRAYER

There was obviously something about Jesus’ prayer life which caught His disciples’ attention. The Lord then proceeds to utter a prayer very similar to the one Matthew records, Matthew 6:9-14.

As Jesus finished praying in a certain place, one Hs disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, just as John had taught his disciples, Luke 11:1. The fact that Jesus responds to His disciples’ request 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. 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. 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, Luke 11:2 / 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', Luke 11:2 / 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, Luke 11:2 / 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.
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 Luke 11:3 / 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.

Our sins are like spiritual debts to God, Luke 11:4 / 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, Luke 11:4 / 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', Luke 11:4 / 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 anymore! 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, wrongly. 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.

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. 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.

THE PARABLE OF THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

‘Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.’ Luke 11:5-8

Jesus now moves on to share a parable with His disciples concerning prayer, which is commonly called, ‘The Parable of the Friend at Midnight’. We must remember that hospitality was very important in ancient Near Eastern society.

The man has a friend who arrived on a journey, and the man has no food to give him, Luke 11:5-6. It is the middle of the night, and so, the friend says he won’t get up and give him anything because the door is shut and the children are in bed with them, Luke 11:7.
The man’s house is possibly a one-room house; hence, the whole family would sleep together in one bed or it’s possible that it simply means that he and his wife were in one bed and the children were in another.

Whatever it means, Jesus says, if the man gets up to open the door, then the whole family will be disturbed, and therefore, they too would have to get up, Luke 11:7.
The point of the parable is simply this: the friend will get up, not because they’re friends, but because of this man’s ‘shameless audacity’, Luke 11:8. It’s not the man’s persistence of the request, it’s the timing of the request along with the persistence.
This man had boldness and gall to make this request at such an hour, Luke 11:5. The friend in the house gives him the bread because he is such an irritant, Luke 11:8.
Jesus’ point is that disciples should pray boldly with shameless nerve. Prayer is the audaciously bold request for God to do what He has promised. This shameless boldness isn’t for selfish requests, James 4:3; no, we’re revealing our complete dependence on God. We are telling God what is happening in our lives and the things that we need spiritually or physically, 1 John 5:14.
Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The connection with what goes before is suitable and natural. Having given the disciples a form of intercessory prayer, Jesus encourages them to persevere in its use, and also in the use of other prayers formed on its model, by a homely parable, the lesson of which is, if a churlish man can be forced by importunity to give against his will, how much more can persevering prayer bring down from the bountiful Father in heaven all good things.’

APPLICATION

1. A friend in need.

In the parable, we read of a man who was in need. The Bible is filled with examples of people in need, and James tells us that ‘Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress,’ James 1:27.
God has always cared for the most vulnerable in society, and the chances are there are people in need all around us, begging on our streets or even in our churches. Why not practice this true religion and ask God to help you find someone in need today and help them out, Romans 12:13 / Galatians 6:10.
2. Find out exactly what people’s needs are.

In the parable, the man asked for bread because bread is what he needed. There would be no point in asking for water if he didn't need water, and so it is the same with Christians when we pray to our Father. We need to learn to be specific in our prayers, Matthew 6:11 / Matthew 7:9-11.

It's often said that giving someone physical food often opens up the door to offer them spiritual food, Luke 7:36-40. Why not go out of your way today and find someone who really needs some food and then invite them to your home for dinner and show them real hospitality, Hebrews 13:2. Who knows, it may be an opportunity to share the Word of God with them.

3. There's never an inconvenience to help others.

In the parable, the friend inside the house demonstrated his reluctance to help others because it was an inconvenient time. There are times when God may call upon us to help people when it doesn't fit in with our timetable.

I understand there are times when we're at work, that's not always possible to stop what we're doing to help someone. But there are other times when we're busy doing other things or out enjoying our hobbies, or we just got to bed after a busy day, but helping others must never be put on hold because it's an inconvenient time.

There are times when someone in need usually needs help straight away. Will you get out of your bed to help someone in need? Why not pray to God and ask Him to help you remember that it's more blessed to give than receive, Acts 20:35.

4. Be bold in your prayers.

The man inside the house opened the door and gave the man as much bread as he needed because of his friend's shameless audacity. God longs to hear from His children, and He longs to give us what we really need, and the real application from the parable is seen in Jesus' next words concerning prayer, Luke 11:9-13.

God has given us the offer to make bold, audacious requests to our Lord, Hebrews 4:16. What have you been afraid to ask God to do in your life? When was the last time you went boldly to God in prayer, even at midnight? Psalm 119:62.

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

"So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11:9-13

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, Luke 11:9 / Matthew 7:7.

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, Luke 11:10 / Matthew 7:8 / 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, Luke 11:9-10 / Matthew 7:7-8. 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, Luke 11:11-12 / Matthew 7:9-10, nor would God do such a thing in the spiritual realm, Luke 11:13 / Matthew 7:11.
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!' Luke 11:13 / Matthew 7:11.
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.

JESUS AND BEELZEBUB

'Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. Now, if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.' Luke 11:14-23

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, Luke 11:14 / Matthew 9:33. The crowd were amazed because they had never seen anything like this before, Luke 11:14 / Matthew 9:33, but others, who couldn't deny what had just happened, accredited the miracle to 'Beelzebul, the prince of demons', Luke 11:15 / Matthew 9:34.

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 9:34 / Matthew 12:24 / 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.

Others 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.

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 is 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 6:24 / Matthew 12:30 / Matthew 16:24-26 / Mark 9:40, they had to decide one or the other.

'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 swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first." Luke 11:24-26

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', Luke 11:24 / Matthew 12:43, 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, Luke 11:24-25 / Matthew 12:44.
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, Luke 11:26 / Matthew 12:45, 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.'

'As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Luke 11:27-28

As Jesus was speaking an unknown woman declares that Jesus' mother Mary was blessed because she gave birth to Him, Luke 11:27 / Luke 1:28 / Luke 1:48. However, Jesus declares it is those who hear and obey God's Word are the

one who are blessed, Luke 11:28 / Psalm 1:1-2 / Psalm 112:1 / Psalm 119:1-2 / Isaiah 48:17-18 / Matthew 7:21 / James 1:25.

THE SIGN OF JONAH

'As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.' Luke 11:29-32

Jesus says to the increasing crowds, they were a wicked and adulterous generation, Luke 11:29.
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, Luke 11:29 / John 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.
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, Luke 11:31 / 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, Luke 11:31 / Matthew 12:42.
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.'
Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, Luke 11:32 / 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.

THE LAMP OF THE BODY

'No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you." Luke 11:33-36

Jesus' disciples are '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, Luke 11:33 / Matthew 5:15. 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, Luke 11:33 / Matthew 5:15, 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, Luke 11:33 / Matthew 5:16.

What does Jesus mean when He speaks of good eyes, bad eyes, darkness, and light? Luke 11:34 / Matthew 6:22-23. 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, Luke 11:34 / Matthew 6:22. 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', Luke 11:34 / Matthew 6:23.

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.'

WOES ON THE PHARISEES

'When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now, as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.' Luke 11:37-41

Jesus received and accepted an invitation to eat in a Pharisee's house, Luke 11:37; however, the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed Jesus didn't wash before the meal, Luke 11:38. This was the tradition of the Jews at the time.

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 buy 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, Luke 11:42 / Matthew 23:23.
The wearing of conspicuous phylacteries and tassels, Matthew 23:5.
The careful observance of ritual purity, Mark 7:1-23.
Frequent fasting, Matthew 9:14.
Distinctions in oaths, Matthew 23:16-22.

HAND WASHING

So what was this tradition, and what was the spirit behind it? They had a hand washing 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 who was unclean. It was regarding these earthenware items 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 Jesus 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, or 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 hand washing purposes rather than for drinking, and there have been reports of some of these Jews almost dying of thirst.

It was ritual, ceremonial, rules, and regulations like that which they considered to be the essence of their service to God. Jesus says that their religion consisted of a mass of taboos, rules, and regulations, Matthew 23:23.
On the outside, they professed religiosity by the performance of religious codes and ceremonies. However, their performance of their religious works did not change their hearts, Luke 11:39.
It was God who made man whole, Luke 11:40. He made man in a way that the outward behaviour of the individual should naturally manifest his inward character, Genesis 1:26-27.
Spence, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 11:40-41.
'Are you not fools to lay down such rules to avoid outward defilement, while within, in the soul, you allow all manner of wickedness? Surely God, who created the things we see and touch, created the soul also!' I will tell you how to really purify, in the eyes of God, these cups and dishes of yours. Share their contents with your poorer neighbour.'

Jones, in his commentary, says the following.

'Let the Pharisee do one single, loving, unselfish act, not for the sake of the action nor for any merit inherent in it, but out of pure goodwill toward others, and their whole inward condition would be different.'

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone.' Luke 11:42

Notice that Jesus says that giving a tenth of their spices was right; however, the problem was these religious leaders were only emphasising the giving because they were living off the contributions of the people, Luke 11:42. And so, in doing so, they totally neglected the more important matters of the law like justice, mercy and faithfulness, Matthew 23:23-24.
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, Luke 11:42 / Matthew 23:23-24.

They shouldn't have emphasised the lesser principles of the law in order to neglect the more important principles of the law, Luke 11:42. Remember, David! Matthew 12:1-8 / 1 Samuel 21:1-6 / Leviticus 24:5-9.

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.' Luke 11:43

Everything they did was only for public show, 3 John 9-10. They loved their authority, as they loved to sit in places of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogue, Luke 11:43. 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, Luke 11:43, or even took the time to call them 'Rabbi', which means teacher, Matthew 23:5-7. Oh, how they loved to be seen by people, sit in positions of authority and liked to have a title.

"Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it." Luke 11:44

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 11:44.
'In Numbers 19:16, the rule appears which makes every person who touches a grave unclean for a week, that is, ceremonially unclean. Jesus here compared the Pharisees to an unmarked grave, which could cause a man to become unclean inadvertently. In a similar manner, but far more seriously, the people who were following the Pharisees, who supposedly were righteous, could be spiritually contaminated through contact with those evil enemies of Jesus. The lawyers were close associates with the Pharisees, and when they saw the drift of Jesus' teachings, it suddenly appeared to them that they, the lawyers, were being condemned, no less than the Pharisees. Up to that point, the lawyers had apparently been enjoying the strong preaching of Jesus against the Pharisees, whose conduct, actually, was the scandal of the whole nation. Pricked in conscience at last, a lawyer responded.'

WOES ON THE EXPERTS IN THE LAW

'One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also." Luke 11:45

After addressing the Pharisees, it appears that one of the experts in the law wasn't very happy about what Jesus was saying. To the Pharisees, in fact, he saw it as an insult, Luke 11:45.
This tells us that the experts in the law were just as bad as the Pharisees. However, the man's feelings meant nothing to Jesus, and so, Jesus goes on to describe them.

'Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.' Luke 11:46

They added so many more rules and regulations to God's law that they couldn't keep them themselves, Luke 11:46 / Acts 15:10. They loaded people down with so many extra traditions, they themselves couldn't carry them, and they wouldn't even help others in the process. They went way beyond what was written, 1 Corinthians 4:6.

"Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' Luke 11:47-49

Here Jesus continues with the theme of tombs and says they were building beautiful tombs and wonderfully decorated graves, Luke 11:47 / 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, Luke 11:48 / 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.'

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The hypocritical conduct of lawyers in building impressive tombs to the honour of God's prophets whose words they themselves despised and were in the process of violating, through their opposition to Jesus, was one and the same quality of action as that of killing the prophets.'

It's clear that Jesus includes Himself here as a prophet whom the religious leaders would kill, Luke 11:49, and it's also a clear reference to His apostles, whom later will either be killed and persecuted, Luke 11:49 / John 16:2 / Matthew 23:34 / Acts 7:52 / Acts 7:59 / Acts 12:2 / Acts 22:19 / 2 Corinthians 11:24-47.

> 'Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.' Luke 11:50-51

Notice Jesus says that those in his generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, Luke 11:50.
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', Luke 11:51 / Matthew 23:35.
Whatever and whoever 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.'

Jesus says those in His generation will be held responsible, Luke 11:51/ 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.

"Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering." Luke 11:52

Because of their own opinions and interpretations of God's Word, they had lost sight of what God had actually written concerning the Messiah and the kingdom of God.

As a result, they had taken away the key to knowledge from others; they themselves haven't entered the kingdom of God and hindered others from doing so, too, Luke 11:52.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'A key is made to open a lock or door. By their false interpretation of the Old Testament, they had taken away the true key or method of understanding it. They had hindered the people from understanding it aright. 'You endeavour to prevent the people also from understanding the Scriptures respecting the Messiah, and those who were coming to 'me' ye hindered.' If there is any sin of special magnitude, it is that of keeping the people in ignorance, and few people are so guilty as they who by false instructions prevent them from coming to a knowledge of the truth, and embracing it as it is in Jesus.'

'When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.' Luke 11:53-54

When Jesus went outside, He now finds Himself being fiercely opposed and facing an onslaught of questions from both the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, Luke 11:53.
They did this in an effort to try and catch Jesus out, to try and get Him to say something they could uses against Him, Luke 11:54. In other words, they were looking for any excuse to kill Him.

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

'Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.' Luke 12:1

WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

Many thousands had gathered together, so many they were trampling on one another, and it's at this point that Jesus warns His disciples to be on their guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, Luke 12:1 / Matthew 15:12-20 / Matthew 16:6.

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.
Their hypocrisy was that they didn't preach 'justice, mercy and faith,' Matthew 23:23. On the outside, they appeared to be righteous because of their 'religious' behaviour, but inwardly their hearts were full of hypocrisy.

'There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.' Luke 12:2-3

Jesus tells them not to be on their guard against them, Luke 12:1 / Romans 8:31 / Romans 8:37 / Philippians 4:13, because everything, whether concealed or hidden, will be openly revealed, Luke 12:2.
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 them, 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, multiplies centres of dissemination for the hated truth. All these results were clearly observable in the history of the early church.'

Jesus tells them that whatever He had taught His disciples in the dark, Luke 12:3 / Matthew 10:27. 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, Luke 12:3 / Matthew 10:27 / Acts 5:20 / Romans 1:16 / Romans 16:25.

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.' Luke 12:4-5

They are not to be afraid of anyone who can kill the body but can't kill the soul, Luke 12:4 / Matthew 10:28 / 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, Luke 12:5 / Matthew 10:28 / Matthew 25:41 / 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.

'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.' Luke 12:6-7

Here we read that Jesus was the first person to introduce the 'buy one, get one free' slogan concerning the sparrows, Luke 12:6 / Matthew 10:29. The point is that even though many people look at sparrows and think they are worthless, God notices them and He cares for them, Luke 12:6 / Matthew 10:29.
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, Luke 12:7 / Matthew 10:30.
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.

'I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.' Luke 12:8-9

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, Luke 12:8 / Matthew 10:32 / 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, Luke 12:9 / Matthew 10:33 / 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.

'And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.' Luke 12:10

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, Luke 12:10 / Matthew 12:31-32. 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 has become hopeless. He says, 'It is possible for us to adopt an attitude that makes it impossible for even God to forgive us.'

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 2 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.

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 of 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?' 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.
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, because 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. 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.

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.

'When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." Luke 12:11-12

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, Luke 12:11 / 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, Luke 11:11 / 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, Luke 11:12 / 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.'

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

"Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:13-15

Have you ever been having a conversation with someone when someone else jumps in and totally changes the subject? That's what this guy does. Jesus had been speaking about vital truths of divine providence. He had been speaking about vital truths of confession.

He had been speaking about the Holy Spirit, and while Jesus was talking with His disciples, this man spoke up and jumped in with a statement. Teacher, he says, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me, Luke 12:13.
Now, what does this tell us about the man? Well, this tells us that he wasn't interested in spiritual things; his whole heart and life were absorbed in his present life.

And so Jesus said to this individual, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' Luke 12:14. Jesus bluntly refused to answer this man's blunt statement.
Jesus didn't want anything to do with a quarrel over family property.
The Jewish Law was specific enough about this kind of thing, Deuteronomy 21:15-21. The Law said that the firstborn son was to receive a double portion of the inheritance, and the remainder was to be divided among the other sons. For example, if there were three sons, the inheritance would be divided into four parts, with the firstborn receiving two parts, and the other two sons each receiving one part. This Law left no room for debate.

Now, this man who spoke to Jesus obviously must have been the younger brother. And so he comes along and speaks to Jesus to try and get Him to go on his side in order to get an equal share of the inheritance. In other words, he knew the Law, but he wanted more than his rightful share.

And what follows is one of the most severe warnings in the Bible against covetousness, Luke 12:15. And this warning covers any and all forms of covetousness. But what is covetousness? It's not simply a desire for property. For example, a person can have an excessive and unrestrained desire for food, and someone might say that they are hungry for food. Just as some people are hungry for food, some other people may be hungry for gain.

In other words, some people have a selfish ambition to want more and more. And that's because there are people who will never be satisfied with what they have. And anyone who desires anything in that way is a perfect example of what covetousness is; it's an excessive desire for gain.

And so after warning against covetousness, Jesus states the reason for the warning, Luke 12:15. The NEB version says, 'Even when a man has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life.'
What's Jesus saying? He's saying that life is more than things. He's saying that the success of a person's work cannot be measured in terms of what he has been able to accumulate. And if you're still confused about what Jesus means, it's now that He shares 'The parable of the rich fool' to illustrate the meaning.

"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night, your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." Luke 12:16-21

Every day of our lives, we see evidence of covetousness all around us. And while adultery, drunkenness and dishonesty are still frowned upon, covetousness rides right through society and is pretty much ignored. Even among self-professed Christians, it is so widespread that it is scarcely recognised for what it is.

And what is it? It's a deadly sin. A worldly atmosphere so threatens the church that its very life is threatened. Individual members are in such hot pursuit of their own interests that they have found very little time and energy left for the Lord. We really need to listen to what Jesus is teaching us here.

Here was a man who in the world's eyes was a great success, yet God called him a fool, Luke 12:20. But why? What was wrong with his life? How did he miss the way? How did he act like a fool? Well, this man was a fool because of the important things he forgot; he forgot five things.
1. He forgot about other people.

He thought of no one except himself. This is the first thing that leaps out at you when you read the parable. Six times he uses the word 'I' in the parable, and five times he uses the word 'My' in the parable. This man was all about self; everything he did, he did for himself.

And other people never even entered his mind; not once did he remember those people who worked for him, Luke 13:16-17. Think about it, maybe the farmer across the field was saying to himself, 'What can I do, for I don't have any bread to feed my children.' And if he didn't have enough barns, there were other places he could have put it.
You might ask, where, where could he have put it? He could have placed it in the hands of orphans and widows, Luke 12:33-34 / James 1:27. That's where he could have put his crops.
He could have put it at the feet of the homeless, he could have put it in the houses of the widows, or he could have put it in the mouths of the orphans and infants. But Oh no, this rich fool didn't think about those barns, all he could think about was his own little world where there was no room for anyone except himself.

2. He forgot that man is more than what he owns.

He looked at life in terms of the physical things only, Luke 12:18. And it's here that he makes a tragic mistake, like much of the world makes today. He didn't distinguish between what a man has and what a man is.
It's not always easy to make a definite distinction because many of you who have been brought up in the church still count a person fortunate if he enjoys a long run of prosperity, Mark 10:23 / 1 Timothy 6:9-10.
In other words, a person's life is not the same as his business. You see, it's more important to be rich in good deeds than it is just to be rich in goods, 1 Timothy 6:17-19.
3. He forgot the source of real happiness.

He had a false conception of life, and so, because of that, he had a false conception of happiness, Luke 12:19. He thought he could be happy by indulging himself, Ecclesiastes 2:3-10.
Happiness is not found in things; money can buy a lot of things, but it can't buy a sense of usefulness. It can't buy a clear conscience, it can't buy a mind content with God and man, Ecclesiastes 2:11. These are the real riches, and without them, no one can be really happy.
4. He forgot about death.

He thought he was going to live a long life, Luke 12:19, and yet God says to him 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you,' Luke 12:20. He only had one more day left to live, and in so many ways we deceive ourselves constantly by thinking that we too have plenty of time to live.
We put it off until tomorrow, and the truth of the matter is that we don't even know if there will be a tomorrow. Satan doesn't say to us, 'you will not die', but he does say to us, 'you will not die soon,' Psalm 90:9-10. At the height of this man's prosperity and self-satisfaction, God appeared to the rich man and required his life.
How much did he leave? He left it all. No wonder he's a fool, Luke 12:20. He spent his whole life striving for the things he had to leave behind. He neglected the true values of life that he could have taken with him, Matthew 6:19-21.
4. His biggest blunder was that he forgot God.

He didn't take God into account at all, Luke 12:21. There was nothing wrong with him wanting to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, because, as we know, a good farmer must have foresight.
But his fatal mistake was that in all of his well-laid plans, he didn't spare one thought for God. And this is a common downfall for many Christians. Whatever our long-range plans may be, we need to remember that our biggest factor of all is God, James 4:13-15. And if we ever leave God out of our plans, then you can be sure that our plans will end in ruin.
Many people may have a good title while they are here on earth, whether it be the Queen, the Prime Minister, or Lord such and such or the Mayor of London. But when they get to heaven, they have no permanent lease or title.

We know the story about the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31. The story is about a rich guy who lived in a great big mansion, and outside near the gate was a beggar named Lazarus. And for years, he begged at his gates, but the rich man did nothing about it.
Now, he wasn't unkind to the guy; he never had him thrown in prison or moved away. But one night his soul slipped out from him, and all his wealth, all his ease, and all his self-indulgence were gone.

Why was the rich man condemned? The rich man lost his chance; Lazarus was right there in front of him, Luke 16:19-20, and yet he did nothing about it, Matthew 25:41-46. The rich fool in the parable forgot about many things, and Satan whispered in his ear, 'These are not important.'

DO NOT WORRY

'Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, 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, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.' Luke 12:22-31

Jesus now addresses the subject of worry in a most powerful way. Jesus' use of the word 'therefore', Luke 12:22 / Matthew 6:24, 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,' Luke 12:22 / Matthew 6:25, 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 worry, several times before you even get out of bed in the morning, Luke 12:22 / Matthew 6:25 / Philippians 4:6.
If we are spiritually perceptive, we will realise that life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing, Luke 12:22-23 / Matthew 6:25. 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', Luke 12:24 / Matthew 6:26. 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', Luke 12:24 / Matthew 6:26. 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? Luke 12:25-26 / Matthew 6:27. 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 like 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, Luke 12:27 / Luke 12:24 / Matthew 6:28 / Matthew 6:26. 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, Luke 12:27 / Matthew 6:29.
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? Luke 12:28 / Matthew 6:30. 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, Luke 12:27-28 / Matthew 6:28-29, should teach us to expect that He will show more interest in providing for those who have been fashioned for eternity, Luke 12:29 / Matthew 6:31. 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? Luke 12:29 / Matthew 6:31. 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? Luke 12:32 / Matthew 6:32. 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,' Luke 12:31 / Matthew 6:33. 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,' Luke 12:31 / Matthew 6:34. 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 Luke 12:22-31 / Matthew 6:25-34, 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?

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Luke 12:32-34

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 12:32.
'The Pharisees, like one of their number at a later date, were breathing out threatening's and slaughter against the Lord, but Jesus calmly assured his chosen that, despite all that, the kingdom would indeed occur and that they should possess it.

In Luke 12:31, the kingdom is to be sought, here it is to be given, but 'both are possible since God gives men the possibility of seeking, and finding God's gift'.'
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.
Boles, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 12:33.
'This does not mean that a Christian should give up everything that he has to those who are not trying to serve God, neither does it mean that a Christian should give up what he has to those who are living lives of idleness and wickedness.'

In the first century, the idea of a secure bank was unknown, and the safest way to keep one's money was to bury it. However, doing so would subject the money, which was composed of metal, to rust and corrosion.

They could choose to keep their treasure above ground, but then they took the risk of having it stolen by a thief breaking in. In actuality, the Greek words here literally indicate that the 'thieves dig through,' Luke 12:33.
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, Luke 12:33-34.
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.' 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.

WATCHFULNESS

‘Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Luke 12:35-40

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, Mark 13:33-37 / Matthew 24:42-43.

Jesus uses two images here: being dressed for action and keeping the lamps burning, Luke 12:35 / Matthew 25:1-13.

We are to be like people who are waiting for the master to come home from a wedding banquet so that we can open the door immediately when he comes, Luke 12:36.

Jesus describes his disciples as people who are prepared so that when the master comes, they are awake and ready, Luke 12:37. Notice that this preparation is not a one-off effort. The servant doesn’t get dressed for action and then falls asleep on the couch until the master returns, Luke 12:37.

Notice that Jesus says the servants that are found ready and awake are blessed, Luke 12:37. Why are they blessed?

Jesus says that the master is going to dress himself for service and have the servants sit at the table, Luke 12:37.

Then the master is going to come and serve the servants at the table, Luke 12:37. The servants who are found ready, prepared, and awake are going to be given an amazing gift. We would think that the servants would serve the master at the table, and the servants would be happy to do so.

However, notice the turn of the story, the servants are going to be told to sit at the table, and the master is going to prepare himself to serve and will serve them, Luke 12:37. We know the master is going to bless us if we are ready for him.

It is not known when the master will return; he might come in the middle of the night, Luke 12:38. That is, the second watch or toward daybreak, that is the third watch.

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They are the second and third of the Roman four watches, representing the dead of night, and by metaphor, the unexpectedness of the Second Advent. The Jews reckoned only three-night watches.’

Jesus describes His return as the arrival of a thief, and we must be ready, Luke 12:39-40. He says that it will be unheralded, like the coming of a thief in the night, Matthew 24:42-44 / Mark 13:32-35.

Jesus will fulfil these words by coming at an unexpected hour, 1 Thessalonians 5:2. 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.’

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 off guard, 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.

‘Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or everyone?” The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. “The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.’ Luke 12:41-48

Peter appears to be curious and asks Jesus if the parable was for them or everyone, Luke 12:41. Jesus answered him by asking the question, 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager,' Luke 12:42. In other words, what He's about to say is telling us how we should be prepared for His return.
To illustrate what is involved in watching and being ready, Jesus contrasted two servants. The first servant is described as 'faithful and wise', Luke 12:42 / Matthew 24:45, he had fulfilled his responsibilities while his master was away, and he would receive a great reward when his master returned, Luke 12:42-44 / 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, Luke 12:45 / 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.'

This is graphic language, the master will come and 'cut the servant into pieces', Luke 12:46. Except that we should not be too relieved because the punishment that awaits us is far worse, eternal torment and separation from God. We will be put with the unbelievers and unfaithful, Luke 12:46.
Jesus is clear in Matthew's Gospel that the place reserved for the faithful servants and unfaithful servants is eternal punishment in hell, Matthew 5:29-30 / Matthew 25:31-46. It's possible to be a servant of Jesus, but because we are not ready and prepared for His return, we will be cast with the unfaithful when He arrives.
The consequences of unfaithfulness will be perfectly fair and just. God will judge those who didn't know or understand less strictly, but those who should know better will have to answer for it.

Boles, in his commentary, says the following concerning Luke 12:47-48.
'The punishment will be proportioned to the powers, gifts, opportunities, and knowledge of the offenders.'

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Jews never inflicted more than forty stripes for one offence, Deuteronomy 25:3. For smaller offences, they inflicted only four, five, six, etc., according to the nature of the crime. In allusion to this, our Lord says that he 'that knew not', that is, he who had comparatively little knowledge, would suffer a punishment proportionally light. He refers, doubtless, to those who have fewer opportunities, smaller gifts, or fewer teachers. Those who have much committed to their disposal, as stewards, were given much, etc, Matthew 25:14-40.'
Most commentators suggest that in this parable, the master represents Jesus, the manager represents the apostles or those who have leadership roles, and the household represents the church or Christians in general.

The master's return represents Jesus' second coming and His judgment upon Christians who are prepared and serving, and those who claim to be Christians but aren't ready or serving.

Those who are found faithful will be blessed and experience the full bounty of heaven! Those who neglect following the will of the Lord will be disciplined. And those who know the Lord's will and flat out reject it will be 'cut into pieces and put with the unfaithful', which is a reference to eternal punishment in hell.

NOT PEACE BUT DIVISION

‘I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on, there will be five in one family, divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” Luke 12:49-53

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, Luke 12:52-53 / Matthew 10:34-37. 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, Luke 12:52-53 / Matthew 10:34-37 / 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, Luke 12:52-53 / Matthew 10:35-37.
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.

INTERPRETING THE TIMES

'He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny." Luke 12:54-59

Jesus tries to reason with the crowds 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, Luke 12:54-55 / Matthew 16:2-4. The crowd 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? Hence, they were hypocrites, Luke 12:56 / Matthew 15:1-9.

The implication here, Luke 12:57-58 / Matthew 5:25, 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', Luke 12:58 / 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, Luke 12:58 / Matthew 5:25.

A 'penny', Luke 12:59 / 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!

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION

‘Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” Luke 13:1-5

REPENT OR PERISH

The Galileans were people who lived in Galilee, and it’s important to remember that they weren’t under the jurisdiction of Pilate, but of Herod. The Galileans, in the time of Christ, were very wicked.

While the Galileans were sacrificing at Jerusalem, Pilate came suddenly upon them and killed them, and ‘their’ blood was mingled with the blood of the animals that they were killing for sacrifice, Luke 13:1. This doesn’t mean that Pilate ‘offered’ their blood in sacrifice, but only that as they were sacrificing, he killed them.
This event isn’t mentioned by Josephus, and nothing more is known of it than what is here recorded. We learn, however, from Josephus that the Galileans were very wicked and that they were much liable to brawls and treasons. It appears, also, that Pilate and Herod quarrelled with each other, Luke 23:8-12.
It’s not improbable that Pilate might feel a particular enmity toward the subjects of Herod. It’s likely that the Galileans excited a tumult in the temple, and that Pilate took occasion to come suddenly upon them, and show his opposition to them and Herod by slaying them.

PILATE

From out of remote Glen Lyon, the longest glen in Scotland, has come an intriguing oral tradition that Pontius Pilate was born in the hamlet of Fortingall, which lies at the entrance to this dramatic and picturesque highland glen.

This ancient tradition also claims that Pontius Pilate was related to the Scots King, Metallanus, whose royal seat was located on a hill fort called Dun Geal, the White Fort, at Fortingall.

According to the ancient Scots Chronicles, Metallanus was on good terms with the government of Caesar in Rome. Local tradition records a Roman camp at Fortingall, and perhaps a clue as to its presence there may be found in the Latinised name of the Scots King, Metallanus.

For is known that the mining of metal ores, such as iron, took place in this area in past times and no doubt the Romans would have been particularly interested in accessing these metals. In nearby Glen Lyon is to be found an old bridge which traditionally has been known as the Roman Bridge.

Could Pontius Pilate have eventually come to Rome as a result of this Scottish Roman connection? Later being appointed the Roman Procurator of Judea at the time of the crucifixion of Christ.

Curiously, one of the oldest military regiments in the British Army is the Royal Scots, who claim to be descended from Pontius Pilate’s bodyguard, thus providing another Scoto-Roman link with the Pilate Scottish enigma.

At Caesarea in Palestine is to be found an ancient stone slab which is called the Pilate Stone due to a Latin inscription inscribed upon it which appears to read ‘Hiberieum Pontius Pilatus’. At the time of Pilate, the Gaelic northern regions of the British Isles, including Ireland, were known to the Romans as Hibernia.

Does this Latin inscription reinforce the story that Pontius Pilate originally came from Scotland, according to the old Glen Lyon oral tradition? As an aside, could it be that Pontius Pilate was schooled in the Celtic Druid tradition so prevalent in Scotland at that time? The Druid motto was ‘Truth against the world’.

Does this explain Pilate asking Jesus, ‘What is truth?’ possibly a Druidic password given by one initiate to another? John 18:38. With His possible association with the Druids during His legendary visits to Britain, perhaps Jesus responded with a secret sign, hence His apparent nonverbal reply as indicated in the Gospel of John.
Jesus’ reply to them shows us what they actually thought; they were prejudiced. They hadn’t suffered such a terrible fate as the Galileans; they were glorifying the misassumption that they didn’t deserve punishment, Luke 13:2.
In that deep human prejudice to the effect that great sufferers are receiving only what they deserve lies a germ of truth, namely, that all human sorrow and suffering derive, in the last analysis, from human sin, but it’s a gross lie that all disasters that happen upon people must be attributed to their immediate, specific sins.

Many suffer through the sins of others, and some for no apparent reason at all. The great truth spoken of here, and repeated in the same words two verses later, Luke 13:3-4, was for the purpose of removing the false security of His hearers, both Galileans and those who live in Jerusalem.
Israel had rejected God’s call to repentance as delivered, first by John the Baptist and again by Jesus Christ, and the impact of this verse is that God rejects the human device of supposing that some are righteous in a relative sense, because they aren’t like such notorious sinners as the Galileans and that the Almighty demands repentance of all men.

The perishing focuses on the fact that Israel is the primary target of this commandment, although, of course, in the general sense, it applies to every man on earth. These words mean that Israel would perish in the same way that the Galileans did, that is, by the Roman sword.

Wesley, in his commentary, says the following.

‘And so they did. There was a remarkable resemblance between the fate of these Galileans and the main body of the Jewish nation. They were slain by the Roman sword, perished in the temple itself, and literally buried under its ruins.’

THE TOWER OF SILOAM

Jesus is speaking about some construction with the pool of that same name, Luke 13:4, and having to do with the aqueduct that brought water into it, and perhaps also with the Roman fortifications of the city.
Josephus wrote that ‘Pilate expended the sacred treasure, which is called corban, upon the aqueducts, whereby he brought water from a distance of four hundred furlongs.’

Upon the presumption that the eighteen men were workers on the construction when the tower fell, it’s easy to see how the Jews would have accounted them especially sinful, for not only were they working for the hated Romans, but they were being paid with money that Pilate had robbed from the temple treasure. However, Jesus rejected the notion that such conduct was the reason they were killed.

Significantly, this terrible accident was introduced into the conversation, not by His hearers, but by Christ himself; but He used it in exactly the same manner as He used the other incident, demanding of all people, and specifically including Israel, that they should repent or perish, Luke 13:5.

Repentance stands between every man and the merit which is in Christ Jesus. Christ's call to repentance was next extended to include a third warning, that of the parable of the barren fig tree.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNFRUITFUL TREE

'Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" Luke 13:6-9

THE FIG TREE

The fig tree would produce fruit for ten months of the year, April and May, but this one had no fruit. It had leaves on it, but produced fruit before leaves; there should have been fruit on that tree.

But why one fig tree in a vineyard? Well, the fig tree got affection whilst the vineyard got attention. Before breaking this parable down, let's look at who's who and what each part stands for.

1. The owner of the vineyard is the heavenly Father.

2. The vinedresser is the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The vineyard is the world.

4. The fig tree is the Jewish nation.

5. Three years stands for the first three years of Jesus' ministry.

6. Fruitlessness is Israel's rejection of Jesus.

7. This year is also Jesus' final year of preaching.

8. Cut it down stands for God's judgment against Israel.

There is nothing in this parable that requires us to consider that fig tree as being only three years old, Luke 13:7. The Greek text in this place uses the past perfect 'having been planted,' that is, having been planted long ago in the call of Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3.

The axe was laid at the root of national Israel, Matthew 3:10. The nation was soon to be cut down. The meaning of this parable is that Israel, the fig tree, was planted years before the coming of Jesus, who came to receive its fruit. However, Israel was unfruitful in that many in Israel strayed from God to follow their own traditional religion, Mark 7:1-9. Nevertheless, Jesus, the vinedresser, pleaded to God on behalf of Israel, Matthew 23:37. But Israel wouldn't repent, and thus, the tree was cut down in A.D. 70.

Here was a man who had a vineyard, in which he had planted a fig tree, Luke 13:6. Just one fig tree in a garden of vines. The owner came looking for fruit on the fig tree and when he was disappointed, he would have destroyed the unfruitful tree had not the Vinedresser pleaded with him to spare it for one more year, Luke 13:8.
The Vinedresser said that He would give the tree every opportunity of producing fruit and then, if it failed, it would be cut down, Luke 13:9. Remember this significant detail. The parable concerns one fig tree in a vineyard. Now, this is in itself remarkable, because it was unusual for a fig tree to be planted in a vineyard.
Notice that the tree wasn't there by accident. It had been planted there quite deliberately. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that the vineyard wasn't cultivated as a hobby or pastime. Nor was it kept for its beauty, or as a garden for relaxation. It existed for the value of the fruit it produced.

The solitary fig tree, on the other hand, wasn't planted in the vineyard because it was a viable business proposition. The Lord's parable highlights a very important difference between that one fig tree and all the other trees, the vines, in that garden.

The vines received attention. The fig tree received affection! Luke 13:8. In other words, the fig tree wasn't meant for the market, but for the owner's personal pleasure. The lesson of this parable is that God expects fruit.
He expects fruit because fruit is the indication of an obedient heart. If there is no fruit, then there is no active faith and without an active faith, no one can be saved, James 2:14-16.

JESUS HEALS A CRIPPLED WOMAN ON THE SABBATH

'On a Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.' Luke 13:10-13

THE SYNAGOGUE

On a Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, Luke 13:10. The synagogue came into existence after the Jews were in captivity, and although we don't find God anywhere commanding synagogues to be built as a gathering place, much like the Jewish temple, He seems to accept its purpose.
The synagogue served several significant purposes.

1. The Synagogue maintained the Jewish national consciousness and became the social centre for the life of the captives, so that even in captivity, they never forgot that they were Jews.

2. It promoted a renewed interest in and respect for the Scriptures and became the place where the collective study of the word of God was conducted.

3. Because it was no longer possible to observe the feasts, fasts and sacrifices prescribed by the Law, there being neither priesthood nor temple, the synagogue also became a place for communal prayer.

When the people returned to their homeland, they took it with them and developed it, so that with the passing of time, the Synagogue was accepted as a uniquely Jewish 'institution', and the Synagogue services became more formal and ritualistic.

When we understand this significance, we can clearly see why Jesus would often go into the synagogue on the Sabbath Day to teach on a regular basis, Luke 4:16. The people were there, and He had an audience to teach some spiritual truths from God's word.

THE WOMAN

This poor woman, who was crippled not because of some natural disability but by a demonic spirit, Luke 13:11 / Luke 13:16, had been in this condition for eighteen years. She must have been in such pain being bent over for all those years, Luke 13:11.
Under normal circumstances, if someone had a demonic spirit, they weren't allowed anywhere near the synagogue, but this woman seems to be inside the synagogue, which suggests her ailment wasn't as bad as others, Luke 8:26-33.
Interestingly, the woman doesn't go to Jesus for a healing, which implies she either didn't know who Jesus was or she hadn't heard about the other miracles He performed. She was possibly embarrassed about her ailment, although it is possible she was waiting to hear what He was going to teach first and then approach Him.

Notice that Jesus sees her and then calls her over, Luke 13:12. This is one of those occasions where Jesus makes the first move to help someone. Why did He call her over? Simply because she didn't come to Jesus to be healed. How refreshing it must have been for Jesus to be somewhere where He wasn't being bombarded by people requesting to be healed.

THE HEALING

It seems a simple touch of Jesus' hands was enough to miraculously heal this woman, Luke 13:12-13. Oh, how the love of Christ reaches out to those who aren't even seeking Him, John 3:16.
Unlike what we see happening in some of the 'religious' world today, she was healed immediately. The miracles in Bible times were always instantaneous, and they were often performed in front of unbelievers. Why? Because miracles were performed to confirm that the message being preached was indeed from God. Mark 16:20 / John 20:30-31 / Acts 4:14-16.

THE WOMAN'S LIFE CHANGED FOREVER

I often wonder what happened to the woman after her healing, as she seems to disappear from the scene after she praised God. We don't know what she did next, but at least she took the time to thank God first, which should always be our first protocol after God delivers us from any situation.

I can imagine how her whole life would have changed for the better, as she is now able to do things she couldn't do before, things like standing up straight for the first time in eighteen years, being able to stretch and reach up for

something for the first time in eighteen years. We mustn't forget she was crippled by a demonic spirit, Luke 13:16, and so was she not only healed physically but spiritually too.

YOU JUST CAN'T PLEASE EVERYONE

'Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, 'There are six days for work. So, come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.' Luke 13:14

Notice that the synagogue leader didn't deny the miracle had happened, and he made no reference to the woman herself, but he became 'indignant', Luke 13:14, which basically means he was greatly displeased.
What was it that greatly displeased him? Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, Luke 13:14, which tells us a lot about this man; he was more concerned about keeping the traditional Sabbath Day laws.
When Jesus healed the woman, it should have been a day of rejoicing; it should have been a day where everyone could glorify God and thank Him for this woman's deliverance from the bondage of Satan, Luke 13:16.
Sadly, it didn't turn out that way, whilst the woman praised God, Luke 13:13, and no doubt others were about to do the same, this self-righteous leader decides to focus on the wrong thing, Luke 13:14.

SABBATH DAY REGULATIONS

He's so obsessed with keeping the rules and the Sabbath Day regulations, he claims that this healing was a 'work', and then he protests. Notice he doesn't protest to Jesus Himself but to the people around him, Luke 13:14. Instead of speaking to Jesus directly, he seems to want as much support as he can get from others first.
He reminds the people of the Sabbath in God's covenant with Israel, Exodus 31:13, and basically says that not honouring the Sabbath showed contempt for the covenant as a whole, Numbers 15:32-36. So, they carefully defined what 'work', Luke 13:14, meant and what activities were forbidden; in this case, it was healing.
As I mentioned earlier, we don't know where the woman is at this point, but it seems the ruler was having a dig at her; he more or less says, 'she could have come for a healing any other day of the week, but not THIS day,' Luke 13:14.
The synagogue leader seems to have forgotten that the woman was in the synagogue before Jesus was; she didn't come for a healing, she didn't approach Jesus, it was Jesus who saw her, called her over and then healed her.

Imagine if that woman were still present! Imagine what she must be feeling right now! One minute she's praising God, and the next she's worrying if she has broken the Sabbath Day law!

HYPOCRITES

'The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?' Luke 13:15-16

The synagogue leader addressed the people, but Jesus swung it around and condemned not only the synagogue leader but all those who were in charge of the synagogue, hence He uses the word, 'Hypocrites', plural, Luke 13:15.

Why were they hypocrites? It was all pretence; they pretended that everything they did was in harmony with God's laws, Luke 13:15, but they weren't; they were more concerned with the traditions of the fathers, Matthew 15:1-20. They didn't understand that the binding of their interpretations of the Sabbath law had actually led them away from God's original purpose for the Sabbath.

They believed that if someone was healed on the Sabbath, it was wrong; they believed that healing on the Sabbath was a 'work', and so Jesus demonstrates their hypocrisy by pointing out that they were more concerned about their animals than they were for their fellow human beings.

THE POINT

Notice Jesus calls the woman, 'a daughter of Abraham', Luke 13:16, implying she is one of them, her spiritual father, was their spiritual father but Abraham was the father of all nations, not just the Jewish nation, Genesis 17:5. The leaders of the synagogue untied their oxen and donkeys on the Sabbath, and Jesus freed this dear woman from the hands of Satan, Luke 13:15-16.

Notice the difference in words which Jesus uses, the leaders 'untie', Luke 13:15, but Jesus 'set free', Luke 13:16. In other words, Jesus is saying, they were more concerned about their animals and their animals' welfare than they were about this woman, and her welfare.

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 having changed hearts.

THE HYPOCRITES HUMILIATED

'When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.' Luke 13:17

The enemies of Jesus didn't realise they were in bondage to their own religious doctrine; they were basically binding laws on the people and themselves, which God had never bound on them, 1 Corinthians 4:6 / Acts 15:1-5 / Galatians 6:10. Their teachings didn't come from God but from themselves, and Jesus exposed their hypocrisy, which led to them being humbled and embarrassed, Luke 13:17.

We get the sense that all those other people who were present were waiting for someone, anyone, to come along and tell these so-called leaders that they were hypocrites.

They had been listening to these leaders for years and submitted to their rules, but Jesus comes along and speaks the truth, and, in a way, He sets them free too, John 8:32. We can just imagine the joy and rejoicing going on here whilst they were declaring how wonderful everything Jesus had done and said, Luke 13:17.

CONCLUSION

I remember a few years ago, I was presiding over the Lord's Supper, and we had a family come to visit us for worship. At the end of our worship, the guy came up to me and said, 'They had a wonderful time with us, BUT, why didn't I read from 1 Corinthians 11, whilst I was presenting the Lord's Supper!'

This is probably what he was used to in his home congregation, and so, I simply said to him, 'I didn't know we were 'commanded' to read from that text every time we partake of the Lord's Supper.' This is a prime example of going beyond what is written, 1 Corinthians 4:6.
This is a prime example of making a man-made traditional law. This is a prime example of someone whose so focused on 'doing things right' that he misses out on the other blessings which come from worship.

Time and time again we see the dangers of becoming too legalistic, where people become more concerned about keeping man-made laws than they do about their fellow man, Matthew 23:23.
May we be like these people who rejoiced in their newfound freedom, but more importantly, may we have the faith to trust that God will humble these self-righteous legalists who care more about keeping the rules than they do for their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, James 4:6.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

'Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches." Luke 13:18-19

In 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, Luke 13:18-19 / Matthew 13:31-32 / Mark 4:30-32.
Everything God created has a purpose, and we can learn many lessons from nature, and that includes 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, Luke 13:19 / Matthew 31:32 / 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, Luke 13:19 / Mark 4:32 / Matthew 13:32, 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, Luke 13:18 / Matthew 13:31 / 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

'Again, he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." Luke 13:20-21

Jesus is still teaching about the kingdom of God, Luke 13:20 / Matthew 13:33, and in this parable, He shares a lesson from something He saw His mother doing time and time again, Luke 13:21 / Matthew 13:33.
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, Luke 13:21 / Matthew 13:33. 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. Where 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.

THE NARROW DOOR

'Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." Luke 13:22-30

As Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, someone asked Him, 'Are only a few people going to be saved?' Luke 13:22-23. It's interesting to note that Jesus never answered the question or the person who asked the question; instead, He spoke to 'them', that is, all those who were present.

Jesus addresses them and tells them to make every effort, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 / Philippians 3:12 / 1 Timothy 6:12 / 2 Timothy 4:7, to enter through the narrow door, Luke 13:24 / Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus says that many will try to enter the door but won't be able to, Luke 13:24 / 1 Peter 5:6 / 2 Corinthians 6:2.

Because the way requires a humility that is combined with suffering and persecution, few will enter the door into heaven, Luke 13:24 / Acts 14:22. This door 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 states in Matthew 7:13-14 that it is wide assumes that most people will be lost. Most people who live upon the face of the earth will choose not to obey God. 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.

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 spoke the truth plainly, didn't He? It's not enough just to cry out, 'Lord, Lord!' Luke 6:46 / Matthew 7:21-23. We must do the will of the heavenly Father if we hope to be saved!

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 7:13, 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!

In spite of the fact that 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. They feel that they deserve salvation for certain acts of service, even though they haven't genuinely been obedient.

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, despite eating and drinking with Him, simply because He didn't know them, Luke 13:25-27 / Matthew 7:21-23.

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! Some of the Jews rejected Jesus, John 1:11, and as a result, God would reject them, Matthew 22:13 / Matthew 25:30 / 2 Peter 2:17 / Jude 13 / Matthew 11:11 / Matthew 21:43.

The weeping and gnashing of teeth are used figuratively to speak of the terrors of hell, Luke 13:28 / Matthew 13:42 / Matthew 13:50 / Matthew 22:13. Notice that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets are in the kingdom of God, but the Jews will be thrown out, Luke 13:28.

People will come from all directions, from all over the earth to take their places at the feast, Luke 13:29 / Isaiah 45:6 / Isaiah 49:12 / Colossians 1:13 / Hebrews 11:8-10. They will enjoy the eternal joys of heaven. Jesus says those who are last will be first, and first will be last, Luke 13:30 / Matthew 20:16.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the first and last.

'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.'

'At that time, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.' Luke 13:31

HEROD

The name Herod was given to the family ruling Palestine immediately before and to some degree during the first half of the first Christian century. Their family history was complex, and what information has come down has been frequently small, conflicting, and difficult to harmonise.

A Jewish political party called the Herodians sympathized with the Herodian rulers in their general policy of government, and in the social customs, that they introduced from Rome, Mark 3:6 / Mark 12:13 / Matthew 22:16 / Luke 20:20.

They were at one with the Sadducees in holding the duty of submission to Rome, and of supporting the Herods on the throne, Mark 8:15 / Matthew 16:6. Herod was the family name of several Roman rulers who served as provincial governors of Palestine and surrounding regions during New Testament times.
The first Herod, known as Herod the Great, was the Roman ruler of Palestine during the days of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Matthew 2:1 / Luke 3:1.
All the other Herods mentioned in the New Testament were the sons or grandsons of this Herod. Herod's son Antipas is the Herod we're dealing with here, was the Roman governor of Galilee and Perea, Matthew 14:1. And if you remember, Antipas was responsible for the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist, Luke 3:19-20 / Matthew 14:1-12.
Jesus is possibly in or around the region of Galilee at this point, which was Herod's jurisdiction and on the surface, it appears some 'well-intentioned' Pharisees came along to warn Jesus that Herod was out to kill Him, Luke 13:31.
I guess the question we should ask is simply this: Were they truly sincere? Did they really care so much for Jesus that they went out of their way to warn Him? Or did they have something else in mind?

Throughout the Gospels, we see the Pharisees' attitude towards Jesus, and I just can't believe for one moment they cared for Jesus in any shape or form. Time and time again, we've seen them clash with Him and look for any excuse to get rid of Him.

Remember, John the Baptist had a great number of people following him; this is one reason why Herod had him arrested. The Pharisees may have told Jesus that Herod wants to kill him for the same reason: he has a great following. The problem with this theory is that if Herod really did want to kill Jesus, why didn't he do so later when he had the chance? Luke 23:11.

SO WHAT WAS THEIR REAL MOTIVE?

It is possible that they tried to intimidate Him in an effort to get Him to stop teaching against their 'religion', but I believe the real motive, which is in the character of the Pharisees, is that they wanted to scare Jesus into returning to Jerusalem, where of course, they planned to kill him themselves.

'He replied, 'Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' Luke 13:32

Notice Jesus calls Herod 'that fox', Luke 13:32. In the Greek text it simply says, 'she fox', a fox isn't a large, bold, or courageous animal, it's the complete opposite, it's a small, weak, sly, and cunning character.
Jesus may be referring to Herodias, Herod's wife, who, if you remember, was very influential in the murder of John the Baptist, Matthew 14:8-11/ Mark 6:24-28. Whatever Jesus was referring to, He basically says that Herod himself was a small, weak, and sly governor who wasn't worthy of any respect or honour.
It's clear that Jesus wasn't that bothered about what the Pharisees thought. He saw through the deception, and so, He will continue to drive out demons and heal people, and what was His goal? Luke 13:32. To get to Jerusalem, where He would eventually die for all of mankind.
If we learn anything from Jesus, surely, it's the lesson of intimidation; we must be willing to continue to move forward in preaching the Gospel, no matter how much the world tries to intimidate us, Acts 4:19-20.

'In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!' Luke 13:33

Jesus says He's not planning to be in Herod's territory very long anyway, but He won't be intimidated into leaving his territory by anyone. Jesus had one thing on His mind, and that was getting to Jerusalem, Luke 13:33.
He was well aware of what His mission was, and so, the Jews, the disciples or even Herod weren't going to change His mind. He was determined to do the will of the Father and go to the cross, Genesis 3:15 / Revelation 13:8. It's clear that Jesus knew that He wouldn't be safe in Jerusalem, but He also knew and prophesied time and time again that He would die in Jerusalem.
Although these Pharisees tried to trick Jesus into going to Jerusalem, they weren't aware that His mind was already made up to go. He knew their plans, He knew their schemes, and He certainly knew that they were planning to murder Him in Jerusalem.

JESUS' SORROW FOR JERUSALEM

'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. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'
Luke 13:34-35

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, Luke 13:34 / Matthew 23:37 / Luke 19:41-42.
They had killed God's prophets and stoned them too, Luke 13:34 / Matthew 23:37 / Matthew 5:12 / Hebrews 11:32-40. God had longed to gather His children as a hen gathers her chicks, Luke 13:34 / Matthew 23:37.
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', Luke 13:35 / Matthew 23:38. Notice He uses the word 'your', it had become their house, not Gods, Luke 13:35 / Matthew 23:38 / 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, Luke 13:35 / Matthew 23:39 / 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 change 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 14

INTRODUCTION

"One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? "But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" And they had nothing to say." Luke 14:1-6

JESUS AT A PHARISEE'S HOUSE

One thing we know about Jesus is that He never refuses an invitation to eat from anyone, regardless of who they are or what their intentions are. We must note that the KJV tells us that Jesus went 'to eat bread on the Sabbath'.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Jews took only two meals on weekdays, but they had three meals on the sabbath', that extra meal was celebrated after the morning worship and was the big meal of the entire week. 'The only restriction upon those feasts was that the food had to be cooked the day before.'

Jesus was doing a bit of table talk as He ate in the house of a prominent Pharisee, Luke 14:1. They were having a Sabbath meal and from the very beginning, the Pharisees had been watching Jesus to see what He would do, Luke 14:1.
They are obviously looking for any excuse to accuse Jesus of something, anything, Luke 6:7. In front of Jesus was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body, Luke 14:2.

DROPSY

The ‘abnormal swelling of the body’ indicates dropsy, ‘hudropikos’, which is a symptom of a disease of the heart, liver, kidneys, or brain. The term stems from the Greek word hydro, describing water.

It involves fluid retention and swelling in the body cavities or in the limbs. There was no cure or medicine available in those days. This is the only miracle of this kind recorded in the Gospels.

THE MAN

Notice that this man appears before Jesus but doesn’t ask to be healed, Luke 14:2. We know nothing about this man or where he came from. Was he deliberately invited by the Pharisees in order to trap Jesus, or was he one of the Pharisees’ family members? The text doesn’t tell us.
Notice also that Jesus points the man with dropsy out to the Pharisees and the experts in the Law and tries to reason with them, Luke 14:3. It is Jesus who initiates this whole event concerning the man; Jesus knows exactly what these religious leaders are thinking, Luke 5:22-24.
He asks them ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? Luke 14:3. Jesus healed a few people on the Sabbath, Mark 1:21 / Luke 4:38 / Luke 6:6 / Luke 13:14 / John 5:9 / John 9:14. He clearly taught that the Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath,’ Mark 2:27.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Like human vultures, those evil men were waiting for Jesus to fall into their trap; but he took it all in at a glance, snaring them with one of their own devices, a dilemma. If they said, ‘Yes,’ they had no case; if they said, ‘No,’ they would have spoken a lie. ‘The law did not condemn such acts of mercy, and they undoubtedly saw the point of the Master’s question.’

THE HEALING

Jesus was a master at silencing people without saying too much, Luke 14:4. Jesus could have told the man, ‘Come back after sundown and I’ll heal you,’ but He didn’t. He silenced them and went ahead and healed the guy.
Jesus took hold of him, healed him, and sent him away. By taking hold of him, Jesus demonstrated His power to heal the man, Luke 14:4. Normally, any cure for any disease takes time, but here, once again, we see Jesus healed the man perfectly and instantly.
It is not clear why Jesus sent the man away because the text doesn’t tell us. I guess it is possible that Jesus didn’t want the man to be there because He was about to rebuke the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. It is also possible that Jesus didn’t want to embarrass the man or want him to become the centre of attention.

We can only imagine how this man’s life has changed after Jesus healed him. I’m sure there would have been much rejoicing, and I’m sure he would have gone on to tell others what happened to him and possibly encourage others to go and see Jesus to be healed, Matthew 15:30.
Jesus astounded them by healing a man who was suffering from dropsy on the Sabbath. Jesus now goes ahead and asks another question, ‘If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not

immediately pull it out?' Luke 14:5. He quotes their own law and practice to them, Exodus 21:33, which says it was perfectly permissible to rescue an ox or a donkey which had fallen into a well.
But notice there was no response, Luke 14:6. It is very clear that they weren't willing to admit that they valued their laws and property more than they valued human life. Jesus' point is simply this: if it was lawful to save an ox on the Sabbath, then surely it was also lawful to save the life of a man on the Sabbath, Luke 13:15.
Jesus asked two questions and received no answers. He totally silenced the critics. They had no power; they were powerless to answer him, Luke 6:6-11 / Matthew 12:9-14 / Mark 3:1-6.
The Pharisees and teachers of the law were often directed by the traditions of men and made those traditions the same level of importance as the commandments of God. This is something we must be careful of even today because very easily and very quickly traditions can become law, Mark 7:8-9 / 1 Corinthians 4:6.

"When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told them this parable. When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:8-11

We know the customs then, which were observed around the dinner table, were quite different from today. The Greeks and the Romans ate their meals in the reclining position, either on the floor or on low couches, drawn up against low tables.

The tables were U-shaped, which allowed the servants to serve food around the table more easily. At the head of the table was placed the honoured guest, and with the Jews, this was reserved for the rabbis. The other guests were seated around the table in descending order of importance.

On most occasions, the exact hour of the meal was never announced, so some guests came in earlier, and others would come in later. The Pharisees had this down to a tee, especially those who were in prominent positions. They would time their arrival so that they could make an unsuspicious entrance, and in the presence of everyone else, they would receive the chief seats.

I think this is an amusing scene because at this particular feast, the Pharisees were scrutinising Jesus' every move, they were closely observing Him, Luke 14:1. However, at the same time, Jesus was observing them, Luke 14:7.
He was watching them slyly manoeuvring around the table for the place of honour. It was after observing them that he would go on to share a rather condemning parable concerning humility, Luke 14:8-11.
Jesus is teaching them about humility, real humility. They were almost playing musical chairs or looking for the best seat in the house, Luke 14:7. Jesus tells them if they get an invite to a wedding feast, not to take the place of honour because someone else more distinguished than they are may have been invited, Luke 14:8.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'What an irony is this! To egotistical social climbers like those guests, it was an unheard-of-consideration that a 'more honourable' man than any of them might have been invited.'

Jesus says if they go directly and sit at the place of honour, then they may get humiliated because the host will ask them to move and give their seat to someone else, Luke 14:9.
Instead, they should go directly and sit in the lowest place, so that the host will ask them to move to be a better place and by doing so, they will be honoured in front of everyone, Luke 14:10.

Jesus uses the phrase 'who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted,' Luke 14:11, over and over again in the New Testament. For example, in Matthew 23, when Jesus is speaking to the crowds and His disciples about the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, who were displaying false humility.
He tells them at the end of Matthew 23:3, 'Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. And then down in Matthew 23:12, He says to them, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."
Again, in Luke 18:9-13, when Jesus is teaching about self-righteousness and the two men who went up to the temple to pray. One guy said, 'Look at me, look at all the good things I do.' And the tax collector said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.' And so, Jesus goes on to say in Luke 18:14, 'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'
And that teaching didn't just stop when Jesus went back to heaven; this truth was carried on and taught to the early church. Paul taught it to the Philippian church in Philippians 2:3-4. James taught it to the church that was scattered in James 4:10. Peter taught it to the young men in the church in 1 Peter 5:5-6.
And this law still stands true today as it did when Jesus first uttered those words. It stands against everything that the world teaches about becoming great. Jesus says if you want to go up in His kingdom, then you need to learn how to go down.

The principle of humility is obvious and clear, but it isn't always easy to find the path which leads to true humility. How do we begin on that path? Where is the starting point of true humility? Well, the place to begin is with yourself. But not so much in public places where many people can see how humble we are, but away from the rush of things.

In quiet places of uninterrupted solitude, a person needs to submit to the rigour of self-evaluation. Because when you think about it, there are many things that should keep us humble. For example, our physical and bodily weaknesses should keep us humble, Psalm 103:13-16.
A person can be an architect or an astronomer, they can be a soldier or a politician, but no person is as mighty as they would like to be. There are paths that people can't go, there are cliffs and mountains that they can't scale, and there are galaxies they can't subdue.

And because mankind lives their days amid suffering and tears, we don't know how to ward off pain, and we're unable to defend ourselves against certain diseases.

We can't disguise the inevitable marks of old age, even though some try plastic surgery. We can't bribe away death, and when you think about it, death alone is sufficient enough to keep mankind humble. And you know, when you think about our bodies, they can so quickly get out of balance.

Our body systems can be easily disturbed and so quickly break down, sometimes without any notice. But all these things show us how insecure life really is. And when we dare to remember these things, selfish pride will soon vanish away.

Another thing which should keep us humble is our mental limitations. For centuries, mankind has been accumulating facts and perfecting methods. And if you gathered all the knowledge mankind has together and placed it into a storehouse, it would still be infinitely smaller compared to all the things mankind doesn't know yet, Job 36:26-29.
Advancements in technology and scientific breakthroughs come painfully slowly. And no one is more aware of this than the scholar, a real scholar in whatever field they specialise in, who is continually shamed by their ignorance.

Think about it! A man may be able to speak ten different languages, but he may not know how to change a fuse in a plug. A woman may be an international authority on the literary classics, but she may not be able to drive a car. An expert on machines, computers and technology may not be able to spell a simple three-syllable word correctly.

The simple truth is that life has grown to such proportions that no one is able to be a master of all the arts, and no one is able to master all of the sciences. So the littleness of our knowledge ought to be enough to keep us humble.

Another example of what should keep us humble is our weaknesses and failures. Nowhere are our defects more obvious to us than in our moral conduct. Christians ought to be aware of their sin; the purest and noblest of Christians should always be conscious of their sin.

The apostle Paul was very much aware of his sin, Romans 7:21-24. In fact, he was so aware of his sin that every time he looked at someone else, he didn't condemn them; he looked at himself, 1 Timothy 1:15.
An honest examination of ourselves will bring us face-to-face with ourselves. And when we see ourselves clearly, we will come away from the mirror seeing just how small we really are. And if you struggle to see yourself clearly, then try praying, Psalm 139:23-24.
How many of us would be willing right now to face God in Judgement on the terms of our own natural goodness and on the basis of the works which we have done in His name?

The grand total of all our goodness and all our generosity and all our good deeds is shamefully small. This, above all things, should make us conscious of our necessity for humility. When a person meets Jesus Christ and places his life next to Jesus' life, the marked difference brings guilt and grief.

On that last night, a quarrel broke out among Jesus' disciples, Luke 22:24-27. We don't know how their argument started, but since Jesus gathered His group to eat the Passover, which was the most important Jewish observance, it's quite likely that the strife was over the seating arrangements. And what a sad picture this is, in Jesus' last hours of His life, His own disciples, just like the Pharisees before, were scrambling over the seats of distinction.
And so Jesus put an end to the dispute by asking them in Luke 22:27, 'For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table?'
And according to John 13:1-17, Jesus washed their feet. And what did they do? They sat there dumbfounded, they sat there utterly disgraced, not believing that they could act so selfishly.
The people in Jesus' day didn't believe that a man who pushes himself would be lower. The people in Jesus' day didn't believe that a man who lowers himself would in the end be victorious.

If God was willing to come down to earth in the form of Jesus Christ and wash people's feet, then surely we should too, Mark 10:45. Jesus served, His disciples served, Acts 16:17, the early church served, then we should be serving too and Christian you must serve, Matthew 25:21 / Romans 12:6-7.

'Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Luke 14:12-15

One of the greatest qualities which dominated the life of Jesus was His unselfishness. While He was eating dinner in the presence of the Pharisees, Jesus' thoughts turned to the many people who hadn't been invited, and so He spoke to His host in the plainest of terms, Luke 14:12.
Jesus tells the host, when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours because they may invite you back and so you will be repaid, Luke 14:12. Jesus says, instead he should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and he will be blessed, Luke 14:13-14.
Boles, in his commentary, says the following.

'It is far better to give to relieve the distressed than to set a feast to those who do not need it.'

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous, Luke 14:14.
Henry, in his commentary, says the following.

'The exclusive mention in this place of rewards to the righteous does not in the least imply that the wicked shall not receive their reward, which is so clearly stated elsewhere.'

Make no mistake about this, these were hard words. I would imagine the host staring at Jesus with anger and rage in his eyes. But that didn't deter Jesus; he just stood His ground.

Have you ever been talking with someone about a subject that you just don't want to talk about? When that happens to me, I usually try to change the subject or say something that will make my thinking a little easier.

Well, that's what happens next because from nowhere one of the other guests tries to break the spell and dismiss the question by saying, 'Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God, Luke 14:15. And so, Jesus responds with a parable that compares His kingdom to a banquet furnished by God.

THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT BANQUET

"A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' "But they all alike began to make excuses."
Luke 14:16-18

Before we get into the parable, we need to mention Matthew's account. In Matthew 22:1-14, we find a similar parable by Jesus to the one we have just read. 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.

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a sumptuous banquet, Luke 14:16. It's very significant that in most of this chapter, Jesus talks a lot about feasts and banquets. And so in this atmosphere, Jesus talks about entering the kingdom of heaven as coming to a feast.
Now I don't know about you, but I hate rumours. I hate them because they may have an element of truth about them, but mostly they are extended lies about an event or a person. And so what started as a rumour has now become a fact in some people's eyes.

During the days of Jesus, there was a rumour that went around that the Jews believed as fact; even today, many Jews still believe it as fact. It was a common belief at that time that when the Messiah came, in the golden age of His reign, all of the Jews would be invited to sit at His table. And so with that in mind, Jesus uses this popular notion and teaches that the kingdom is like a banquet.

It's not a long, dreary funeral procession; it's a festive occasion of warm fellowship and unheard of delight. And remember that Jesus didn't come to darken an already gloomy world; His mission was to bring good news. And I wish the world would recognise that Jesus' message of good news has been distorted beyond the point of recognition.

Multitudes of people have come to believe that people can't enjoy themselves and still be a Christian. And many people have misconceptions about Christianity because they have a distorted view of Jesus. Yes, Isaiah 53:3 indeed describes Him as a 'Man of sorrows', but this view has been magnified out of proportion.
A man named Publius Lentulus wrote a commentary on behalf of Pontius Pilate, which incidentally was written some three-four hundred years later, and in it he describes Jesus. Listen to the way he describes Him.

'In reproof and rebuke, He is formidable, in exhortation and teaching, gentle and amiable. He has never been seen to laugh, but oftentimes to weep. His person is tall and erect. His hands and limbs are beautiful and straight. In speaking, He is deliberate and grave and little given to loquacity, in the beauty He surpasses the children of men.'

And this image of Jesus had a lasting effect on the art and sculpture of succeeding ages, so that even today, Jesus is seen as a man who never laughed. Is this what Jesus was like? If Jesus lived in a way to enjoy life, then surely His disciples should do the same.

We're not expected in 'Monk fashion' to withdraw from the world and punish ourselves. We're not expected to be like the Pharisees and bind ourselves with a code so strict that even toys for children are condemned as 'works of the flesh.'

Jesus said, 'His kingdom is one of Joy', Isaiah 35:10. Not a joy of bodily depravity and sensual living but the joys that are spiritual and eternal. Now there are three excuses given, but they can be divided into two classes.
The first two have to do with earthly possessions, and the third concerns earthly ties. And we're going to look at the excuses in more depth in a minute, but let me first say this.

That word 'alike' in Luke 14:18 is interesting because it doesn't mean they couldn't go or they simply said, 'No thank you'. What basically means is that they simply 'didn't want to go'. First, let's look at the first two excuses, the earthly possessions.

> "The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'" Luke 14:18-19

Now there is little difference between the two excuses. Both men are absorbed in their own interests; both men were so tied up in their business affairs that they had no time for anything else. They were saying, 'they had too much to do, so they couldn't come', Luke 14:18-19.
How many times have we heard that excuse over the years? It's like focusing on 'self' is everything, and the 'life that is now' gets more attention. Their business is their Bible, and making a living is their creed. They rarely seem to have time for other people and never have any time for God.

God knew that all of mankind would struggle with this, and so what He did to help us take our minds away from our earthly possessions is institute what He calls the Lord's Day.

It's a special occasion and a special service of worship on the first day of every week. And Sundays are the days that He gives us a special call to put aside all of our concerns of the week and give attention to the concerns of God.

And as we meet every week with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we each encourage one another, and each of us reflects upon the sacrifice of Christ, as we're reminded again of the cost of sin, Matthew 4:4.
Some Christians don't like Hebrews 10:25, is because it is a direct command from the Holy Spirit, through the Hebrew writer, for us to continually come together. And the ones who don't like this verse are those who are already in the habit of not meeting together.
People who don't meet together could end up like Demas, 2 Timothy 4:10. It's not so much a matter of commitment; it's a matter of encouragement, James 5:5. Let's look at the third excuse, the earthly ties.

"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'" Luke 14:20

Now this man's excuse is a little more difficult to understand because of one of the beautiful Laws written in the Book of Deuteronomy. Maybe the man was basing his excuse on this particular Law found in Deuteronomy 24:5, and maybe he felt that he had a perfectly good excuse.
He placed the obligation of his family and his home first, and he thought that everybody would understand. But when you think about it, it's a paradox that something as lovely and sweet as a home can stand between a man and his God, Genesis 2:24. But that doesn't mean that he's to leave his Father in heaven.
When we think about our homes, they're among our greatest blessings, but as we know, many a blessing can turn into a disaster. Because there are at least two ways in which we can use our homes wrongly.

1. Our home and our family ties can occupy the chief spot in our hearts, Luke 14:20 / Luke 14:26.
We're going to look more at this in a moment, but for now, let me say that Jesus commands an exclusive affection; He wants the whole heart.

2. Our homes can be used selfishly.

We can come home after a hard day at work and want to do nothing but relax and enjoy ourselves. Or we can spend much time and effort making our homes so liveable that we wrap ourselves up in luxury and shut others out.

Regardless of how our homes are built, the windows should always look out for the needs of others. This is the way the first-century church thought of their homes, and it's the way we should think about our homes, Romans 12:13 / Hebrews 13:2. Practising this remains one of the great glories of a Christian home.

"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full." Luke 14:21-23

The flimsy excuses made the host angry, Luke 14:21, especially with those whom he invited but didn't want to come. So He sent His servant out into the city, He sent Him onto the streets, and the alleys, Luke 14:21. The poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame were invited, Luke 14:21.
When the servant returns, he tells his master that there is still room for more, Luke 14:22. He wanted His house full and so, He sent the servant out into what we would call the slums, Luke 13:23.
Isn't that a wonderful truth of general application that God wants His house to be full? He's abundant in mercy and desires the salvation of all, Romans 5:17. Once His invitation is refused, He returns again and goes to others in order that some will feast at His banquet, Luke 14:23.
I mean, this is a universal invitation to come and feast at the Lord's Table, Matthew 28:19. The Gospel is for all, the love of God desires a multitude of guests.
What a sight it must have been! The cripples, the downcast, the poor with their heads bowed. The blind groping around for a place to sit, the lame leaning on their crutches.

Now, what's Jesus' point here? The point is that Jesus was saying to the Jews that they had rejected the Messiah, and they wouldn't sit at the Messiah's table. He's telling them that the lower classes of people, the publicans, sinners and even the heathens are going to take their place at the table, that's what He's telling them.

"I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet." Luke 14:24

We need to remember that it was a happy group of people and a happy occasion. And I wish we could just leave the story on that happy note, but I can't because there are still the others, the ones who didn't come in. This is bad news for those who rejected His offer, but great news for us, Luke 14:14.

They had closed themselves out, they had sent different excuses, yet there was only one reason why they didn't come. They loved things too much, they rejected a generous Host, and they rejected His grace.

Imagine what it would be like! For some to be filled with the bread of life and for others to be dying of hunger! For some to have living water at their feet and for others to be dying of thirst! Matthew 5:6. Jesus' invitation is open to you all. Please don't make an excuse to refuse your personal invite to feast at His table today.

THE COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE

"Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers, and sisters–yes, even his own life–he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:25-27

Many people pledge allegiance to Jesus Christ, but their actions don't back up their allegiance. I don't know about you, but I believe the mark of a great leader is to state very clearly the conditions that must be met by those who follow him.

You can't join the army and just expect to do your own thing; you have to do what the commanding officer asks of you. You wouldn't accept a job until you've had a job interview to find out exactly what the terms and conditions of your contract are, and if you didn't agree with the contract, then you wouldn't take the job.

Jesus was that type of a leader. He very clearly laid out the conditions that must be met by anyone who wants to follow Him. Great multitudes of people had been following Jesus, and many people were excited about Him, Luke 14:25.
Some of them thought that as a Messiah, He would drive out the Roman mass. Others in the crowd were fascinated with His strange teaching and His mighty works, and many others were just curious.

But to this motley crowd of people who were turning the whole thing into a playful extravaganza. Jesus tells the crowd that if you want to follow Him, then here are some terms and conditions.

1. Hate your father, mother, wife, and kids and even your own life, Luke 14:26.
Before we get into the text, we need to look at what Jesus means when He tells the crowd to hate their families and their lives. We need to understand just what kind of hate Jesus is looking for from His followers. Did Jesus literally mean that we should hate our families and our own lives?

If you believe that He meant these words to be taken literally, then you come into some problems with some of Jesus' other teachings. And we know that Jesus doesn't contradict Himself; the problem usually lies in our understanding of what we're reading.

Jesus didn't seek to crush the tender relationships of human friendships and love. He taught His followers in Matthew 5:43-48, to 'love even their enemies.' In Mark 7:9-13, He taught His followers to 'Honour their parents'. On the cross, He committed the care of His mother to a trusted friend in John 19:26-27.
In Matthew 5:21-26, He spoke against anger and hatred of one's brother and said that it was a kind of murder. Little children, He gathered in His arms and blessed in Mark 10:13-16.
His whole life and His teachings made it quite clear that people were to be loved. Jesus isn't contradicting Himself, no! The way to understand what He means is in the word 'hate'.

For example, it doesn't mean that we're to love our relatives with a diminished love, because this would be opposed to the heart and soul of Christianity, Ephesians 5:25 / 1 Peter 1:22.

We may indeed love the Lord too little, but we cannot love any human being too much. And we will never love the Lord more by loving our human friends less. And so, what does Jesus mean when He says that 'we are to hate our own life?' Luke 14:26. In what sense are we to hate ourselves, like we're to hate our relatives and friends?
It's an awareness of sin in our own lives and the lives of our friends and family. A Christian must hate whatever is in himself, which is low and biased; he must hate everything which is greedy and selfish. Anything which drags him away from Christ and robs him of his real self and true values.

A Christian ought to love his relatives and friends as they love themselves and hate them as he hates himself. In other words, whatever is in them, which is pure and right, he's to love.

Whatever is in them, which is unclean and self-indulgent, he's to hate. That's why Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was to 'love your neighbour as yourself,' Mark 12:30-31.
Remember when Jesus was telling the disciples that the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, and be killed, and after three days He will be resurrected? The Bible says that Peter rebuked Jesus, but then Jesus went on to rebuke him, Mark 8:32-33.
What's the point? Well, the point is that even if a person's friend comes to stand between him and his Lord, then a choice needs to be made. A choice between the natural affection of a friend and a devotion to their Saviour Jesus Christ.

And sadly, that's where many a Christian falls, where friends and family give us a choice sometimes daily. We're faced with choices every day, and the way to deal with those choices is to ask ourselves a simple question.

Which choice has in mind the things of God? And which choice has in mind the things of men? Too many Christians choose wrongly; that's why they have abandoned the faith, 1 Timothy 6:21, and you never see them anymore.
But the true followers of Christ will always be and must be ready to treat their dearest friends and family as enemies. So that's what Jesus means when He asks His followers to hate their families and friends.

2. We must carry our cross.

Jesus says, whoever does not carry their cross and follow Him cannot be His disciple, Luke 14:27 / Matthew 10:38 / Matthew 16:24. Jesus plainly explained what was required to become His disciple.
He said that you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, Luke 14:27 / Matthew 10:38 / Matthew 16:24 / Mark 8:34-9:1 / Luke 9:23. 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.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:28-33

It's now that Jesus goes on to share some other conditions, which first must be met before you even think about becoming a follower of Christ. Now, this text should be very familiar to all of us because I know that most of us use these Scriptures a lot when we're studying with people who are thinking about becoming Christians.

People need to be aware that there's a cost involved in becoming a disciple of Christ. And Jesus is uncompromisingly honest. He's going to spell it out, what's required of everyone who wants to become a Christian.

And if you're not a Christian today, then I beg of you to listen closely to Jesus' words. And if you are a Christian this morning, then I suggest that you listen closely and reflect on the commitment that you made when you declared allegiance to Jesus Christ.

3. Am I willing to follow Him to the end?

Many people want to follow Jesus, provided the way is easy and pleasant, but when the going gets hard, and the road stretches long, they give it all up. The first parable we read presents this as a distinct possibility for every Christian.

Many a Christian starts with a spurt but never finishes the race, but Jesus knew that was going to happen anyway, didn't He? Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus never said that the Christian race was going to be a sprint; He said it's going to be a marathon.
The Christian journey lasts until the journey ends. You don't become a Christian and then a couple of months or years later decide to count the cost again and give up.

Why? Why would that be a bad choice? It would be a bad choice because the end will be worse, 2 Peter 2:21. Peter is talking about people who were Christians, but after a few miles down the road, they gave up. But they didn't just give up Christ, they turned their backs on Christ, and crucified Him all over again, Hebrews 6:4-6.
That's why you need to understand these words of Jesus before you become a Christian. And if you ever wondered why Jesus' words seem so serious, it's because following Him is a serious business. In every department of life, it's always better to be honest with yourself and face the facts.

Everyone who wants to achieve anything in life must be aware of the sacrifices that need to be made. God wants us to be aware of those sacrifices, even before we commit our lives to Him. Please don't get Jesus wrong here. He's not trying to dampen people's enthusiasm.

He's saying that the hard facts of the Christian life must be faced.
In John 16:33, He told His disciples, 'In this world, you will have trouble.' But Jesus goes on to say in that verse, 'But take heart! I have overcome the world.'
And Jesus isn't saying that it's better not to begin than to begin and fail with a flourish of trumpets; He's not saying that. But what He's saying is that it's better not to begin than to begin with a flourish of trumpets.

There's no greater challenge for any of mankind than the challenge of living the life of a Christian. There's no challenge that exceeds the thrill of the Christian way of living. 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, Luke 14:28-33 / 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, Luke 14:31-32. Before one becomes a disciple, he must first consider whether he can win the battle, 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.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." Luke 14:34-35

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? Luke 14:34 / Matthew 5:13 / 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, Luke 14:35 / Matthew 5:13 / 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.

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

"Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Luke 15:1-2

This chapter is probably one of the best-loved chapters in the Bible. Some people describe it as 'The Gospel within the Gospel', and certainly, in many ways, we do have the Gospel in miniature here in this chapter. And as someone once said, 'It contained the very distilled essence of the good news which Jesus had come to tell."

We can all see little defects in people at times, but we should never let those defects stop us from approaching them with the Gospel of Christ. In our first parable, we find Jesus sharing His truths with our dear friends, the Pharisees, and the teachers of the Law.

Have you ever had people telling you that you shouldn't hang out with certain people? Maybe you're talking with someone who is known as a drunkard, and other passers-by take note of it. Maybe you've seen talking with a drug dealer in the street, and the people around take notice of you both.

And when you look over at them, you can see them whispering things about you because of the person you're speaking to. And they're probably saying things like, 'If he only knew who he was talking to, if he only knew what kind of person that was.' And when we as Christians talk to anyone who doesn't fit in with society's idea of acceptable, society takes it as an offence.

In Luke 7, when Jesus is invited into a Pharisee's house, a woman comes in off the street, and it's clear that she's not welcome. And so Jesus says to Simon in Luke 7:33, 'Simon, do you see this woman?' I mean, how could he not see the woman? She's standing there in front of him.
The problem was Simon saw a tramp, Simon saw a sinner, an unclean woman, someone who wasn't good enough to be saved. But the point is that just like Simon, many people are offended when we say that the Gospel is for those kinds of people, too.

That's the kind of thing that's going on here. It was an offence to the Jewish leaders that Jesus should be seen in association with the tax collectors and sinners, Luke 15:1. By their own regulations, a Pharisee was forbidden to be the guest of any such man, Luke 15:2.
They were even forbidden to have these people as their guests. They weren't allowed to have any dealings with tax collectors and sinners as far as it was possible. They couldn't even buy anything from them or even sell anything to them. They were to try to avoid any contact with them altogether.

Now that we understand the Pharisees' thinking, we can see why they were shocked by Jesus' actions. But they weren't just shocked, they were shocked to the core because this man, who claimed to be their Messiah, wanted so much to spend time in the company with those outsiders. In their minds, if you had anything to do with sinners, you were guaranteed to be corrupted.

Their attitude wasn't so much, 'there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents,' but rather it was 'there is joy in heaven when one sinner is obliterated before God.'

They looked sadistically forward, not to the saving of the sinner but the destruction of the sinner. And it's because these religious leaders considered themselves already in the fold that Jesus tells them they should be glad that He was seeking those who were outside the fold.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

"Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'" Luke 15:3-6

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning 'the parable recorded in Matthew 18:11-14'.
'Christ spoke this parable twice, evidently for a different purpose on each occasion. In Matthew's account, 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.'
This is certainly one of the simplest of parables that Jesus ever taught, Luke 15:3. And in Judea at this time, it was all so easy for a sheep to go astray. The pastureland was in the hill country, which would run like a backbone down the middle of the land.
Now, this ridge-like plateau was very narrow; it was only a few miles across and at its best, this pastureland was bare, and so the sheep were very liable to wander.

And in their search for more grass, they would wander off into little gullies and ravines, and very often they would end up on some ledge where they couldn't get back up or down. And all too often, many would just stay there until they died.

Here in this parable, we have one of Jesus' favourite pictures of God. A picture of a loving, caring shepherd who brought home the wanderer. And so what I want to do is share with you five small 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, Luke 15:4 / Matthew 18:12. 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. And they would go to any lengths to bring that sheep back, Luke 15:4 / Matthew 18:12.
And we would do the same with our family members, wouldn't we? No matter how big your family is, if one of them goes astray, you would go to great lengths to find them and bring them back to safety.

My point is, even though some people have got ten children, if one goes missing, that's one that they cannot do without. And that's because there's no one who doesn't matter. And our God is like that, He's not happy until the last one is gathered in.

Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:15 that when he recognised that he was a sinner, he also understood that God's love was an individual love. And like we've always said, if you're not a Christian, then God wants to offer that same individual love to you today.

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. And we do that with people all the time, especially with those who are foolish sometimes.

What do we say when people get into some kind of trouble? I'll tell you what we say, we say, 'Well, it's their own fault, they brought it on themselves, don't waste any sympathy on them.'

Let me tell you something, thank God, God isn't like that. The sheep might be foolish, but thank God the Good Shepherd would still risk His life to save them. Thank God for John 10:11, where Jesus says, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.'

Thank God for 2 Peter 3:9, where Peter says, 'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'

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.

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, Luke 15:4 / Matthew 18:12.

Because if they couldn't leave the sheep with other shepherds when they returned, they would find that other sheep would have gone astray. When Jesus came to earth, He came on a search and rescue mission; He came to search for the lost and rescue them from their sins. But the point is that He came for us. The shepherd wasn't willing to wait for the sheep to come back. He went out to search for it, Luke 15:4 / Matthew 18:12.

And that's what the Jews, even today, cannot understand about the Christian idea of God. The Jew would gladly agree with us if we said that if the sinner comes crawling wretchedly home to God, then God would forgive them. But we know our God is far more wonderful than that.

For in Christ Jesus, God came to seek and to search for those who wander. He's not content to wait until men come home, Oh, no! He goes and searches for them, no matter what it costs Him.

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, Luke 19:10 / John 10:7-10 / 1 John 4:9-10. But Jesus says He didn't come to seek and destroy. 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, Luke 15:5 / Matthew 18:13. 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.

But we can imagine how the other shepherds would return with their flocks to the village in the evening and how they would tell how one shepherd was still out in the mountains seeking the wanderer.

And imagine the eyes of those villagers, watching over the mountains, waiting, and looking for the shepherd who hadn't come home yet. And then off in the distance, they would see a little figure of someone getting closer to the village.

And as that figure gets closer, they realise that this is the shepherd, and the joy on their faces would be great to see. But as he gets closer, they notice that he's carrying this wanderer of a sheep across his shoulders, and it's still alive. And the whole village would come out and joyfully surround him and welcome him home, Luke 15:6.
Now, if that were the church, I wonder how we would react? I wonder if we would say things like, 'Where have you been for the past few months? What sinful acts have you been involved in? Do you need to confess anything before the whole church today?'

With Jesus, there are no accusations, there's no receiving back with grudges, there's no superior contempt; it's all about joy, Galatians 6:1. And instead of the church accepting a person who is repentant with a moral lecture and making it clear that they must see themselves as a disgraceful person.
And instead of making it clear that we're never going to trust them again, maybe we can be like God, who forgets our past sins and doesn't hold our sins against us. God has thrown our sins into the depths of the sea, Micah 7:19, and there are warning signs all around the shore. And do you know what those signs say? No fishing.
We shouldn't be in the business of dragging up the past sins in our own lives, never mind the sins of other people's lives if God has thrown them away, Psalm 103:8-12.
And so 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. Then we too can be happy like Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:14.

"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." Luke 15:7

Do you realise that you can give heaven an excuse to party? Luke 15:7. I know that many people, after they have been in prison for a few years, often get together with their families to celebrate their newfound freedom.
But let me tell you that's nothing like the celebration that breaks out in heaven when someone returns to God after going back to the world. 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 / Luke 15:10.
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. Now 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.
That's why Paul could say in 2 Corinthians 12:10, 'For when I am weak, then I am strong.' 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.

So Jesus says, no one will snatch us from God's mighty hands, John 10:27-30, and that's because He's a protecting God. That's the Gospel, that's the Gospel according to Christ.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:8-10

Now this parable is closely related to 'The parable of the lost sheep', Luke 15:1-7. But it's also closely related to 'The parable of the lost son', Luke 15:11-32. All three parables go together, and that's because they all come from the same source.

In other words, the parables are told to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who were condemning Jesus for associating with sinners, Luke 15:1-2. And so what Jesus is doing in all three parables is explaining why He associates with such people.

The coin in question here is a silver drachma, Luke 15:8, which by our standards is worth very little. But during Jesus' time, this was worth a lot; it was equivalent to just over a day's wage. So now we can understand why this woman was so desperate to find the lost coin, Luke 15:8; it meant the difference between eating and starving.

And in those days, like some people in the world today, most people lived very much on the edge of things. And we see that in Matthew 20:1-16, when Jesus talked about 'The parable of the vineyard workers.'

When all the men stood at the marketplace all day long, waiting for the opportunity to work, very little stood between them, living and starving. She turned the house upside down because whether or not she found it would determine whether or not her family would eat.

Remember that Jesus is talking about His relationship with sinners and tax collectors. I want to share with you a couple of points about this parable, to help you understand it possibly in a way that you've never thought about before.

1. How was the coin lost?

There's no arguing that the woman herself lost the coin, Luke 15:8. Maybe it was through stupidity, carelessness or even neglect. In either case, the woman was responsible; it was her own fault that the coin was lost. So we can't blame the coin, because the coin was lost through no direct fault of its own.

And unlike the sheep, which we looked at last time, which strayed and became lost through its own stupidity, Luke 15:3, the coin was completely passive. In other words, the coin being lost was someone else's responsibility.

And again, unlike the sheep, the coin couldn't wander back. It couldn't shout out to the woman that it was lost, and when you think about it, it's a coin, it wouldn't even realise it was lost.

The point I'm trying to make is that all the searching had to be done by someone else. I've said it before, and I'll say it again, God in the human form of Jesus The Christ came on a search and rescue mission, Luke 19:10.

He came to search for that which was lost and bring them to salvation. And that includes us, that includes every single human being on this planet that's willing to let Him save them, Titus 2:11.

2. How are people lost?

Now it would be very easy to go off the mark with this parable and make applications that can't be made. But every person who is lost is lost because of their own sin, but remember that the coin is passive; people aren't.

No person is lost just because of the sin of someone else. In other words, you're responsible for your own sins; you can't go blaming others for your sins, Ezekiel 18:1-4.
But the question is, what kind of influence do you have on others? The influence we have on other people can determine where they spend eternity. Do you realise the power you have to influence people?

Titus tells us how we can influence other saints in the church and those who oppose our teachings, Titus 2:7-8. And Paul reminds us that it's the church that's to do the influencing, not the world, Ephesians 4:17-19.
In other words, our Christian lifestyles, teachings, and beliefs should be the very things that influence the people around us, but we shouldn't let it happen the other way around. What did Jesus say about you and salt? Matthew 5:13.
You're not the salt of your church building, you're not the salt of your house. You know, when you look in a salt dish, what do you see? Ah, salt, you may say, well, what I see when I look around at some Christians, is salt enjoying the company of the same salt.

But Jesus says, you're not the salt in a salt dish, you're the salt of the earth, now go and season and influence the people in your world with that salt, Matthew 5:13.
Mix with the ungodly salt and influence it until it becomes godly salt. The word 'yeast' used in Bible terms often relates to evil influence, Matthew 16:6. That's what Jesus meant in Matthew 23:15.
But the point I'm trying to get across is that people can influence people. And as Christians, we should influence people for the good, but we need to be on our guard against the world influencing us with evil.

And that can come in many different forms; it can come in the form of false teaching. It can come in the form of a lack of church attendance, where it's not important for you to come to worship regularly. It can come in the form of a tired attitude towards sin.

Because if your influence helps someone to decide to become a Christian, they're just going to follow your example. They won't think that the Bible is important if you don't think it's important.

They won't think it's important to come to worship to meet with other Christians if you don't think it's important to come to worship and be with other Christians. They won't think it's all that important to give up some sin in their lives if you don't think it's important to give up the sin which is in your life.

But the question is, who is influencing whom? When you let the world influence your religion, your religion becomes worthless. Just like the coin in the parable, when a coin is lost, it becomes worthless.

You know, when a coin goes out of circulation, it still has its basic worth. In other words, five pence lost is still worth five pence, and ten pence lost is still worth ten pence. But any coin that's out of circulation and unused is worthless. Money is only good when it's used and circulated.

And what Jesus is teaching us here is that He could see that people could wear the name God and could live the will of God, but yet they were lost to God. Their soul is still worth more than the whole world, but their souls aren't given to God; they're lost, Romans 1:18-21.
People are lost, and they're not even bothered about it, and why aren't they bothered? Because they don't even recognise they're lost. A woman loses one coin, so what? What's a coin?

The world says, 'forget it, it's just a coin.' The Scribes and Pharisees thought that way about sinners. Why be bothered, the lowly, the outcast and the poor, why bother?

A coin may be just a coin, and some people may care less, but coins have more than their monetary value. Just as this coin was to its owner, she got a lamp, lit it, and searched the whole house to find what was lost. How keen are we at searching for the lost in the same manner?

She was overwhelmed with joy, Luke 15:9, finding that lost coin was more important to her than the other nine coins she didn't lose. Why? Because they were already safe, she knew exactly where they were; they were in her possession.
God loves us and cares for us and gives us grace and peace and eternal life. But nothing makes Him and His heavenly hosts happier than someone who turns their back on their sinful lifestyle and turns toward God for a godly one, Luke 15:10 / Luke 15:7. Just like when the shepherd brings home the lost sheep, heaven rejoices.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

'Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.' Luke 15:11-12

Most people know the parable of 'The lost son' or 'The prodigal son' pretty well, but maybe it should be called, 'The parable of the loving Father'. The word 'prodigal' means 'wasteful'.

Before we make some applications with this parable, let's see if we can understand the background to it first. Under Jewish Law, the terms by which a father assigned his inheritance were quite specific.

The law clearly stated that the firstborn son was to receive a double portion, Deuteronomy 21:17. In other words, two-thirds of the father's property went to his firstborn son, and so the son who went away in the parable only owned one-third of it.
And very often during Biblical times, a person didn't have to wait until their father died to get their inheritance; the father just gave them their share of his possessions before he died.

Jesus says there was a man who had two sons, and the younger son demanded his share of the inheritance from his father, Luke 15:12. He couldn't wait; he wanted his inheritance right there and then.
The younger son in the parable didn't speak to anyone about his decision, and make no mistake about it, his request was callous and heartless. Basically, what he's saying to his father is, 'give me now the part of my estate that I'm going get when you're dead anyway.' He's saying, 'give it to me now, so that I can get out of here.'

Most children go through a rebellious stage at some point in their lives. Most of them, when they're in their teens and that's possibly what's happening here. The younger son feels he's been the baby of the family for long enough, and now it's time for him to strike out and go it alone.

Now, if that were you or me, I'm sure most of us who have kids would certainly strike back. We wouldn't let them go without a moral lecture, but I want you to notice how the father deals with the situation.

He didn't argue with him, he didn't try to persuade his son otherwise, he simply divided his property between his two sons and let the younger one go, Luke 15:12. But why? Why didn't he give him a moral lecture like so many of us would do? Why did he simply let him go?
Well, he let him go simply because he knew his son well enough to know that if his son was ever going to learn anything, he was going to have to learn the hard way. That's why he gave in to his request, and some people are like that; they will never learn until they learn the hard way.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs." Luke 15:13-15

The younger son goes to a distant country and squanders all his money, Luke 15:13. A severe famine struck the land, and he was starving, and he was desperate, Luke 15:14, and desperate times call for desperate measures.
We might be thinking, well, at least when times were hard for him, he got a job working with pigs, Luke 15:15. Well, let me tell you, what you think of a pig is totally opposite to what the Jews thought about pigs. In Leviticus 11:1-8, when God is speaking to Moses about unclean animals, he gives a list of animals they cannot eat, and a pig is one of them, it is an unclean animal, Leviticus 11:7.
To you and me, working with a pig is no big deal but to a Jew, a pig was an unclean animal, this was lower than low. To this guy, this was the most degrading and humiliating task possible.

"He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!" Luke 15:16-17

Despite his job, he's still starving and lonely, and nobody would help, Luke 15:16. He knew he was better off at home because his father would take care of his needs, Luke 15:17. When things weren't going to plan, he ended up in a pigpen and then he realised what was happening.
And there's a great lesson for the church here, isn't there? We can't force people to stay faithful; we can't make Christians go to worship and attend all the Bible studies.

Sometimes, we need to let people go and learn from their mistakes so that they can come to their senses, and see what they had when they were in fellowship and let them see that they have made a mistake. The younger brother realised he was better off at home; he knew that there would be food at home, Luke 15:17.

"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father." Luke 15:18-20

He even knew that his father's servants would have food leftover, Luke 15:17. He already had it all worked out what he would say to his father when he got back home. He was going to confess to his father that he had sinned against him and heaven, Luke 15:18.
Now, this took courage; this was true humility that the younger brother showed here. Because he intended to ask his father to take him back as a hired servant, not as a son, Luke 15:19.
And you need to realise that there's a difference between a hired servant and an ordinary servant. The ordinary servant was in some sense a member of the family, but the hired servant could be dismissed at a day's notice.

He wasn't part of the family at all because a hired servant only worked one day at a time. He had no guarantee of employment, and as we know, he lived on the edge of starvation.

Think about what he's done and is doing. He left home as a prince, and he's willing to return as a lowly labourer. He didn't just get a few things like an inheritance; his father was rich.

He had full-time servants and part-time servants, and that was a sign of wealth back then. It was time for humility, time for submission, time for swallowing his pride.

Let's take a closer look at what he did.

1. 'He came to his senses', Luke 15:17.

In other words, he was out of his mind when he left his home, and it's only now that he truly sees himself for the first time. It's never easy taking a close look at yourself because sometimes what you see is some very scary facts about your life. But when he comes to his senses, that's the point at which he is starting his return to his father.

2. 'He will set out and go,' Luke 15:18.
That was the decision that he had pushed furthest to the back of his mind, but now that he saw himself more clearly, he saw his father in a different light. And let me tell you, when you look at yourself clearly, your opinions of the people around you change, too, don't they?

3. 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son, Luke 15:18.
Here's his confession: in other words, when he reached a decision to return to his father, he already had his confession prepared. But notice his confession, there's no messing around with his words, there are no excuses for what he had done.

4. 'He got up and went,' Luke 15:20.
He didn't hesitate; he just got up and went. There was no thinking time between the saying and doing. Nothing was going to change his mind, nothing was going to tempt him to stay away. And when you think about it, there are many people in the world today who aren't Christians who are caught between the saying and the doing.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." Luke 15:20-24

Notice the Father's reactions to His returning son. That's the example the church has to follow. No moral lectures, no making them people feel inferior when they return, just pure joy.

While the younger son was still a long way off, his father saw him, Luke 15:20, implying that he was looking out for his return. The father was filled with compassion, and so, he ran to his son, Luke 15:20. Don't underestimate what the father did here by running to his son.
In Bible times, men often wore long white outer garments which went down to their ankles because it was considered shameful to show their shins. For the father to run, he would have to lift up his outer garment to run. This tells us that the father was willing to take upon himself his son's shame, Hebrews 12:2.
The father now throws his arms around his son and kisses him, Luke 15:20. The son now confesses his sin to the father, Luke 15:21 / Luke 15:18. Notice that the father doesn't lecture his son about his actions like many parents would today when their children go off and do something stupid.
Instead of lecturing his son, the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him, Luke 15:22.
The servant is also told to put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, Luke 15:22.
The servant is also told to bring the fattened calf and kill it, let's have a feast and celebrate, Luke 15:23. And the reason for the celebration is because his son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found, Luke 15:24. So they began to celebrate, Luke 15:24.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The ring, the robe, the shoes. All these were the signs of the sonship which the father restored to him, the signet ring, in particular, indicating that the father undertook to pay all of his debts. The new clothing and the status at the father's table are fitting emblems of the salvation which God bestows upon his returning children.'

In the parables of 'The lost sheep, The lost coin and The lost son', Jesus teaches us a great deal about mankind. Jesus teaches us that men are lost. And it's interesting that Jesus very seldom called men "sinners", but rather he spoke of them as being lost.

When Jesus is sending out the twelve, He tells them not to go to the Gentiles or any Samaritan towns, but He tells them in Matthew 10:6, 'Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.'
When Jesus' disciples were being harassed by a woman who had a demon-possessed girl, Jesus said in Matthew 15:24, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' Jesus isn't saying that He counted them as moral wretches or outlaws in headstrong rebellion against God. But it was simply that men were misguided and disillusioned and needed to get back on the right road.
And people are still like that today, aren't they? They are lost like 'the sheep' described in Luke 15:3-7. They don't revolt against God, they don't fight against His church, they simply slip away from Him step by step, Hebrews 2:1. Many people do drift away; they slip away with the tide of the world and become spiritually numb. People are also like 'the coin' described in Luke 15:8-10. Although there's a difference between coins and people, the coin was lost through no fault of its own.
But with men, there's always the responsibility of choice that governs their destiny, so the coin was lost in the sense that man could never be. But many people's lives are wrecked, and it's true that this may not always be because of their own fault, but because of the faults of other men.

And finally, men are like 'the lost son'. We all know that 'self' is the root of sin, and it's the downfall of many a soul. Many people deliberately, with their eyes wide open, forsake the Lord and go off on their own.

This is the essence of sin, the desire to please 'self' despite its consequences, to do what one wants to do, regardless of the feelings of others. Instead of pursuing the will of God, they pursue the will of 'self'.

Let's take another look at the younger son. He was lost, but he also lost some other things.

1. He lost the fellowship of his father and the comfort of his home.

Think about it, he had lived in the best house, with the best servants to wait on him, and he had the best father a son could ever have. But all of these things meant nothing to him until he was left friendless in a strange land. And although he knew what his father was like, when he was in a far-off country in a pigpen, they were out of reach.

2. He lost something else, too; he lost his self-esteem.

He left home full of self-esteem and confidence and ended up working in a field with some pigs. He threw away his family because of his pride and ended up sleeping with pigs.

Have you ever been to a strange country or place where you didn't know anyone? Well, that's what he felt like, unknown and unheeded and unwanted in a far-off country.

3. He also lost everything he had, Luke 15:14.
It's amazing how the inheritance that he received so easily was so easily squandered. Easy come, easy go, as some may say. He lost it all, he lost everything.

He had no real friends, no real pleasures, no real freedom, no real independence, and no real pride; he lost everything. Now he's in a mess, and I wonder how the church would deal with someone who went off and lived like this and then came to their senses and came back home?

The shepherd with the sheep, the woman with the coin, the father with the son, was filled with uncontrollable joy when they gained again what had been lost. And that's because God is kind and He's more understanding than we are. And He feels deep in His heart the joy of joys when one wanderer returns home.

And then we come to the part of the parable that I don't like. I wished I could just leave it there in Luke 15:24, because that's a happy ending. But sadly, I'm not the author and thank God for that, because I think there are some serious lessons we can learn from this older brother's reactions. The older son was saved but lost.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' "The older brother became angry and refused to go in."
Luke 15:25-28

While the celebrations are going on the older son was in the field and as he got nearer to the house, he heard music and dancing, Luke 15:25. He goes to one of the servants and asked him what was going on, Luke 15:26. The servant tells him that his brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound, Luke 15:27.
The older brother was a self-righteous kind of man, and he could find nothing good in the life of his brother; everything his brother had done was bad. The older brother was proud of himself and proud of his life.

He was very proud, and he was very much like the Pharisees who started Jesus off with these parables by accusing Him of receiving sinners, Luke 15:1-2. But the older brother was so jealous that he wouldn't even go inside and greet his brother, but decided to stay outside the house and sulk, Luke 15:28.
But most of all, the older brother was just pure heartless. He's so heartless that he would probably die and have the words, 'What are you looking at?' on his gravestone.

The father went out to plead with him, Luke 15:28, but he wasn't having any of it. He says, 'Look! All these years, I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends, Luke 15:29.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The distorted views of the selfish soul are evident in this verse. The older brother had received the double portion of the divided estate, Luke 15:12, and he was in fact the owner of the whole estate, Luke 15:31; it was his duty to have given to the father, not the other way around. If this elder brother had wanted to share a banquet with his friends, it was surely within his power to have done so; but as a matter of obvious fact, he did not wish to share anything with anybody, even resenting the slaughter of the fatted calf for the return of his brother.'
He wasn't happy at all that his brother had come home; he would probably be happier if he had been beaten up and forgotten about. And that was the attitude of the older brother, 'who wants him back!'

He was jealous and heartless, and all he cared about was himself. And let me ask you, how did he know his brother was with prostitutes? Luke 25:30. Because there's no mention of prostitutes until he mentions them. Maybe he suspected that's what he did, and maybe he accused his brother of those sins because he himself would have liked to commit those sins.
And notice that he refers to his brother, not as 'My brother' but as 'Your son,' Luke 15:30. This man would have no problems kicking you down under the gutter when you're already lying on top of it.
Even when his father says to him, 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours,' Luke 15:31. In other words, your brother has squandered all he had, but you've still got your inheritance, it's twice as much as your brother had. But he still didn't want to listen; he was hurting himself without realising it.

Now he's not thinking straight; he needs to come to his senses. Even when his father tells him, 'that they had to celebrate and be glad because his brother was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found, Luke 15:32.
Even then, his anger took hold of him. He just couldn't see that if his father had gained a son, he had gained a brother. His whole attitude shows us that his years of obedience to his father had been years of grim duty and not loving service. There's not a sympathetic bone in his body.

THE LESSON

The lesson from this parable is severe. You don't necessarily have to go on a long journey in order to leave God. You can stay at home and not know your father and not know your father's heart. And so you can be lost at home, just as you can be lost anywhere else in the world.

God's attitude is seen in the diligent search of the shepherd and of the woman in the other two parables I mentioned earlier. Because it's one thing to accept a sinner, but it's another thing to go out and look for them. It's one thing to go out and look for them, but it's another thing to know that they're diseased with sin and they would probably let you down anyway.

Once again, Jesus is revealing an amazing truth here, and the truth is that it is easier to confess to God than it is to many a man. The truth is that God is far more merciful in His judgments than we will ever be with our fellow man.

The truth is that the love of God is far broader than the love we have for each other. The truth is that God can forgive people even when people refuse to forgive each other. And when you're faced with a love like that, then you too will be lost in wonder, lost in love, and lost in praise.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law who started Jesus off with these parables would have said, 'Who cares, it's just one lost sheep.' Jesus would say, 'Rejoice with me, I have found my lost sheep, Luke 15:6.
The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law would have said, 'What's a coin, it's worthless anyway.' Jesus would say, 'Rejoice with me, I have found my lost coin', Luke 15:9.
The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law would have said, 'Cancel the party, my brother's home.' Jesus would say and still says today, 'we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found', Luke 15:32. That's love, that's forgiveness, that's worth rejoicing.

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION

'Jesus told his disciples: 'There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So, he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' 'The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg—I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' 'So, he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. 'The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.' 'Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A

thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. 'He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' 'The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. 'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So, if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? 'No 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.' Luke 16:1-13

THE PARABLE OF THE SHREWD MANAGER

In the audience listening to the Lord Jesus were very religious Pharisees and Scribes, Luke 15:1-2. When some 'tax collectors' and 'sinners' joined the crowd, they criticised Him for having anything to do with them.
They regarded such people as beyond reach, beyond the reach of salvation, not worth bothering with, to be kept at more than arm's length. So, following on from the previous chapter, the Lord told the crowd the parables of 'the lost sheep', 'the lost coin' and 'the lost son'.

Note how in this third parable, 'the prodigal son', 'The older brother became angry and refused to go in', Luke 15:28. The other brother was angry at how excitedly the father had welcomed back his long-absent brother. A more suitable title for this parable might be 'The Unforgiving Brother'.
The Lord Jesus then told his disciples 'the parable of the shrewd manager'. This parable was targeted at the self-righteous ones who were in the crowd. He was reasoning with them at their level of understanding. Like Solomon said, 'answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes,' Proverbs 26:5.
Jesus accuses a worker of wasting his master's possessions, Luke 16:1. The manager calls him in to ask for an account of his management because he's about to get sacked, Luke 16:2. In other words, he's incompetent; he's not capable of doing the job. He was probably pocketing his manager's wealth for his own advantage.
He knows he's about to get sacked, he knows he's not strong enough for manual labour and too embarrassed to beg, Luke 16:3. So he comes up with a scheming plan for when he loses his job, and that is people will welcome him into their homes, Luke 16:4.
He was worried about what he could do to secure his future. So, he craftily sweetens the favour of those whose friendship he would need when he became unemployed.

When we read of his plan, it's clear that his plan was really dishonest. He called in each one of his master's debtors and asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' Luke 16:5.
The debtor replies, 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil, and so, the manager tells him to 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty,' Luke 16:6.
The manager now asks the seconded debtor how much he owes and the debtor tells him, 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' and so, the manager tells him to 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred, Luke 16:7.
Basically, he drops the first debt by fifty-percent and drops the second debt by twenty-percent. The two debtors were quid's in, but now they owed the manager a favour. He's trying to make friends quickly in the hope that they will help him out later when he's unemployed.

Note an important point here, despite the man being legally and morally corrupt, He wasn't commended for being dishonest, he was commended for his shrewdness, Luke 16:8. Note the word lord used here isn't referring to Jesus, but the master of the unjust manager.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'The master of this unjust steward spoke highly of the address and cunning of his iniquitous servant. He had, on his own principles, made a very prudent provision for his support, but his master no more approved of his conduct in this than he did in his wasting his substance before. From the ambiguous and improper manner in which this is expressed in the common English translation, it has been supposed that our blessed Lord commended the conduct of this wicked man, but the word κυριος, there translated lord, simply means the master of the unjust steward.'

Jesus isn't teaching us to lie, cheat, or steal; he is commending the shrewdness, the urgency, and the foresight of the manager. The Lord's critics were far from whiter than white. They saw themselves as 'the people of the light', Luke 16:8. Yet it was they who had abused the privilege they enjoyed as servants of the Lord God.
The Lord Jesus isn't recommending that the children of God should copy the corrupt manager's tactics, Luke 16:9. He was answering the self-righteous people present according to their own hypocrisy.
So, when called to account on the day of judgement, they would be cast out, Luke 16:9 / James 5:1-5 / Matthew 25:41-43. They would finish up spending eternity with many of those they had alienated.
These self-styled 'people of the light' anticipated the coming of the Messiah to restore the kingdom to Israel and expected to have prominent roles in that kingdom.

Since they were incapable of handling their dubiously acquired wealth wisely, so as to make friends of those with whom they would spend eternity, how could they expect to be entrusted with the spiritual wealth to be had in that anticipated kingdom? Luke 16:10-11.
The self-styled 'people of the light' are expected to inherit wealth and privilege in the Messiah's kingdom as theirs by Divine right. If they couldn't be trusted with the property they have extorted from others, how could they expect to be given wealth and privilege in the Messiah's kingdom? Luke 16:12.
Notice how Jesus personifies wealth, saying, 'you cannot serve both God and money,' Luke 16:13. The traditional word 'Mammon' means wealth, property, and possessions that have been personified as a master over your life. They claimed they were devoted servants of God, whilst really, they were devoted to the god of wealth.
Yet they alienated those whom they regarded as worldly-wise, the basest of folk, only fit for hell, whom they disparagingly called 'tax collectors and sinners', Luke 15:1-2. They were quick to criticise their failings whilst ignoring their own.
In this parable, Jesus targets another hypocritical trait they had: they coveted riches whilst claiming to be spiritually minded, Luke 16:14-15. They were obsessed with acquiring riches, whilst at the same time putting on a show of being very religious. The energy which should have been directed to God was directed to acquiring wealth. Almost as though wealth was a god, Matthew 6:19-21.
I see this as being one of those occasions when the Lord Jesus answered blatant hypocrites with irony so as to try and bring them to their senses. They regarded the outcasts as the type of people who would stoop as low as the corrupt manager did.

They couldn't see that fault in themselves. But since they were at risk of spending eternity with them, they needed to sweeten their favour so that they would be welcomed by them into eternity, Luke 16:8-13.
The manager is a symbol for the Pharisees in this parable; Jesus is telling the Pharisees how they should behave, rather than just commenting on their behaviour. The Pharisees refused to have anything to do with sinners.

Jesus is simply saying this: the debt that sinners hold is their sin against God; God is the creditor, and you are just the manager. If God can forgive their debt, you should be able to, Matthew 6:12 / Luke 11:4 / Ephesians 4:32.
It would be better for you to forgive their sin on this earth and welcome them to God now than it would be for you to hold them accountable for a debt that isn't even yours to collect.

It costs you nothing and shows the love that God expects. I think the last point of pleasing 'the master' is when the manager repents and changes, and rectifies his cheating ways, Luke 16:5-8.

LESSONS

1. We need to prepare for our eternal future.

As Christians, we need to invest our time in things which have eternal value, not waste our time focusing on money. Otherwise, we may be endangered of losing our eternal salvation, 1 Timothy 6.8-9.

2. We need to use wisdom when dealing with material things.

Everything we have comes from God because He is the owner of all things, Exodus 19:5, and so, we need to use all our material blessings for the good and glory of God, 1 Corinthians 10:31.

3. We need to be faithful even with the little things we have.

Everything we have, even the smallest things we have, should be used for God's service in His kingdom. Helping the poor and vulnerable, James 1:27, and encouraging the saints, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, every act of kindness should be used to build up God's kingdom.

4. We need to use our money to bless others.

If we use our money just to satisfy our own needs, then our money can very easily become more important to us than God. When we use our money wisely to bless other people, then we store up treasures in heaven, Matthew 6:20.

ADDITIONAL TEACHINGS

'The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.' Luke 16:16-17

The prophets and the law both told the Jews that John would come, Luke 16:16 / Malachi 4:4-6.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The type of violence with which men sought to force the kingdom is illustrated by the multitude's action in trying to make him king by force; and the Pharisees, particularly, thought the kingdom would be a secular restoration of the old Solomonic throne and they were at that very moment trying to force Jesus to conform to their secular and materialistic views of the kingdom, all of which is indicated by their scoffing at him, Matthew 11:12.'
Jesus' meaning in Luke 16:17, 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.

"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.' Luke 16:18

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.
A few translations have led to a total misunderstanding of what Jesus means in this verse, Luke 16:18. Note that the word which is translated as 'divorce' should read 'send away', which is 'apoluo' in Greek. There is a huge difference between sending away and divorce. Notice how this text should read.

''Anyone who divorces (apoluo) (sends away) his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. '

Jesus said 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.

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 better give her a 'certificate of divorce,' Matthew 5:31-32 / Deuteronomy 24:1-4.
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. 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'. This was the Jews' loophole, they 'put them away' without the official 'divorce'.

When we read the original Greek word, and we replace the word 'divorce' in Luke 16:18 / Matthew 5:31-32, 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.
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.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

So much is said about life after death that is bewildering, misleading and absolutely false. Philosophers, wise men, and scholars have speculated for ages about life after death, but our Lord does not speculate; He knows. And He is equally at home in the realms of the seen and or the realms of the unseen, John 14:1-2 / Colossians 2:9.
This story is compelling, chilling and disturbing, and it is a drama in three scenes. And when the curtain rises in the first scene, we have a typical day in the lives of two men.

"There was a rich man who had been dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and lick his sores." Luke 16:19-21

Jesus compels us to look at these two men, that's all. No words of comment on the character of either man, just a typical day. One of these men has got a lot going for them; he lives in a great house.

Rooms possibly hung with the finest tapestries. He's possibly got rugs on the floor and the choicest products scattered throughout the house; we know he's got loads of money, Luke 16:19.
He had the kind of house that people on the street would admire when they walked past and think for a moment that maybe they lived there, and they were their things.

And you would walk by one day, and you think to yourself, 'I would like to live in a house like that, I would like to have his resources. I would like to get into that guy's shoes.'

And these people are coming up, and he's having a party or something, and these people are coming up in their chariots. Some have horse chariots, some two-horse chariots, others have six-horse chariots.

And when these people are coming up, they almost stumble at these rags, these dirty rags at the gate, Luke 16:20.
They walk by on the path and realise there is somebody living out here, there is a man out here.
He's just a mess and looks awful, and these wild street dogs are hanging around him and licking his sores, Luke 16:21. They, too, are starving, just exactly like that poor, miserable beggar.
Now, remember the Jews used to wipe their hands with any leftover bread and throw it on the ground. That's why Jesus says, 'he longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table', Luke 16:21. So the rich man didn't even offer Lazarus the scraps from his table.
Notice that Jesus has no word of condemnation for the rich man, just because he's got something, or is there any attempt to put a halo on the beggar's head just because of his poverty and rags.

There is a rich man here, and that stands for power, the ability to serve. He's got the ability to do something good. And there is a beggar at his gate, and that stands for need; the beggar is the rich man's opportunity.

And this story is a tragedy because the two men never come together. Here is a chance for an able man to make a deposit for an eternity, and he doesn't get it done at all.

We don't even know if this rich man ever sees this beggar at all; it doesn't say anything about whether he noticed him or took note of him or had anything to do with him. Now maybe he's busy with his affairs, he's got a lot of things to sort out.

He's not unkind to the guy; he doesn't have him stoned or have him thrown into prison. He just leaves him alone; he never does anything; he doesn't take any notice of him whatsoever. And then the first scene is over, and when the second scene begins, we are into a familiar scene, it is a scene of death.

"The time came when the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried." Luke 16:22

And we know about death, especially those of you who have lived a while. We never get used to death, we never get used to funeral services, and that's because we are of life, not of death, and it is hard for us to endure it. The beggar dies, and notice it doesn't say anything about his body being buried.

In New Testament times, there would be a group of people who were employed to walk around the streets of Jerusalem at night to pick up anyone who had died on the streets. They would basically place the body on a cart and take it to a place called Gehenna, just outside the city walls.

I want to point out something important here, as many people believe that both Lazarus and the rich man ended up in the Hadean world. Notice that when Lazarus dies, he was taken by angels to Abraham's side, Luke 16:22. This is the Hebrew way of saying that he was in 'the paradise of God', that is, heaven.
The word 'heaven' simply means 'the heights or lifted up', but notice in Genesis 1:1 that God created the heavens, plural. The Bible teaches there are actually three heavens, and this was firmly believed by the Jews.

1. They saw the area of the clouds in the sky as the first heaven.

This is the atmosphere and the place where the birds fly. This is physical and is created by God.

2. They saw the area in which the sun, moon, and stars hung as the second heaven.

This is physical and is created by God.

3. The third heaven was known as the dwelling place of God.

This is God's spiritual, eternal home. This isn't physical and isn't created. This third heaven is also known as 'paradise', which is used in connection with 'the third heaven.' Paul speaks about being 'caught up in the third heaven and caught up in paradise' in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4.
In other words, the third heaven and paradise are the same location. Lazarus was in heaven, not in Hades. And there's no need to speculate where Paul was because John tells us that paradise is the heavenly realm of God, Revelation 2:7. And there's no need to speculate where Lazarus was located; he was in paradise, the heavenly realm of God. And there's no need to speculate where Jesus and the thief on the cross were going that very day, Luke 23:43.
They were both going to paradise, the heavenly realm of God. The third heaven, paradise, is the place where Paul and all Christians long to go, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.
But imagine the people who used to walk by, they would be asking each other, 'What happened to that old beggar that used to be out here?' And someone would answer, 'I don't know, I guess he is out of his misery, I guess he died.'

The beggar is gone, and everybody says, 'Well, it is a blessing, he's out of his misery, he doesn't have to suffer anymore.' Nobody gets very upset about it, nobody is very disturbed about it, but then they pick up the newspaper the next morning and there it is.

This guy, this guy who had it all, this big community leader, this guy with all the money and everything, he died. And people begin to think, 'Well, he was pretty young,' and they try to figure out just how old he was.

But he dies, and it startles them because they remember just a few days ago, they went by his house and said, 'I wish I lived there, I wish I were in his shoes.' But now they are saying, 'Lord, don't hear my prayers, just ignore that prayer for that, I've changed my mind on that one, Lord, I don't want to be in his shoes.'

And for one rare moment, they face the realisation that you can't live, not really live, through materialism, because it has no power in our lives. Rich people die just like poor people do.

And this guy, whom they were envying and wishing they were in his shoes, is dead this morning. Despite his beautiful home, despite all his money. One day, he's gone, and everybody in town is concerned about it. It is a death scene.

And then we enter the third scene, this is the world unseen. This is someplace we don't know much about because we haven't been there before. But notice how naturally Christ passes from the seen to the unseen.

And now we begin to walk in a world where we have never walked before, never been there ourselves. And we begin to learn some things, very important things about life after death.

"In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'" Luke 16:23-24

Many people connect Hades with the Old Testament word Sheol, thinking they speak of the same place. 'Sheol' in the Old Testament means 'the realm or place of the dead'.

The realm or place of the dead is the grave where our bodies end up, but the realm of disembodied souls is where our soul ends up without our physical bodies. 'Hades' in the New Testament means 'the realm of disembodied souls'.

The New Testament words 'Hades' and 'Gehenna' are the final destination of the wicked 'soul', the place of punishment, hell. The word 'Gehenna', from which it originates, has a historical origin in the Old Testament. We read about a valley on the western side of the city of Jerusalem, which was known as 'The Valley of Hinnom', that is, 'Ge Henna'.

We know nothing about Hinnom, except that he owned that valley and must have lived very early in Old Testament times, probably even before the time of Joshua, because 'The valley of the SON of HINNON' is mentioned in Joshua 15:8.
The apostle Paul uses the Greek word 'Hades' in 1 Corinthians 15:55, but he never uses the word 'Gehenna' in any of his other letters, which were mainly addressed to Greek-speaking churches. The only place outside of the Gospels where "Gehenna" is used is in James' letter, which is addressed to Hebrew-speaking Jews, James 3:6.
Now, although the word 'Sheol' literally means 'the realm or place of the dead', you don't need much intelligence to recognise that Hell and the Grave are not the same places! When a physical body is placed in the grave, it has not been consigned to Hell!

The Jewish-speaking audiences would understand that 'Gehenna' was a reference to hell, and the Greek-speaking audiences would understand that 'Hades' also referred to hell.

In other words, everyone's 'body' will go to the grave, and their 'spirit' will go back to God, Ecclesiastes 12:7, but the 'soul', which is the part of man, will go on for eternity, either with God in heaven or in Hell with the devil and his angels.
While Lazarus is in heaven, the rich man finds himself in Hades, Luke 16:23, which is hell. Notice he was in torment, Luke 16:23; he was in agony in the fire, Luke 16:24. Don't those words 'torment' and 'fire' describe what we now know as hell? Matthew 13:41-43 / Matthew 25:41. Remember, hell is the place where God isn't present; it's the place where sinners are separated from God, 2 Thessalonians 1:9.
There are five principles I would like to share with you.

1. The dead are still alive.

I realise sometimes we speak, and the Bible speaks about going to sleep in the Lord, and that's true, and the physical body is sleeping, but the dead are consciously and vividly alive. They are not asleep, they are not unconscious, but they are consciously alive. This was true of Lazarus, and it was true of the rich man.

Notice the text says that the rich man was in torment and agony, he looked and saw Abraham and Lazarus, he spoke to Abraham, and he was thirsty, Luke 16:23-34.
Both of them were very much alive. And remember speaking of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Mark 12, saints that have passed into the unseen, Jesus did not count them as dead, Mark 12:26-27.
And when Jesus is hanging on that cross, one of the men by His side prayed in Luke 23:42, 'Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom'. Remember the thief by Him? And Jesus replied by giving this dying man a promise in Luke 23:43, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' What does this promise mean?
It means that Jesus and the dying robber are going to meet in the paradise of God, that is heaven, that very day. Not some distant time in the future, but that very day, they are going to be consciously alive; they are both going to be conscious of each other.

Just as a side note, we don't have to wonder or speculate where Jesus went when he died, or where he was when He was in the grave, the text clearly tells us where he was going, Luke 23:43. The soul does exist after death, Revelation 6:9.

So death is not just an unconscious sleep for so many hundreds or thousands of years. We are consciously alive beyond the grave; that's what Jesus teaches here, and in other passages, we are still alive after death.

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." Luke 16:25-26

2. The dead are conscious of being themselves.

Just as Abraham was still Abraham, the rich man and Lazarus were still the rich man and Lazarus. And both the rich man and Lazarus were very much conscious of still being themselves, Luke 16:25.

Now, you might think, 'well, that's no big deal', well, yes, it is a big deal. At death, we are going to lose some things; we are going to lose the physical. We are going to lose these bodies of ours and the possessions we have. Death can rob me of the material things and the physical things, but it can't take anything else away from us.

It cannot rob us of ourselves; it cannot do that. Yesterday I was myself, I will be myself tomorrow, I will continue to be myself as long as heaven is heaven and as long as God is God. I'm myself from now on, but I've got to give up this body someday.

These bodies of ours are here today and gone tomorrow. And there is something you've got to know about your body, your body is in the process of change. You're getting older, and your body over a period of seven years replaces every cell that it has. It has been going on from the day you were born and will continue until the day you die.

I have had six new bodies, and I get another new one in two years. And I know that some people have had a lot more than I have. But it didn't work any change in us at all, did it? It changed every single cell in our bodies, but we are still the same person. Death is not going to work any moral change in us. Oh no!

Because you hear these stories all the time where people just live any way they like, and all of a sudden they sprout wings and get a halo and float around in heaven and all those things. As though death has some kind of hocus pocus power to cleanse us and empower us to do something for us.

Don't expect the undertaker to do something for you, which you won't allow Christ to do for you here and now because it is not going to happen; the undertaker hasn't got any power.

Death cannot and will not work any kind of moral change in us; it just doesn't happen. Now that is a little frightening to me because sometimes, I don't like myself very much.

Do you know what I mean? Sometimes there are things in my life that I'm not very pleased about, but I'm going to have to live with me from now on. And we are all going to have to do that; we are all going to have to remain the same.

If I learn anything from these words of Jesus, I learned that sometimes we have to live with ourselves, and sometimes it's not a very pleasant thing to have to live with ourselves. God wants to change us through His Son, but we're going to be ourselves from now on, and death isn't going to change who we are.

3. The dead remember.

We may forget things in old age, but we won't forget anything in the afterlife. Abraham asks the rich man to remember his life and all the good things he had, Luke 16:25.
The rich man remembers the life he used to live, he remembers his selfishness, his sin. He remembers his lost opportunity and his brother's back there. He remembers his family, Luke 16:27-28.
Memory is either going to help intensify the joys of heaven or it will embitter the pains of hell. It's got to be that way because it can't be any other way, Matthew 12:36.
And if you think about it, how can God judge anyone if they don't know why they are being judged? How can God judge anyone if they can't remember anything that they've said or done whilst they were still alive?

In other words, those souls in heaven will know exactly why they are in heaven, and those souls who end up in hell will know exactly why they are in hell. Everyone will remember who they are, and they will remember what they did or didn't do while they were alive here on Earth.

4. All men do not have the same destiny.

These two men didn't have the same destiny; the text tells us they are separated by a great gulf, Luke 16:26. But who separated them? God! No way. I believe these men separated themselves by the deliberate choices they made in this life; they separated themselves, so don't blame this on God.
They become morally separated by a gulf that is as wide as right is from wrong, as night is from the day, and it's a separation that continues from beyond the grave.

Remember Luke 16:22, which says, 'Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham's side.' Not because in this life he was unfortunate or sick or neglected. He was carried into paradise because, despite all these calamities, he made a deliberate choice of God; his name signifies, 'God is my help'.
And it was this right choice that made him a right character and the right character that made for a glorious spiritual destiny. And the rich man is not lost because he's rich, because he had good clothes, because he ate good food, and he was ruined by wrong choices. He made a deliberate choice of things that were seen, and he turned his back on God.

Now you might say, 'Wait a minute, it doesn't say a word in there about the rich man turning his back on God.' Well, how do I know he did that? I know he turned his back on God because he turned his back on Lazarus, and Lazarus was his opportunity right there, Matthew 25:40.
He didn't do anything for Lazarus, and Lazarus was his chance. God has only one way of reaching men, and it is through His Son. By believing in Him, responding to God's grace and love through His Son Jesus Christ. And if we do not hear Him and if we do not receive Him, we will not be saved, it's as simple as that.

So Lazarus found himself lying against Abraham's side, which is, as I said, the Hebrew way of saying that he was in the paradise of God. And while Lazarus was comforted, the rich man was tormented. But why? Why this heaven or hell? Well, it's certainly not because God loved one of them and didn't love the other one.

Their different destinies were the inevitable outcome of their different character. Their different lifestyle, who they were, who they believed in, who they placed their confidence and hope in, their different choices, 2 Corinthians 5:10.
The truth of the matter is that God doesn't have a way of getting anybody into heaven if they have hell in their hearts.
And that's the whole point Jesus is getting at. If we go back to Luke 15:1-2, we find a religious group of people called Pharisees and Scribes listening to what Jesus was saying.
And when some tax collectors and sinners joined the crowd, the Pharisees and Scribes criticised Him for having anything to do with them. They regarded such people as the lowest of the low, beyond the reach of salvation, not worth bothering with, to be kept at more than arm's length.

Many of the Jews believed that if they had accumulated enough wealth, upped their social status, and got into prominent positions in the religious community, then that proved that they were under the blessing of God. They also thought, according to their logic, that those who were poor were under the curse of God. And so Jesus is using an everyday event to make His point.

There were rich people in their houses, and there were poor people, even beggars, walking around the streets every day. And Jesus is telling them that just because you guys are well off and have high positions in the Jewish religion doesn't necessarily mean you are right with God.

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'" Luke 16:27-28

5. The living can't mix with the dead.

We also need to realise that you cannot mix the living with the dead. You can't mix them, and you can't do it in this life. This is highlighted when the rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his family and his brothers, Luke 16:27-28.
That's why I find it very disturbing when you get all these so-called mediums and spiritualists who claim they can speak to the dead. You never hear of any dead person telling their loved ones, 'hey you better believe there is a God because where I am right now, you don't want to come here.'

When we lose a loved one in death, we know we can't keep them, we have to put them in the place of the dead; you have to go to the cemetery. You can't do it physically, you can't mix the living and the dead. And it's the same with eternity, you can't mix the living with the dead, Luke 16:29-31.

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" Luke 16:29-31

Abraham tells the rich man that his family has Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them, Luke 16:29, which emphasises again that the dead can't mix with the living.
Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

'This plainly supposes they were all Jewish believers; they had these writings in their hands, but they did not permit them to influence their lives.'

The rich man insists that if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent, Luke 16:30, but Abraham tells him if they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead, Luke 16:31.
Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

'Our Lord disbelieved the power of signs and wonders to produce repentance, and here declares that even the sign of His own Resurrection will leave many hard hearts unmoved.'

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

This answer of Abraham contains two remarkable propositions.

1. That the sacred writings contain such proofs of a Divine origin, that though all the dead were to arise, to convince an unbeliever of the truths therein declared, the conviction could not be greater, nor the proof more evident, of the divinity and truth of these sacred records, than that which themselves afford.

2. That to escape eternal perdition, and get at last into eternal glory, a man is to receive the testimonies of God, and to walk according to their dictates.

CONCLUSION

I want to tell you one thing about hell. I don't know much about it, but I will tell you this. Whatever hell may be, it is a burying ground of dead souls, souls that are dead in trespass and sin. And forever you are going to live, you are created in the image of God, Genesis 1:27, and indwelt with a soul that lives forever, 1 Corinthians 15:54
And so there is something really special about you. Forever, you are going to be yourself, and you are going to have to keep house with yourself for all eternity. And forever we are going to have to enjoy or suffer the destiny that we have created in this life.

Whether it is through the grace of God to love and embrace His Son, our Saviour, and live with Him and be created anew by His Spirit. Or whether we are going to go on our own and turn our back on God and His son and live for the day, live for the material things, live for how much we can store up and stash away. But remember this, even though some are lost, no one has to be lost, Luke 19:10 / John 6:37.

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION

'Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So watch yourselves.' Luke 17:1-3

SIN, FAITH, DUTY

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.

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, Luke 17:1-2 / Matthew 18:6-9.
The result of someone doing so is worse than death. Jesus mentions a 'large millstone', Luke 17:2 / Matthew 18:6, this is the large millstone that 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' we can be sure of the seriousness of the crime and the punishment of the crime, Luke 17:1 / Matthew 18:7 / 1 Corinthians 11:19 / 1 Timothy 4:1. Not only does Jesus gives us the warning, but He also gives us the promise that 'such things are bound to 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, Luke 17:3. 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 that needs to be cut off? Matthew 18:6-9. Our soul is just too precious to play games with, our eternal salvation is just too important to throw away.

'If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive them." Luke 17:3-4

Jesus once again reminds us of the importance of forgiveness. If someone sins against another, the person who sins needs to be rebuked, Luke 17:3 / Matthew 18:15, and if they repent, then they must be forgiven, Luke 17:3.

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. If we cannot forgive our people, then certainly we aren't of the nature of God, and thus, not a candidate for heaven, Matthew 18:35 / James 2:13.

The example of seven times a day, Luke 17:4, isn't to be taken literally, Jesus is simply saying, we are to forgive an unlimited number of times, yet we may rebuke in love, Leviticus 19:17 / Matthew 18:15 / Matthew 18:21.

He's saying 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 18:21-22 / Matthew 18:35 / James 2:13.

'The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.' Luke 17:5-6

After speaking about the importance of forgiveness, the apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith, Luke 17:5. Jesus tells them that if they had the faith as small as a mustard seed, Matthew 21:21-22 / Mark 11:23-24 / Luke 17:6 / 1 Corinthians 12:9 / 1 Corinthians 13:2, they could achieve much, Luke 17:6 / Matthew 17:14-20.

Nothing would be impossible to them for nothing is impossible for the One who actually does the miraculous work, Luke 17:6 / 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.

PARABLE OF THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

‘Suppose one of you has a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” Luke 17:7-10

Jesus now shares a parable with His disciples concerning a master and his servant. When the servant is finished ploughing or looking after the sheep, does the master tell the servant to sit at the table for dinner? Luke 17:7.
Of course not, the master tells the servant to make the dinner and serve the master while he eats, Luke 17:8. After the master has had his meal, only then does the servant eat and drink, Luke 17:8.
The point is that the servant waits on the master; the master doesn’t wait on the servant. The master doesn’t thank the servant for his work; the servant is supposed to do what he was commanded, Luke 17:9.
The master doesn’t have to thank him for doing so. The point of this parable is clear: Jesus says that when we have done everything that God has commanded us to do, here is what we’re supposed to say, ‘we are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty,’ Luke 17:10.
It is not the master’s responsibility to make life easy for the servant; God doesn’t exist to make our lives easier. It is the servant’s responsibility to work hard for the master. After we have worked hard for the master, we have only done our duty.

We don’t deserve any kind of special recognition. If we hadn’t done what we did, we would be failures, we would be rebellious servants. By doing all that God has commanded, we are simply being a servant.

Can you imagine the servant in the story going around thinking how awesome he was because he ploughed the field and made the master dinner? What a fool! Those are your duties. That is what you were supposed to do. God owes us nothing! There is nothing we can do to put God in a position of owing us something. There is nothing we can do to place God in our debt.

LESSON

1. None of us can earn our salvation.

Yes, it’s true we must follow God’s commands and obey them, but they don’t merit our salvation, Ephesians 2:4-9 / Titus 3:4-5. Regardless of how much we do or don’t do, we are still ‘unprofitable servants’, Isaiah 64:6.
2. We still need to be obedient.

Yes, we don’t earn our salvation, but obedience is still required, Luke 17:10 / 1 Corinthians 7:19 / 1 John 2:4. It’s a sad fact that when many people hear the word obedience, they instantly think of legalism.
If we truly believe that obedience earns our salvation, then we are truly legalists; however, if we obey God out of love and duty, we are simply being faithful servants.

JESUS HEALS TEN MEN WITH LEPROSY

‘Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’ Luke 17:11-13

Jesus is getting closer to His destination, that is the cross, which has been Jesus' goal since He came in the flesh, Genesis 3:15. In context between Luke 17:10-11, we see that Jesus went to Bethany, Ephraim, Samaria and Galilee, John 11.
He's on His way to Jerusalem, Luke 9:51 / Luke 13:22. Whilst Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and as he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him, Luke 17:12.

LEPROSY

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. 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. This explains why they stood at a distance. 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. No wonder they stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!' Luke 17:12-13.

> 'When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.' Luke 17:14-16

When Jesus saw them He tells them to go, show themselves to the priests, Luke 17:14. 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, Leviticus 13:1-6 / Leviticus 13:45- 49 / Leviticus 14:1-32 / Luke 5:14. Unlike other miracles of Jesus, they seemed to be healed along the way to the priests, Luke 17:14.
The text implies that we have ten lepers, nine seem to be Jewish and one a Samaritan, Luke 17:16, but when they call on Jesus, they are in the same place, physically, emotionally, spiritually, there's no hatred of the different races here, they are all helpless and in a hopeless situation, they all called out for pity and they all received it, Luke 17:13-14.
It's interesting that only one of them praised God and even more interesting that he happened to be a Samaritan man, Luke 17:15-16 / Luke 5:25 / Luke 18:43. Not only did he praise God, but he also praised God 'loudly', Luke 17:15, we can only imagine the joy in his voice as he shouts, 'thank you, God'.
It's interesting because he was the one that the Jewish society as a whole would have rejected, whether he was clean or not but because Jesus showed him mercy, he was filled with thanksgiving, which is something we all must

do, Acts 13:46-48 / 1 Corinthians 15:10 / 2 Corinthians 4:15. I wonder if they would have associated with one another after their healing? Or would it be life back to normal?

LIFE-CHANGING HEALING

Imagine how their lives would have been changed after their 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, get a mainstream job and walks through the market places in Jerusalem. This healing was life-changing on all kinds of levels, physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually.

THE GRATEFUL LEPER

'Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.' Luke 17:17-19

I believe there may have been a tone of sadness in Jesus' voice when He asked were not all ten cleansed, where are the other nine, Luke 17:17. It's important to remember that Jesus didn't ask this question because He didn't know the answer, He asked the question to get everyone to think about their thanksgiving to God when they are shown mercy. This one grateful foreign leper shows the contrast between him and the other nine lepers, Luke 17:18. Why didn't the other nine come back to give thanks? We don't really know why the other nine didn't return to Jesus, but I like what Coffman says concerning this question.

One waited to see if the cure was real.
One waited to see if it would last.
One said he would see Jesus later.
One decided that he had never had leprosy.
One said he would have gotten well anyway.
One gave the glory to the priests.
One said, Oh well, Jesus didn't really DO anything.
One said, just any rabbi could have done it.
One said I was already much improved.

We will never know why the nine didn't return, but what we do see is that people can be healed physically but remain sick spiritually. The Samaritan was healed both physically and spiritually, hence Jesus tells him his faith has healed him, Luke 17:19, remembering that his faith alone didn't heal him; he had to trust in the Great Physician, Jesus, to do the healing.

HAVE YOU THANKED HIM TODAY?

We have so much to be grateful for, but there are times we simply forget to thank Him for what He has done and continues to do in our lives because of the business of our lives these days. But the busyness of life is really just an excuse. We must take time to thank Him and show we appreciate everything He does in our lives, 2 Corinthians 9:11 / Philippians 4:6.

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

'Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." Luke 17:20-21

The Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him when God's kingdom would come, Matthew 3:2. The Pharisees were looking for an earthly king who would lead the Jews in a rebellion against Rome and re-establish Israel as a major power on the world scene.
However, they severely misunderstood what the kingdom of God was all about. It was not a physical kingdom, but a spiritual one. Jesus said the kingdom would come relatively quietly. It would not arrive as an occupying army, but it would arise within the hearts of individuals.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'This was a matter of much importance to them, and they had taught that it would come with parade and pomp. It is not unlikely that they asked this merely in 'contempt', and for the purpose of drawing out something that would expose him to ridicule.'

Note that some translations have the words the kingdom of God is within you, Luke 17:21.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

This is capable of two interpretations.

1. The reign of God is 'in the heart.'

It does not come with pomp and splendour, like the reign of temporal kings, merely to control the external 'actions' and strike the senses of people with awe, but it reigns in the heart by the law of God, it sets up its dominion over the passions, and brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

2. It may mean the new dispensation is 'even now among you.'

The Messiah has come. John has ushered in the kingdom of God, and you are not to expect the appearance of the Messiah with great pomp and splendour, for he is now among you. Most critics at present incline to this latter interpretation. The ancient versions chiefly follow the former.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

'Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.' Luke 17:22-25

There appears to be some confusion concerning Luke 17:22-37, because the wording is very similar to what we find later in Luke 21:5-36, and in Matthew 24:1-51, and Mark 13:1-37.
Some believe it's strictly speaking about the return of Christ, others believe it's speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem, and others believe it's speaking about both.

Notice that Jesus now takes the opportunity to discuss other future events with His disciples, Luke 17:22. 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.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'The days will come. He here takes occasion to direct the minds of his disciples to the days of vengeance which were about to fall on the Jewish nation. Heavy calamities will befall the Jewish people, and you will desire a deliverer.'

There would be false messiahs and false prophets, Luke 17:23 / Luke 21:8-11 / Matthew 24:23-26 / Mark 13:21-23. They are again warned to ignore false Messiahs and false prophets, Luke 17:23 / Matthew 24:4-5 / Mark 13:5-6.
Boles, in his commentary, says the following.

'Many persons, impostors, and self-deceived aspire to fill the places of persons of honour. Many did come claiming to be the Christ. There is still a constant stream of men claiming to be God's chosen servants, leading multitudes into sin and infidelity with pretended claims.'

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. They were to ignore the false messiahs, and the Lord gives a reason why they must ignore the false messiahs.
This is the same warning Jesus gave his disciples when discussing the fall of Jerusalem, Matthew 24:4-5 / Matthew 24:11. They are to ignore them because when the Lord does come, it will not be in the desert or some obscure place. He will appear instantaneously and will be seen by everyone who has ever lived, Luke 17:24 / Matthew 24:27-28 / Revelation 1:7. The Essenes in the desert at Qumran were expecting a Messiah who would throw off the Roman yoke. Their seclusion did not save them from being massacred by the Roman army. The coming of the Son of Man will be obvious to all. Therefore, we shouldn't listen to people who claim that the Son of Man is here or there.
Josephus, in his writings, says the following.

'Many false Christs appeared about that time, attempting to lead away the people.'

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'Many false Christs, according to Josephus, appeared about that time, attempting to lead away the people, Matthew 24:23-27.'
Before any of these things happen, Jesus will suffer and be rejected by that generation to whom Jesus was speaking, Luke 17:25. The Lord Jesus would suffer scorn, abuse, and death, being rejected by people of that generation.
This 'generation' implies it would happen in Jesus' time, Luke 17:25 / Matthew 23:36. Please note that the phrase 'this generation' occurs fifteen times in the New Testament, and everyone is where the Lord is referring to the generation of people to whom He is talking. The phrase 'that generation' is used to refer to folk of a different time, Hebrews 3:10.
The death of Jesus was a significant event prior to the fall of Jerusalem or the fall of Rome, Mark 8:31. While still a significant event, it is less important as a time marker for events in our lifetime or to mark the second coming of Christ.

THE END OF THE WORLD

‘Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.’ ‘It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying, and selling, planting, and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.’ Luke 17:26-29

Jesus now goes on to speak to His disciples about His return. Jesus says that there is going to be a time coming when they will desire the days of the Son of Man, Daniel 7:13-14, but mustn’t be fooled by going out and looking for it, Luke 17:26.
When the days of the Son of Man arrive, the coming will be quite visible. Jesus illustrates the fact that people wouldn’t pay attention to the warnings before the judgment with two past events, the flood in the days of Noah, Luke 17:26-27, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot, Luke 17:28-29.
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, they will never notice, Luke 17:27-28 / Matthew 24:37-39. The only sign before the flood was the preaching of Noah, Genesis 6:5 / Genesis 7:6-23 / Matthew 24:37-39.
And you know 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 onboard.’

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. Peter said that people will scoff at the idea of the world ending, 2 Peter 3:4-6.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

‘It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night, two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” “Where, Lord?” they asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.” Luke 17:30-37

Jesus now turns His attention to the destruction of Jerusalem again. The parallels to Luke 17:30-31 are found in Matthew 24:17-18, and Mark 13:15-16, and they refer to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.
Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Destruction came upon the old world, and upon Sodom, ‘suddenly,’ when they were engaged in other things, and little expecting this. ‘So, suddenly and unexpectedly, says he, shall destruction come upon the Jewish people.’

'On that day', Luke 17:30, refers to the time of yearning and bogus messiahs. When Jerusalem is under siege, they must get away. In Luke 17:31, the word 'that' refers back to the beginning of the Lord's remarks where He warns them that there would be false Messiahs, Luke 21:22-23.
When they heard about bogus messiahs rallying patriotic Hebrews to fight off the Roman soldiers, they were to flee without looking back because their lives would be in such danger that they would not even have time to collect their belongings; they were to abandon everything.

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, Luke 21:20. 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, Luke 21:21-24 / Matthew 24:16-20 / Mark 13:15-17. '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, along with Matthew 24:16-20 / Mark 13:15-17 / Luke 21:21-24, confirm that these predictions are to do with the Jews living then.
It means when they saw the Roman armies, Luke 21:20, they should flee immediately and not go into the house to rescue any belongings. In this context, it means when Jesus comes, one's hope must be on Christ. If one has his trust in material things, they will not do him any good.
The story of Lot's wife is told in Genesis 19:17-26. The basic problem of Lot's wife that caused her disobedience was her trust in material things instead of God, Luke 17:32.
During the siege of AD 70, there was a short break in hostilities, and that day, Christians, following this advice, took that opportunity to flee Jerusalem. They weren't to be like Lot's wife, reluctant to leave their belongings behind.

One should remember Lot's wife and trust in God, not in earthly material possessions. The person who trusts in material possessions will lose his life, Luke 17:33 / Matthew 10:39 / Matthew 16:25-26.
The person who denies himself, takes up his cross and follows Jesus will have eternal life. The real values of life are spiritual. When one believes in Jesus Christ and obeys him, he is putting his trust in God and spiritual things. This person will have eternal life, Matthew 7:24-27.
Two people will be sleeping, one will be left and the other taken, two women will be grinding grain, one will be left and the other taken, Luke 17:34-35. Jesus gives the same warning concerning His final coming, Matthew 24:40-41. Note that Luke 17:36 isn't in the most reliable manuscripts, although it is in Matthew 24:40, 'two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left.' They ask where will the Messiah be found?
Luke 17:37, and Jesus tells them, 'Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.' The Greek word here may mean either eagle or vulture, Luke 17:37 / Matthew 24:28. The imagery of this context is of the vulture. Where there is a dead body, the vultures will gather.

CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION

'Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.' Luke 18:1

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 really, 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.’ Here in Luke, we find Jesus teaching in parable form that He wants us to speak to the Father in prayer, especially in times of need, Luke 18:1. The Father longs to hear from us, He longs for us to talk to Him, sadly when times get tough a lot of Christians simply switch off, they go everywhere else to find someone to talk to, instead of speaking to the Father who longs to help His children, Luke 11:5-10 / Ephesians 6:18 / 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
It’s so easy to give up when difficult times come our way, it’s so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that God doesn’t hear our prayers or God won’t answer our prayers or as in the case of this parable, it’s easy to fall into the trap of thinking that God just doesn’t care about the injustices in our lives, but Jesus reminds us not to give up, why?

THE PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW

‘He said: ‘In a certain town, there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ ‘For some time, he refused. But finally, he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’
Luke 18:2-5

THE JUDGE

It’s quite clear that Jesus is teaching us that anyone who doesn’t fear God in the first place, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, anyone who doesn’t respect His ways and commandments will usually have no respect for anyone else, Luke 18:2. There’s no doubt that the kind of judge Jesus is describing here is the kind of judge who would only listen to those who were willing to ‘pay’ him for his time. In other words, he would only listen and act on behalf of someone else if it was for his own benefit, if he was going to gain something out of it.

THE WIDOW

It’s also clear that someone at some point in time had done something wrong against this widow, and so, she was perfectly within her rights to plead for justice, Luke 13:3. I don’t believe her plea for justice was in terms of spiteful revenge, but simply in terms of her enemy wronging her in some way, and she simply wanted justice.
God has always had a special place in His heart for widows, Luke 13:3, and He always wanted them protected and cared for, Deuteronomy 10:18 / Psalm 68:5 / Isaiah 1:17 / James 1:27.

THE JUDGE

The judge doesn't seem to care about his duties as a judge, he doesn't seem to care about the widow and her plea, he seems to be more interested in getting rid of this 'nagging' widow, Luke 18:4.
Notice that the judge admitted within himself at least, that he didn't fear God and he didn't care what people thought about him, Luke 18:4. This is what was really going on inside of him and this reveals just how evil he was, he was full of himself, he was arrogant and cared for no-one else except himself.
We're not told how long she kept pleading with the judge, but the good news is that the widow didn't give up, her persistence paid off as the judge finally listened and acted in dealing with the one who unjustly treated her, Luke 18:5. But please note, he did this, not because he genuinely cared about the widow, he did this because he simply wanted to get rid of the widow, he was tired of her.
The NIV tells us that he gave in to her pleas, 'so that she won't eventually come and attack me', Luke 18:5, which can be misleading. We're not to think that somehow this widow was eventually going to get the judge and beat him up if he didn't help her.
The original text literally says, 'lest she gives me a black eye', which unlike today's understanding of someone giving you a 'black eye' in terms of being physically assaulted, the judge is thinking in terms of his reputation as a judge, in his opinion he is a 'good' judge, with a good reputation which he wants to maintain, Matthew 6:1.
Like so many today, he possibly believed that doing this righteous deed for this widow would be accepted as a righteous act, but the truth is, Jesus is telling us that if our motives are wrong, God won't accept them as righteous acts, Proverbs 16:2 / 1 Corinthians 4:5.

'And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.' Luke 18:6-7

THE POINT

Jesus quickly gets to the point of the parable which is simply this, if a judge who doesn't fear God and doesn't care about others, if this judge who cares about no one except himself will act upon the requests of this persistent widow, how much more will God hear and act upon the pleas of His children who are seeking justice because of the persecution their facing, Luke 18:6-7 / Hebrews 10:37 / 2 Peter 3:8-9 / Revelation 6:10.
Hence, the answer to the first question is 'yes'. God will bring justice to those who are pleading for justice because they are being persecuted, and the answer to the second question is 'no'. He will not keep putting them off because He cares for and loves His children so much, He won't ignore their pleas but will act justly against the persecutors.

FAITH ON EARTH

'However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' Luke 18:8

The whole crutch of the parable is found in Jesus' third and final question. Not only are Christians encouraged to pray when they're facing trials, but they're also encouraged to keep the faith while going through those trials, James 1:2-8.
We get the idea that this persecution will be so intense that many will fall away because of it.

What kind of faith is this? Luke 18:8. To keep the answer to this question in its proper context, it must be the kind of faith that endures, the kind of faith that knows that God hears our cries during times of persecution and the kind of faith that acknowledges that God will help us in our time of need and will act justly. In other words, don't stop praying for justice, don't give up when we're being persecuted.
It's clear that Jesus has in mind that the persecution of His children will be ongoing persecution until He returns to judge the world, we read about this persecution happening within the early church, Acts 7 / Revelation 1-22, and throughout history, even to our present day, hence why we need to keep praying about it and trusting that God will deal with it.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Imagine going through trial after trial and being persecuted time and time again because you're a Christian. It's so easy to stop praying and give up because we've convinced ourselves that God isn't listening, or He doesn't care.

God wants us to have an enduring faith that never quits, which never stops believing that God will deal with our persecutors, 2 Peter 3:1-13 / Matthew 24:12-13.
Over the years, I've heard many a sermon and sat in many a Bible study where we were taught that, just like the widow, we should keep 'nagging' God in prayer until He finally gives in and answers our prayers.

That's not the point of the parable; in fact, it's the complete opposite. God is the complete opposite of this unjust judge because He really does care about His children.

The context isn't about 'general prayer', it's all about justice and being mistreated, we don't have to keep 'nagging' God in prayer because we're promised He hears our prayers, and we're promised that He will take action and unlike the unjust, just quickly at that.

In this context, Jesus is encouraging His followers to pray for deliverance in times of persecution because God promises to act and bring judgment upon anyone who persecutes His children.

We must trust that God will deal with them at the appropriate time, Romans 12:19. As Christians, we need to believe that in times of trouble, God is always longing to hear from us in order to answer our prayers and help us. Anyone who says, 'become a Christian and your life will be a bed of roses' has lied because the Bible promises the exact opposite, 2 Timothy 3:12.
As Christians we will go through many trials and tribulations in this life and there may be times when we're facing real persecution, but Jesus promised that if we endure the persecution we will be blessed, Matthew 5:10-11, but let's not forget that Jesus' question here still applies to us all today, will we have the enduring faith that lasts until He returns?

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

'To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable.'
Luke 18:9

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Self-righteousness is a problem that many people struggle with in one way or another. Sadly, this also applies to some Christians, who start measuring their righteousness against others; they start measuring how many times they attend meetings, comparing themselves with others, how much money they put in the offering, how well they know the Scriptures, etc.

In the context here in Luke's account, it was all about those who had become legalistic and measured their religion by the things they were doing, law-keeping, fasting, public praying, etc., Luke 18:9 / Matthew 6:1-18 / Luke 10:29 / Luke 16:16.
The mindset in Jesus' day with the Scribes and Pharisees was very much like measuring their religion against others, and if you didn't match up to theirs, then you were condemned, Proverbs 30:12 / Colossians 2:20-23.
This is what the whole point of this parable is about: it's about those who are self-righteous and trust in their good works to be right before God and those who are humble enough to rely on God and His righteousness because they understand that they can never be right before God, no matter how many good deeds they do, Isaiah 64:6.

THE PARABLE

'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.' Luke 18:10

THE PHARISEES

The word Pharisee, Luke 18:10, is derived from an Aramaic word meaning, 'separated.' Over the years, they believed in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and punishment in the future life. They believed that punishment was based on how a person behaves in this life.
They believed that the souls of the wicked would be in prison forever under the earth, but those who were righteous would live again. If you remember, this was the opposite of the Sadducees, who taught that there was no resurrection, no angels, no spirit, but the Pharisees believed in all of these things, Acts 23:8.
When we read through the Gospel, we can clearly see that the Pharisees practised righteousness externally, and it appears they were more concerned with the outward appearance than the inward feeling, Matthew 23.
It was the Pharisees who introduced traditions to the Jewish religion, Matthew 15:2-6. There's no doubt when it came to persecuting Jesus and His followers, the Pharisees were leading the way.

THE TAX COLLECTORS

Most people know that a tax collector, Luke 18:10, 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. Their job was to collect not only Roman taxes but the temple tax, which 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.

THE PHARISEES’ ATTITUDE

‘The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ Luke 18:11-12

Remember, the Pharisees were an elect group of Jews, who were of the ruling class of people; he truly believed that what he practised was right before God. Notice that he ‘stood’, Luke 18:11, this suggests that he struck the pose, the idea of doing this so that others could see him doing it, it’s like he is saying, ‘look at me, look how wonderful I am’, Matthew 6:5.

Notice that he wasn’t all that bad either; he wasn’t a robber, he wasn’t an evildoer, and he wasn’t an adulterer, Luke 18:11; those are positive things. His devotion to keeping God’s commands was ‘good’ in his eyes, as he practised and did more than what God required, Luke 18:12.

Those are the ‘positives’, but when we read the words of the Pharisees it’s clear that all that matters to him is his own self-righteousness, he went through his religious checklist, I’m not a robber, check, I’m not an evildoer, check, I’m not an adulterer, check, I fast twice a week, check, I give a tenth of my income, check, Luke 18:11-12.

Just as a side note to show you just how self-righteous the Pharisees had become, he mentioned that he fasted twice a week, Luke 18:12. Well, according to the law of Moses, they were commanded to fast only one day a year, and that was on the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 23:26-28.

The Pharisee says that he gives a tenth of all he gets, Luke 18:12, but again, the law of Moses only asked for tithes from the production of the field and cattle, not from all grains, not everything, Leviticus 27:30-33.

Despite acknowledging God in his prayer, the Pharisee’s prayer is interesting because he doesn’t ask for his needs to be met, he doesn’t ask God for a blessing, he doesn’t admit he’s a sinner, and he doesn’t ask for mercy.

We really get the idea that this is all just lip service with no heartfelt meaning behind it. We could say that even though he had two eyes, both of which should have been on God, one eye was on himself, and the other eye was on the tax collector, whom he insults.

In other words, he was measuring himself by his deeds and comparing himself to others and thought that he wasn’t as bad as some other people, Luke 18:11-12 / Luke 7:41-42, and thus came to the conclusion that all his law-keeping would satisfy God and God would have no choice but to accept him because he was so good, Romans 3:20 / Galatians 2:16.

THE TAX COLLECTOR

‘But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ Luke 18:13

Remember that the tax collectors were social outcasts, and no doubt he felt ashamed of the part he was playing in the oppression and humiliation of his own nation by the Romans.

No doubt he was well aware that he was nothing like the Pharisee in terms of law-keeping and good deeds. He couldn't keep up with the Pharisees' righteousness, and he may have looked at him as the example of righteousness, but he was failing miserably.

Whilst the Pharisee proudly stood publicly to be seen and heard, the tax collector 'stood at a distance,' Luke 13:13, why? Simply because he was judged as unrighteous by the Pharisees.
He may have stood at a distance from the Pharisee, but he certainly stood close to God because he recognised his own spiritual shortfalls, Matthew 5:3-10.
He couldn't even bring himself to look heavenwards, because he recognised his sinfulness; he beat his chest, showing his sorrow and remorse, Luke 18:13 / Luke 23:48.
Notice the Pharisee used thirty-three words, but the tax collector only used seven words. Again, this shows the character difference between them both. It's so often the case that fewer words speak a lot more. His prayer was informal, it was warm and honest, it was prayed by a man who was burdened with sin. The tax collector first asks God for mercy, Luke 18:13.
You see, justice is when we do get what we do deserve, mercy is when we don't get what we do deserve, and grace is when we do get what we don't deserve. He then admits his sinfulness before God, Romans 3:23.

'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.' Luke 18:14

Interestingly, the Pharisee received nothing after praying, although we could say he didn't ask for anything. The point is that his prayers weren't accepted by God because his prayers were insults to God. The tax collector's prayer resulted in him being justified before God, Luke 18:14, because his prayer was short, honest and to the point.
Notice Jesus didn't say the tax collector went home justified before God because of his perfect law-keeping or his good deeds, he went home justified because he recognised he was a sinner who was in need of God's grace, Luke 18:13 / Romans 1:17 / Galatians 3:11 / Hebrews 10:38. In other words, he recognised his own spiritual unworthiness but trusted in the grace of God for justification which simply means 'just as if I've never sinned'.
Make no mistake about it, Jesus saying that anyone who practises self-righteousness will be brought back down to planet earth with a thump, but those who humble themselves will be raised up by God, James 4:6. I believe it's always a wise choice to humble ourselves, rather than God having to humble us, Luke 18:14 / John 17:1-17.

THE SINNER'S PRAYER

I heard many preachers and teachers using this text as an example of the 'sinner's prayer' where they teach that the tax collector's prayer is an example of a prayer for salvation.

Like the Pharisee in the parable, well-intentioned people are simply going beyond what is written, 1 Corinthians 4:6, or, in the case of the 'sinner's prayer', not going far enough.
First of all, we need to notice that the tax collector was already a child of God; he was Jewish, and after his prayer, he was still a Jew, still under the old law. He didn't become a Christian because Jesus hadn't died on the cross yet, Colossians 2:14. There is no example of the 'sinner's prayer' anywhere in Scripture, even after Jesus died on the cross.
The Scriptures clearly teach us what a person must do in order to be saved, we must hear God's Word, Romans 10:17, we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, John 3:36, we must confess His name before

men, Romans 10:9-10, we must repent of whatever sin that is in our lives, Luke 13:3, and we must be baptised for the forgiveness of our sins, Acts 2:38.
If we're honest with ourselves, when we look at the Pharisee and the tax collector's attitude, maybe there are times when we see a touch of both of them in us.

What I mean is that we sometimes can just go through the 'routine' of worship, we hear the same old sermons being recycled, but we leave and go back to 'normality' without being moved in our hearts, and we hear the same prayers being led week in and week out.

We sing the same hymns without the words moving us, and we partake of the Lord's Supper without giving any thought whatsoever as to what it really means to us as individuals.

To the Pharisees, it was 'them' and 'us', but as Christians, humility is a virtue that must be practised; otherwise, we too can fall into the trap of self-righteous religion. We must accept that everyone, including ourselves, is a sinner who has fallen short of God's desire for us, Romans 3:10 / Romans 3:23.
When we pray, we must remember that the only audience we're praying to is God Himself. He's not interested in hearing long-winded prayers about how wonderful we are, and He certainly doesn't need to be reminded of what His Word says.

The prayer of the tax collector was honest, short and to the point, and maybe there are times when we're 'broken' and honest with ourselves about our own sinfulness, we just don't have the words to express ourselves, and all we can do is ask for mercy while admitting our own sinfulness.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN AND JESUS

'People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Luke 18:15-17

The disciples never seemed to want Jesus to be bothered, so they were constantly trying to keep certain kinds of people away from Him, Mark 10:46-52. In this case, it was children and notice the disciples actually rebuked those who brought the children to Jesus, Luke 18:15 / Matthew 19:13 / Mark 10:13.
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, Luke 18:17 / Matthew 19:14 / Mark 10:14-15. He said that the kingdom of God itself belongs to people who become like children, Luke 18:16-17 / Matthew 19:14 / Mark 10:14-15.
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. 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, Luke 9:48 / Matthew 18:4 / 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.

THE RICH YOUNG MAN

"A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone." Luke 18:18

This event is recorded in Luke 18:18-30 / Matthew 19:16-30 / 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, Luke 18:23 / Matthew 19:22 / 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, Luke 18:21 / Matthew 19:20 / 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, Luke 18:18 / Matthew 19:16 / Mark 10:19; he was honestly looking for answers.

JESUS ANSWERS THE QUESTION REGARDING ETERNAL LIFE

Mark 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, Luke 18:23 / Matthew 19:16-30 / 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, Luke 18:18 / Matthew 19:16 / Mark 10:17. In other words, he was asking, what must he do to be saved? Which is the question the disciples asked, Luke 18:26 / Matthew 19:25 / 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, Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:20-21 / Mark 10:21. He loved money more than God, Colossians 3:5. His wealth had become his security, Luke 18:24-25 / Matthew 19:23-25 / 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', Luke 18:19 / Matthew 17:19 / 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, Luke 18:27 / Matthew 19:26 / 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', Luke 18:19 / Matthew 17:19 / 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, Luke 18:22-23 / Matthew 19:21-22 / 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. Afterall, 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.

"You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother.'" Luke 18:20

Notice 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', Luke 18:19 / Matthew 19:17 / 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, Luke 18:20 / Matthew 19:18-19 / 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 since I was a boy," he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Luke 18:21-22

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', Luke 18:21 / Matthew 19:20 / Mark 10:20.
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, Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21 / 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, Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21 / 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', Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21 / 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, Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21 / 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 he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy." Luke 18:23

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, Luke 18:23 / Matthew 19:22 / 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, Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21 / Mark 10:21 / Luke 14:25-33.

THE DISCIPLE'S REACTION

"Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" Luke 18:24-26

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,' Luke 18:24 / Matthew 19:23 / 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, Luke 18:25 / Matthew 19:24 / 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?' Luke 18:26 / Matthew 19:25 / 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 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 replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" "Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life." Luke 18:27-30

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, Luke 18:27 / Matthew 19:26 / 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 answers 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, Luke 18:29-30 / Matthew 19:28-30 / 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, Luke 18:29-30 / Matthew 19:29 / Mark 10:29-30. Jesus says, 'many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first', Luke 13:30 / Matthew 20:16 / Matthew 19:30 / Mark 10:31.
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?

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A THIRD TIME

'Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again." The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.' Luke 18:31-34

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, Luke 18:31 / Mark 10:32 / Matthew 10:17.
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, Luke 18:32 / Matthew 20:18-19 / Mark 10:33 / Isaiah 53.
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 the Sanhedrin, Matthew 26:15, and He knows He would be handed over to the Gentiles, Luke 18:32 / Mark 10:32-33 / Matthew 17:22-23, that is, the Romans, to be mocked, spat upon, flogged and crucified, 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, Luke 18:32 / Matthew 20:18-19 / Mark 10:33-34.
The good news is that Jesus also knows that He will rise again on the third day, Mark 10:34 / 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, despite His disciples being saddened by Jesus even speaking about His death, Luke 18:31 / Luke 9:22 / Luke 24:46 / Matthew 16:21-28. 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.'

TWO BLIND MEN RECEIVE SIGHT

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 Luke 18:35-43 / Matthew 20:29-34 / Mark 10:46-52.
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 event in Matthew 9:27-31 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 Luke 18:35 / Matthew 20:29, and Mark 10:46.
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.

A BLIND BEGGAR RECEIVES HIS SIGHT

'As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied. Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.' Luke 18:35-43

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, Luke 18:35 / Matthew 20:29-30 / Mark 10:46.

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!' Luke 18:36-38 / Matthew 20:30 / Mark 10:47.

The crowds tried to silence him, Luke 18:39 / Matthew 20:31 / Mark 10:48, 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!' Luke 18:39 / Matthew 20:31 / Mark 10:48.

'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, Luke 18:40 / Matthew 20:32. 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, Luke 18:41 / Matthew 20:32-33 / Mark 10:51. Jesus has compassion on them and tells them to go, their faith has healed them, and immediately they received their sight, Luke 18:42-43 / Matthew 20:34 / Mark 10:52.

Notice also that they began to follow Him, Luke 18:43 / Matthew 20:34 / Mark 10:52. 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 19

INTRODUCTION

'Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.' Luke 19:1-2

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through, and there was a man by the name of Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector and was wealthy, Luke 19:1-2.

THE 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. Their job was to collect not only Roman taxes but the temple tax, which 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.

ZACCHAEUS

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector for the Romans, but Luke also tells us that he was wealthy, but not how he came by his wealth. Because the name Zacchaeus means 'pure', we would assume that he became wealthy through collecting taxes, which was his job.

We can also assume that he was a righteous man, Luke 19:9, and this is one of these people who remained faithful to God despite his wealth, Luke 18:24-27 / 1 Timothy 6:6-12.

It's all too easy to condemn someone because of their wealth, and it's all too easy to tell them they must give up everything they own and give it to the poor, Matthew 10:17-27.

I guess we could say that Zacchaeus was the camel passing through the eye of the needle, and the rich man entering the kingdom of God, Luke 18:25 / Matthew 19:24 / Mark 10:25. There's nothing wrong with being wealthy; it all depends if we rely on our wealth more than we do on God and how we use our wealth.

'He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So, he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' Luke 19:3-7

It's clear that Zacchaeus was small in size because he couldn't see over the crowd, Luke 19:3, but something else to keep in mind here, because he was a tax collector, the Pharisees commanded that they would be a part of God's people when the Messiah came. Despite him being rich and in a high position in the Roman rule, he still had to climb up a tree to get a look at Jesus.
The tree in question, Luke 19:4, was the sycamore-fig tree, the fig-mulberry, having fig-like fruit and leaves like the mulberry. These trees were strong, with long branches and were often climbed, especially by young children. The very fact that he took the time to climb the tree tells us a lot about his determination just to see Jesus in the flesh.

JESUS KNOWS EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE

Even though Jesus had never met Zacchaeus before, He certainly knew His name, Luke 19:5 / Luke 6:8 / Luke 9:47 / Matthew 9:4 / Matthew 12:25 / Matthew 22:18 / Matthew 24:25 / Mark 2:8 / Mark 5:30. Isn't it wonderful that He knows us personally, Luke 12:7.
He not only knew who Zacchaeus was, but He also knew the condition of Zacchaeus' heart. Jesus wanted to stay at his house this day, Luke 19:5. This is the only occasion where Jesus invites Himself to stay at someone's house.
Notice that he 'welcomed him gladly', Luke 19:6, which tells us that God will always welcome anyone who welcomes Him into their lives. But, as always, there are those in the background who aren't happy with Jesus and His decisions to associate with 'sinners'.
The crowd seemed to have made up their minds that Zacchaeus was a traitor to the Jews and therefore a sinner, Luke 19:7, because he was a tax collector, regardless of whether he was an honest tax collector or not, 1 Samuel 16:7.
In other words, Zacchaeus was guilty, in their minds at least, of being a sinner because he worked for sinners, the Romans. He was guilty by association. Jesus was going to deal with this mentally later in Luke 19:11-27.

'But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Luke 19:8

I don't believe that Zacchaeus is saying from this point on he's going to do all these things, Luke 19:8. I believe he's saying that he's going to continue to do what he's been doing for years, he will continually give to the poor, and he will continue to have compassion on the poor, Psalm 41:1.
Surely this gives us a glimpse into his heart and his honesty, he wants to continue to do what's right, he's even willing to pay back anyone 'if' he has cheated anybody out of anything, Luke 19:8.
Notice the word 'if', implying he may not have cheated anyone deliberately. Other tax collectors may have been charging a lot of extra charges over and above what was actually required by the Romans, but Zacchaeus seems to be charging just enough to earn a decent living.

This idea of paying back 'four times the amount', Luke 19:8, went way beyond what the Old Testament law required, Exodus 22 / Numbers 5:6-7 / Leviticus 6:1-6, but was often what was required by Roman law in some cases.
Zacchaeus was obviously very careful when it came to dealing with people's money, and if he overcharged people by mistake, he would go back and give them not just the difference but four times the amount.

Again, this shows us the integrity of the man; he was honest and also strove to do what was right, even if that did mean he had to humble himself when he realised he made a mistake. How many of us are quick to give the shopkeeper the money back when they give us too much change?

'Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.' Luke 19:9-10

Jesus tells him that salvation has come to his house, Luke 19:9.
Ryle, in his commentary, says the following.

'Salvation comes to a house when the head and master of it is saved.'

Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham by faith, Luke 19:9 / Romans 2:28-29 / Galatians 3:7 / Galatians 3:26-29. The Jews wouldn't accept him as a son of Abraham because he was a tax collector.
Notice his faith had legs attached, he climbed the tree, he came down when Jesus asked him to, He was willing to do what was right, He took Jesus to his house. In other words, his faith in Jesus moved him to respond to Jesus, which resulted in his salvation, James 2:14-26. The Jews believed that salvation comes to a house when the head and master of it are saved.
Here we read about Christ's mission whilst He was on earth, 'He came to seek and to save the lost', Luke 19:10. It's a truth that many people ignore, many people won't admit they are lost, lost in sin.
Isn't it interesting that despite Zacchaeus being a righteous man, Jesus still classed him as 'lost'? The word 'lost' here simply means 'spiritual destitution and alienation from God'. Zacchaeus was lost, and he didn't even know it. Salvation came to him because Jesus brought it to him and accepted Him.

Zacchaeus proved that he was the real deal. The Pharisees and the Jews as a whole tried to justify themselves by their works, but Zacchaeus was different and had a different attitude towards his good works; his faith and repentance clearly show us that he was different from those around him.

And as a result, he is saved from his sins, that is, from the guilt of his sins, from the power of his sins, and now all the benefits of salvation are his. We're not told if he ever went on in later years to become a Christian; we can only hope that he did.

His faith in Christ was rewarded then, but a greater reward awaited him if he obeyed Christ's later commands, Matthew 28:18-20 / Mark 16:16. Because Christ's mission was to 'save', this tells us that we couldn't save ourselves; Christ had to come and do something for us that we couldn't do ourselves.
Some people are just happy to read about Jesus, whilst others are more than happy to obey Him too. The question is, what heights will we climb, not only to see Jesus but to allow Him to save us?

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN MINAS

'While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.' Luke 19:11

A few commentators suggest that this parable is Luke's version of the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14-30; however, although there are some similarities, they are different.
First of all, they are spoken in different places; this one is spoken in Jericho, while the other is spoken in Jerusalem. One involves only servants; this one involves also hostile subjects. One has three servants, this one has ten servants; there are also different amounts of money and different applications.

We must remember that this parable is part of Jesus' discussion at Jericho, where he specifically spoke of His mission on earth. As he gets closer to Jerusalem, the disciples are thinking about what they assumed would soon happen, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Many people believed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, but they didn't understand the nature of His kingdom and the purpose behind it. And so, Jesus, who is coming near the end of His ministry, teaches a parable to help clear up any misconceptions, Luke 19:11.

THE KING

'He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.' Luke 19:12

Robertson's Word Pictures says the following.

'Apparently, this parable has the historical basis of Archelaus, who actually went from Jerusalem to Rome on this very errand to get a kingdom in Palestine and to come back to it. This happened while Jesus was a boy in Nazareth, and it was a matter of common knowledge.'

Expositor's Bible Commentary says the following.

'The historical background for the parable was the visit of Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, to Rome to secure permission to reign as a so-called client king, i.e., over a territory actually subject to Rome. This petition was opposed by a delegation of Archelaus' own subjects.'

The nobleman represents Jesus, the Messiah, Luke 19:12. He meets the credentials of a king, and He is worthy to be king. But His kingship will not begin here, where He is.
He travels to a distant country far away to receive His crown and begin His reign, to have Himself appointed king, Luke 19:12 / Philippians 2:8-9 / Hebrews 1:3 / Hebrews 1:8-9.
This was pointing out to the disciples that Jesus would not immediately establish His kingdom during the coming Passover at Jerusalem. Later in the upper room discourse, the disciples were perplexed and sorrowful when Jesus spoke to them about going away, John 16.
Where was this 'distant country'? Luke 19:12. Was it the grave, at His death, or heaven at His ascension after His resurrection? The best understanding points to His ascension to the Father as the time He would receive the Kingdom, Daniel 7:13-14 / Matthew 28:18-20 / Acts 2 / Ephesians 1:19-21.
Jesus' parable pointed forward to fifty days after His death at the Passover, on the Day of Pentecost, when the church or kingdom of God began through the coming of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the authority of Christ, after His resurrection, Acts 1:3-8.

THE SERVANTS

‘So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ Luke 19:13

In preparation for His reception of His kingdom, the nobleman entrusts his ten servants with the responsibility to do business on His behalf, Luke 19:13. His journey to the distant country provides an opportunity for His servants to show their faithfulness and loyalty to Him.
The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia says the following.

‘A mina was a Greek coin worth 100 drachmas or slightly more than three months’ wages.’

For them, the issue is one of stewardship and responsibility. While the master wanted them to make money with what he provided, the amount of money is insignificant in this parable. All received the same relatively small amount.

The question was whether each would faithfully work and submit to His authority, Luke 19:13. Therefore, the authority of the King is in view. Some servants will be faithful, but not all are willing.

THE REBELLIOUS SUBJECTS

‘But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’ Luke 19:14

Some other subjects hated the nobleman, Luke 19:14. They went as far as sending a delegation to denounce His authority over them, and attempt to sabotage His reign, Luke 19:14. But the enemies of this King would have no such success.
David prophesied of the Christ, Psalm 69:4. Jesus warned His disciples that they would be hated because He was hated. Later in the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus spoke of those who treated the servants of the king spitefully and killed them, Matthew 22:6.
Jesus was clearly pointing out that His authority would be rejected. But the hatred and rejection would not preclude His reigning over them. Notice that he returns in Luke 19:15, ‘having received the kingdom’. His kingship wasn’t postponed because of their rejection.
Rather, the accountability He established with His subjects before He left was still intact, and when He returned, He came to exercise judgment. They rejected the chief cornerstone, Psalm 118:22; they rejected the very one who came for them, John 1:11-13.

THE JUDGMENT

‘He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ “‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ “The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ “His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’ “Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’ “His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my

money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?' "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.' "'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!' "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.'" Luke 19:15-27

With business complete and successful, the king now wants to know how much money his servants gained from the money he had given them, Luke 19:15. The authority of this king would be exhibited in His willingness and ability to judge His servants.
There would be an accounting which is proof that He was in charge. Those servants who are responsible and use what they are entrusted with are rewarded.

Those who are faithful in little are given power over much, from ten minas to the rulership of ten cities, Luke 19:16-17. From five minas to the rulership of five cities, Luke 16:18-19.
Then another servant came and returned the mina that had been kept in a handkerchief, Luke 19:20. Because of fear, he did nothing, and note that he uses wording that implied the king was a harsh and unreasonable man, collecting what he had not actually earned, Luke 19:21.
Notice that the king calls this servant wicked because of his failure to do what he was supposed to do, and his accusations against the king, Luke 19:22. The king then judged the servant by his own words, and so the king would treat him as harshly as he was accused, Luke 19:22.
Whether he was actually harsh or not is irrelevant. Notice how this king was gracious to those who had been faithful in their service.
He is rebuked because he didn't even put the money in a bank where it could at least have gained interest, Luke 19:23.
The king tells those standing by to take the mina away from the wicked servant and give it to the one who had ten minas, Luke 19:24. Those standing by don't seem to understand, because the one with the ten minas had already received so much, Luke 18:25.
But then the story turns back to those subjects who tried to sabotage His kingdom and hated Him, His enemies, Luke 19:27. The King has them destroyed, Luke 19:27. There is an accounting for those who reject the King.
Jesus' words may have been a prophetic pointer to the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem as God's punishment of the Jewish nation for the rejection of their Messiah.

The Bible Hub says the following.

1. Stewardship and Accountability.

The parable emphasises the responsibility of believers to use the resources and opportunities God has entrusted to them. Faithfulness in small matters is rewarded with greater responsibilities in the Kingdom of God.

2. The Nature of the Kingdom.

Jesus uses the parable to correct the expectation of an immediate, earthly kingdom. The nobleman's journey to a distant country symbolises Christ's ascension and the period before His return, during which His followers are to be active and diligent.

3. Judgment and Reward.

The parable illustrates the principle of divine judgment and reward. Faithful servants are rewarded with greater authority, while unfaithful servants face loss. The severe fate of the nobleman's enemies underscores the seriousness of rejecting Christ's lordship.

4. Grace and Responsibility.

While salvation is by grace, the parable highlights the believer's responsibility to live out their faith actively. The rewards are not for salvation but for faithfulness in service.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

The triumphal entry is recorded in all four Gospels, Luke 19:24-44 / Matthew 21:1-11 / 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.

'After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'" Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt, and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."' Luke 19:28-40

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, Luke 19:28-29 / Matthew 21:1 / Mark 11:1.

THE COLT

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, Luke 19:32 / Matthew 21:6 / 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, Luke 19:35 / Matthew 21:7 / 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 they 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 he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you, and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you." Luke 19:41-44

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 whom meet 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, Psalm 118:25-26 / Leviticus 23:40 / Matthew 21:8 / Mark 11:8.
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.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

'When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" Luke 19:45-46

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 richest 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, Luke 19:45 / Matthew 21:12 / 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 and 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.

'Every day, he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.'
Luke 19:47-48

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.

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

'One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?" He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me: John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet." So they answered, "We don't know where it was from." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." Luke 20:1-8

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS QUESTIONED

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, Luke 19:45-48 / Matthew 21:12-16 / 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, Luke 20:1-2 / Matthew 7:28-29 / Matthew 21:23 / Mark 11:27-28.

Jesus replied to their challenge with a question. He asked whether John's baptism came from God or men, Luke 20:3-4 / Matthew 21:24-25 / 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, Luke 20:5-7 / Matthew 21:25-27 / Mark 11:31-33. Their refusal demonstrated that they were not sincerely seeking the truth. Therefore, Jesus refused to answer their question, Luke 20:8 / Matthew 21:27 / 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 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.

'He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.' Luke 20:9

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, Luke 20:9 / Matthew 21:33 / 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.

'At harvest time, he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.' Luke 20:10-12

3. Our God is patient.

Notice how the master sent servant after servant, Luke 20:10-12 / Matthew 21:34-37 / 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 sawed 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.

‘Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’ “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.’ Luke 20:13-15

Notice that Jesus doesn’t call Himself a servant here, Luke 20:13-15 / Matthew 21:37-38 / 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, Luke 20:14-15 / Matthew 21:38-39 / 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.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” Luke 20:15-16

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, Luke 20:15 / Matthew 21:40 / 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 have 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, Luke 20:10 / Matthew 21:34 / 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,' Luke 20:15 / Matthew 21:40 / Matthew 21:43 / 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 will be grateful for everything He has done and will do for them, Luke 20:16 / Matthew 21:41 / 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 looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?' Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.' Luke 20:17-18

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 / Luke 20:17 / Matthew 21:42 / Mark 12:10-11.
This stone, which was the keystone for the building, the most important stone of all, was being rejected, Luke 20:18 / Matthew 21:44. 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, Luke 20:19 / Matthew 21:45-46 / 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.

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.

'The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.' Luke 20:19

They understood what Jesus was talking about with the parable; the chief priests and Pharisees didn't want to accept Him, Luke 20:19 / Matthew 21:45-46 / 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.

PAYING TAXES 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.

'Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said, so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor.' Luke 20:20

It's obvious that the parables, Luke 20:9-19 / Matthew 22:33-45 / 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, Luke 20:20 / Matthew 22:15 / Mark 12:13.

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 our 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.

'So, the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.' Luke 20:21

FLATTERY

The Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus and use flattery as a trap, Luke 20:21 / Matthew 22:16 / 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, Luke 20:21 / Matthew 22:16 / 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

‘Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’ Luke 20:22

In simple terms, they were asking Jesus this question based on the law of Moses, Luke 21:22 / Matthew 22:17 / 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 has no way out of, Luke 20:22 / Matthew 22:17 / Mark 12:15, but instead of them humiliating Jesus, Jesus will end up humiliating them.

‘He saw through their duplicity and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. He said to them, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.’ Luke 20:23-26

Notice how Jesus knew what they were up to and knew what their intent really was, Luke 20:23 / Matthew 22:18 / 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, Luke 20:24 / Matthew 22:19-21 / 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, Luke 20:25 / Matthew 22:21 / 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, Luke 20:25 / Matthew 22:21 / 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, Luke 20:26 / Matthew 22:22 / 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.

THE RESURRECTION AND MARRIAGE

'Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question.' Luke 20:27

THE SADDUCEES

The Sadducees were a religious sect in the time of Jesus, Luke 20:27 / Matthew 22:23 / 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 wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way, the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"' Luke 20:28-33

Just like the Pharisees before them, the Sadducees' question was all about trying to trap Jesus, Luke 20:28-33 / Matthew 22:24-28 / 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, Luke 20:28 / Matthew 22:24 / Mark 12:19, and then they give an example of a woman being widowed seven times, Luke 20:29-32 / Matthew 22:25-27 / 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, Luke 20:27 / Matthew 22:23 / Matthew 22:28 / 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, Luke 20:33 / Matthew 22:28 / Mark 12:23.

JESUS' RESPONSE

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.

> 'Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Luke 20:34-37

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, Luke 20:37 / Matthew 22:31-32 / Mark 12:26.

The Old Testament Scriptures do teach about the resurrection, Luke 20:37 / Matthew 22:31 / 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, Luke 20:36 / Matthew 22:30 / Mark 12:25, but He also tells them there will be no marriage at the resurrection, just like angels don't marry, Luke 20:35-36 / Matthew 22:30 / 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.

THE GOD OF THE LIVING

'He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.' Luke 20:38

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, Luke 20:38 / Matthew 22:32 / 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.

'Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" And no one dared to ask him any more questions.' Luke 20:39-40

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.

WHOSE SON IS THE MESSIAH?

'Then Jesus said to them, "Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."' David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" Luke 20:41-44

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? Luke 20:41-44 / Matthew 22:41-46 / 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 Luke 20:42 / Matthew 22:43-45, 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, Luke 20:42-43 / Matthew 22:44 / 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.

WARNING AGAINST THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW

'While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and, for a show, make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely." Luke 20:45-47

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 did was only for public show, Luke 20:46 / Matthew 23:5-7 / 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, Luke 20:46 / Matthew 23:6 / 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 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 20:26 / Matthew 23:11. 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', Luke 20:47 / Matthew 23:14 / 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. 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.

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION

'As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury.' Luke 21:1

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

Jesus sat down, looked up and observed people contributing to the temple treasury Luke 21:1 / Mark 12:41. He saw many rich people deposit large offerings into the temple treasury.

THE TEMPLE TREASURY

In the New Testament, there seems to be a lot of things happening in and around the temple treasury, which is also known as the Court of Women. It was called the Court of the Women, as that is as far as women were allowed to enter the temple courts. It was in this court where Jesus was presented for purification as a child, the place where they met Simeon and Anna, Luke 2:25-38.

We know that Jesus taught in the treasury, Matthew 21:23 / John 7:14 / John 7:28 / John 8:2 / John 8:20, but one thing we should bear in mind is that He never actually entered the sanctuary itself because it was only the priests who were allowed to enter.

The treasury was a court that was located to the east of the temple itself, just below the Nicanor Gate. The Sanhedrin often met there, and it was here that they brought the woman who was supposedly caught in the act of adultery, John 8:1-20.

In the treasury, there were thirteen boxes on the wall, into which people could drop their offering money into. They are made of bronze and called trumpets because of their shape.

'He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.' Luke 21:2

Not only did Jesus see many rich people deposit large offerings into the temple treasury, but He also saw an impoverished widow give two small coins, which were nearly worthless, Luke 21:2 / Mark 12:42.

THE COPPER COINS

The KJV uses the word 'mite', which was a very small Jewish coin called a 'lepton', meaning 'the thin one'; it's sometimes called a farthing or a penny, Luke 12:59. It was made of bronze or copper and was the smallest in terms of the value of all the Roman Coins, Mark 12:42.

HOW DID JESUS KNOW WHAT SHE GAVE?

I've personally held one of these coins in my hand, and I must say it's tiny, I would say around the size of our old British half pennies. How did Jesus know that this widow had given in two little coins?

It's possible that He saw them; we certainly know that He knows all things and all people, but it's also possible that the sound these coins made against the metal would have indicated how much people offered to the temple.

'"Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on."' Luke 21:3-4

The Lord explained that the widow had contributed more than the rich, more than all of them put together. It is being suggested here that she put in everything she had, while the rich had simply given their left-over change, Luke 21:3-4 / Mark 12:43-44.

This is the difference between a collection and an offering. When we stand outside a supermarket, we usually find someone rattling a collection box, and if we like the cause, we'll do our shopping and give them any spare change we have left over.

An offering isn't about giving the leftover change; it's purposely given, the amount is purposely given, and we give first, then do whatever we need to do with the rest.

WHY DID JESUS COMMEND THE WIDOW'S GIFT?

Some commentators suggest that the Jewish law at the time wouldn't allow anyone to give less than two gifts; if this is true, then it's clear she gave the smallest amount legally possible. However, if she literally gave everything she had and only had two coins to her name, this speaks volumes about her faith in God to take care of her daily needs.

Her offering was a reflection of her heart. What she gave was in accordance with God's law; however, this law was only addressed to Jewish males over the age of twenty, Exodus 30:12-14.
It's entirely possible that she wasn't obliged to give, but she did so as a free will offering, Exodus 35:29. If that's all she had, then it was truly a sacrificial gift because this meant she had nothing left.
She is the example of sacrificial living, which is in contrast with those who spend their wealth on everything else but reluctantly give God the leftovers, Matthew 6:19-21.
Her giving was easy because she knew her giving wouldn't affect her lifestyle; she trusted in God and not in wealth.
She gave because she truly loved God and expressed her love for Him through her giving, 2 Corinthians 4:15 / 1 Corinthians 15:10.

JESUS CONTRADICTS MODERN VIEWS OF GIVING

Many modern churches seem to regard large donations more highly than small ones. Some honour wealthy donors in special ways and allow them more influence in church policy; occasionally, they even ridicule small contributions as unworthy of the Lord. It's clear that the Lord Himself viewed giving in a very different way.

Jesus wasn't impressed by the size of the offering, whether large or small, but He was very concerned with the attitude of the giver. To Jesus, the gift of the widow, while having almost no monetary value, was worth much more than the large and impressive donations of the rich. We need to think of riches as Jesus did.

CONCLUSION

Jesus teaches us that giving has little to do with the amount we give but the attitude in which we give. He sees what we give, He knows the amount we give, but He also knows how much we have kept back for ourselves.

The poor among us should take great comfort from the widow's example, and they should know that their 'small' offering is just as accepted by God as someone who is rich and making a 'large' offering.

Even today in our churches, we have those who give a 'large' amount because they have to; God says, we MUST give! But then you get those others, who, out of a heart of thanksgiving for what God has done in their lives, may give 'less' because that's all they have, but their hearts are right.

When we look at the Christian faith as a whole, we know that our faith isn't just about receiving, but it's also about giving, Acts 20:35 / 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 / Philippians 4:8-18. To be a Christian means we need to be willing to sacrifice, even in our finances.
If we first give ourselves to the Lord, 2 Corinthians 8:5, we will have no problem being liberal in our giving.
Remember, Jesus saw what the widow put into the temple treasury, so He still sees it today, 2 Corinthians 9:7.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE, THE CITY, AND THE SIGN OF HIS COMING

‘Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.” “Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” Luke 21:5-7

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, Luke 21:5-7 / Matthew 24:1-3 / Mark 13:1-4.

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 Luke 21:5-36 / Matthew 25:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31, 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,’ Luke 21:5 / Mark 13:1.

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 / Matthew 7:10. 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.

'He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.' Luke 21:8-11

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, Luke 21:8-11 / Matthew 24:4-8 / Matthew 24:23-26 / Mark 13:5-8 / Mark 13:21-22.

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.

'But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.' Luke 21:12-19

2. The disciples to whom he was speaking would be persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders, betrayed even by their close relatives, and killed.

They would be hated everywhere, Luke 21:12-19 / Matthew 24:9-13 / Mark 12:12-19. All this had to happen before the temple was destroyed, Luke 21:9. They were required to remain faithful throughout all those traumatic experiences, Luke 21:18 / Matthew 24:13 / Mark 13:13.

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

'When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.' Luke 21:20

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 Epiphanes came to Jerusalem and took a pig into the temple and sacrificed it on the holy altar. 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 there, 'when you see Jerusalem in the process of being surrounded,' Luke 21:20. So, what is the warning of Jesus? It's very clear. They were to flee, Luke 21:21-24 / Matthew 24:16-20 / Mark 13:15-17.

'Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 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.'

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'? Luke 21:21 / Matthew 24:16 / Mark 13:14. 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.

In Matthew 24:20, they are to pray that they would not have to flee on the Sabbath. This confirms that these predictions are to do with the Jews living then. The horrors that would ensue would exceed anything else in history, either in the past or in the future, Luke 21:26 / Matthew 24:19-22 / Mark 13:17-19. They have nothing to do with the end of the world.

Jesus again reminds them, 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, Luke 21:8-11 / Matthew 24:4-8 / Matthew 24:23-26 / Mark 13:5-8 / Mark 13:21-22. 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.

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 body is, there will the 'vultures' be gathered together. Some translations use the word 'eagles', but it probably refers to vultures.

'There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' Luke 13:25-26

The sign language in Luke 21:5-36 / Matthew 24:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31 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 apocalyptical language, you often announced judgement by saying the whole cosmic structure, sun, moon, stars, were going to be shaken, Luke 21:25-26 / Matthew 24:29 / Mark 13:24-25. 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 Edom.
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.

'At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.' Luke 21:27-28

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,' Luke 21:32 / Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30.
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 in 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 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.

We're so far removed from this text at this time that we don't understand why this text is so important. In the first 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, Luke 21:32 / Matthew 23:36 / Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30. No longer were Israel God's chosen people, now salvation will be offered to everyone on the earth, Matthew 24:31 / Mark 13:27.

'He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. "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.' Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.' Luke 21:29-36

The sign events of Luke 21:5-36 / Matthew 24:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31 have already been fulfilled. And I think the key to understanding Luke 21:5-36 / Matthew 24:1-35 / Mark 13:1-37, is in Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30 / Luke 21:32, '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 are the signs of these things?' Luke 21:7 / Matthew 24:3 / Mark 13:4.
At the end of all three Gospels, He says, 'This generation will not pass away until these things happen,' Luke 21:32 / Matthew 24:34 / Mark 13:30. The real question is, what does Jesus mean by the word 'generation'? So, 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.' 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.

And 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 Luke 21 / Matthew 24 / Mark 13.
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 Luke 21:5-36 / Matthew 25:1-35 / Mark 13:1-31, 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 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', Luke 21:10-11 / Matthew 24:6-7 / Mark 13:7, 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, people were 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', Luke 21:8 / Matthew 24:24 / Mark 13:5.

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. 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'?

Now, 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 that, years ago, they met with wide resentment, because of their manner of approach, but they accepted 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 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 100,000 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.

‘Chamber’s 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 to 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’ evelen years earlier, on December 25th, 1832. Had he lived. He would have reached the magical age of 85 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, also, are 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 world.

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.
Now, 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 recognize 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, Luke 20:1-8 / Mark 11:27-33 / Matthew 21:23-27.
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. Jesus tells them how they should live, while they await the coming judgment upon Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, Luke 21:36.

THE END OF THE WORLD

As I mentioned earlier, Luke doesn't deal with the end of the world question, but I think it's useful to insert it here. 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.
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, 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 onboard.'

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.

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.
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. 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.

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.'
To illustrate what is involved in watching and being ready, Jesus contrasted two servants, Matthew 24:45-51. 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. 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.
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 off guard, 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. 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 is doing isn't giving us 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.

'Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.' Luke 21:37-38

Jesus taught in the temple each day, and in the evening he spent the night on the hill called Mount of Olives, Luke 21:37. Some commentators suggest that Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, whose house was on the slopes of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, Luke 22:38 / John 8:1-2. Notice the people came to Jesus early in the morning to hear Him teach, Luke 21:38.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Jesus' teaching at the temple.

'This has reference to the daily schedule of teachings followed by Jesus. This mention of the early hour shows that the days were very long working periods, filled to the utmost with teaching by the Master.'

CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION

'Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.' Luke 22:1-2

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, Luke 22:1-2 / Matthew 26:1-5 / 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.

JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS

'Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him

money. He consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.' Luke 22:3-6

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, Luke 22:4 / Matthew 26:14 / 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, Luke 22:6 / Matthew 26:16 / 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, Luke 22:13 / Matthew 26:19 / 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, Luke 22:14-15 / Matthew 26:20-21 / 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 fourteenth at evening, Leviticus 23:5 / Numbers 9:2-3 / Luke 22:14-15 / Matthew 26:20-21 / 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 sixteenth, Luke 23:56. The women returned on Sunday seventeenth, early in the morning to find the empty tomb because Jesus had risen from the grave, Luke 23:51-24:1 / Matthew 27:62-28:1 / Mark 16:1-2 / John 19:42-20:21.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAST SUPPER

'Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.' Luke 22:7-13

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, Luke 22:7 / Matthew 26:17 / 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, Luke 22:10 / Matthew 26:18 / 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, Luke 22:13 / Matthew 26:19 / Mark 14:16.

THE LAST SUPPER

'When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.' Luke 22:14-20

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 bread, Luke 22:19 / Matthew 26:26 / 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, Luke 22:19 / Mark 14:22 / Matthew 26:26 / 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, Luke 22:20 / Matthew 26:27 / 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, Luke 22:20 / Matthew 26:28 / 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, Luke 22:17 / Matthew 26:29 / 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, Luke 22:17 / Luke 22:19 / Matthew 26:26-27 / 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: Luke 22:20 / Matthew 26:27 / 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, Luke 22:19 / Matthew 26:26 / Mark 14:22. When it comes to the Lord's Supper, we know that the 'wine' represents the 'blood' of Christ, Luke 22:20 / Matthew 26:27-28 / 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 expediency. 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.

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.

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 THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS

‘But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!” They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.’ Luke 22:21-23

Luke placed Jesus’ announcement of His betrayal after the institution of the Lord’s Supper, 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 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 preventative 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 is 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?

'A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' Luke 22:24-30

Now 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, Luke 22:24-25 / 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, Luke 22:26 / Matthew 20:25 / Mark 10:42. In Christ's kingdom, they need to be serving, not lording it over people, Luke 22:6 / 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.
The disciples viewed themselves as sitting at the table and being served by others, Luke 22:27. However, Jesus came to be the servant of all. If the disciples were to be like Jesus, they must view their lives as servants and slaves to the needs of others, Mark 10:35-45.
Jesus says, 'I am among you as one who serves', Luke 22:27. This was said at the time He washed their feet, John 13:12-15. Jesus tells them they are those who have stood by Him in His trials, Luke 22:28. He came to serve, Matthew 20:28 / John 13:13-14 / Philippians 2:7.
Jesus conferring on them a kingdom, Luke 22:29, refers to earth and this life; His kingdom would be administered by them; they would deliver inspired direction to the church, John 14:26 / John 16:13-14. The eating and drinking at Jesus' table in His kingdom refers to the church, wherein the Lord's Table is ever found.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning sitting on the thrones, Luke 22:30 / Matthew 19:28.
'These are to be understood spiritually, as are the 'twelve tribes of Israel'. This refers to the word of the holy apostles as the supreme authority in the Lord's church. Also, it should be noted that death would not remove them from office,

no successors to the Twelve being envisioned by the Lord, Matthew 19:28. Luke did not mention 'twelve' thrones, but Matthew did, Matthew 19:28. These expressions apply primarily to the Twelve apostles.'

'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me." Luke 22:31-34

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 cannot 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, Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:34 / 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, Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:34 / 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, Luke 22:33 / Matthew 26:35 / 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, Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:34 / 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 in 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.

'Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered. He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment. The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords. "That's enough!" he replied." Luke 22:35-38

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.

JESUS IN GETHSEMANE

'Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.' Luke 22:39

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.

'On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." Luke 22:40

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

'He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22:41-42

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, Luke 22:41-42 / Matthew 26:39 / 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', Luke 22:42 / Matthew 26:39 / 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.

'When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 'Why are you sleeping?' he asked them. 'Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation'. Luke 22:45-46

The disciples were sleeping when Jesus returned, Luke 22:45-46 / Matthew 26:40-41 / 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

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, Luke 22:42 / Matthew 26:42 / 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

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.'

'An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 'And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.' Luke 22:43-44

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.

'When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." Luke 22:45-46

When Jesus returned, He asked if the disciples were still sleeping and resting, Luke 22:45-46 / Matthew 26:45 / 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, Luke 11:1 / Matthew 6:10-14.
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, a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns."
Luke 22:47-53

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

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 to the 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, Luke 27:47 / Matthew 26:47 / Mark 14:43. Imagine two-six hundred Roman soldiers and all the religious leaders, armed with torches, lanterns, clubs and swords, Luke 22:52 / Matthew 26:47 / 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, Luke 22:52 / Matthew 26:47 / 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, Luke 22:50 / Matthew 26:51 / 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, Luke 22:52 / Matthew 26:47 / 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 half years to arrest Him but they didn't, Luke 22:52-53 / Matthew 26:55 / 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 surrendered 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.’

PETER DENIES JESUS

‘Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.” But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said. A little later, someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” “Man, I am not!” Peter replied. About an hour later, another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.” Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.’ Luke 22:54-62

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, Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:33-35 / 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, Luke 22:57 / Matthew 26:30 / 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’.
In 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, Luke 22:33-34 / Matthew 26:33-35 / 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.

THE TRAILS 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', Mark 14:60-64 / Matthew 26:63 / 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, Mark 14:29-31 / Matthew 26:33-35 / 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.

His 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, Mark 14:53-65 / Matthew 26:57-67.

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.

THE GUARDS MOCK JESUS

'The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophesy! Who hit you?" And they said many other insulting things to him.' Luke 22:63-65

They spat on Jesus, they blindfolded him, punched him, and mocked him and beat Him up, Luke 22:63-65 / Mark 14:65 / Matthew 26:67-68. 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.

JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

‘At daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. “If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You say that I am.” Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.” Luke 22:66-71

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, Luke 22:66 / Mark 14:53 / Matthew 26:57. 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, Mark 14:54 / Matthew 26:5.
The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for any excuse to put Jesus to death, Mark 14:55 / Matthew 26:59. They bribed false witnesses who told contradictory stories about Him, Mark 14:56 / Matthew 26:59-60.
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, Mark 14:57 / Matthew 26:60.
They accused Jesus of plotting to destroy the temple and in three days He would build another one, Mark 14:58 / Matthew 26:61. 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, Mark 14:60 / Matthew 26:63, but he would ask a question first. Jesus remained silent, Mark 14:61 / Matthew 26:63.
Finally, the high priest asked Him if He were the Christ, Luke 22:67 / Mark 14:61 / Matthew 26:63. 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 are claims that He is God, EGO EIMI, 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, Luke 22:69 / Mark 14:62 / Matthew 26:64. 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, Mark 14:62 / Matthew 26:64.
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, Mark 14:63-64 / Matthew 26:65-66.

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 a 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 could 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, Luke 23:50-51 / John 19:38.
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.

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION

‘Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.’ So, Pilate asked Jesus, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, ‘I find no basis for a charge against this man.’ But they insisted, ‘He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.’ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.’ Luke 23:1-7

JESUS’ FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

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, Luke 23:1 / Mark 15:1, 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?' Luke 23:3 / Matthew 27:11 / Mark 15:2 / 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, Luke 23:3 / Matthew 27:11 / Mark 15:2. 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

'On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.' Luke 23:6-12

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. It'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

'Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him." But the whole crowd shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" For the third time, he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him." But with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.' Luke 23:13-25

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, Luke 23:17 / Matthew 27:15 / Mark 15:6 / 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, Luke 23:17 / Matthew 27:15 / Mark 15:6 / 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 them what he should do with Jesus, who is called Christ? And they all said, Crucify Him! Matthew 27:22. Mark tells us that Pilate asked them what should he 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, man, 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, Luke 23:19 / Matthew 27:20 / Mark 15:11 / 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

Luke doesn't record the soldiers mocking Jesus, but the other Gospels do. 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, Luke 23:26 / Matthew 27:31 / Mark 15:20 / 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, we also read that He was 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 bur 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 him 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 judge 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, 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 the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then " 'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Luke 23:26-31

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, Luke 23:26 / Matthew 27:32 / Mark 15:21, 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, Luke 23:26 / Matthew 27:32 / Mark 15:21. 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 / Luke 23:34 / Matthew 27:35 / Mark 15:24 / John 19:24. With Him, they crucified two thieves, Isaiah 53:9 / Isaiah 53:12 / Luke 22:32-33 / Matthew 27:38 / Mark 15:27. 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 / Luke 23:34 / Matthew 27:35 / Mark 15:24 / 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 what he has written, John 19:22.

'Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.' Luke 23:33-34

There were also two thieves who were carrying their crosses with Jesus, Luke 23:33 / Matthew 27:38 / 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 / Luke 22:32-33 / Matthew 27:38 / Mark 15:27.
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, Luke 23:39-43 / Matthew 27:44 / Mark 15:32.

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 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?"), Matthew 27:46.

'FATHER, FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.'

It's near the end of Jesus' human life. He senses it. He has hung on the cross for a little while now. It has become hard for Jesus to even get a breath. Hung from His arms, He must pull Himself up each time He wants to breathe. But even still, He's thinking of others, Luke 23:34.

Does Jesus mean to forgive only those soldiers who carried out the crucifixion? Is He asking God to forgive only those who were present that day? Possibly, I personally believe He's speaking about every single sin that mankind as a whole has committed against God, since creation.

He's paying the price for the sins of the world and prays for God to forgive us all because none of us knew what we were doing until we became Christians; we were all enemies of God without realising it, Romans 5:6-10.

The people at the time of Jesus, much like us today, didn't understand the extent of their evil hearts nor recognise Him as the true Messiah, 1 Corinthians 2:8. Yes, they committed many sins that day for which they will be held accountable on the Day of Judgement, but they will not consciously and intentionally crucify the Messiah.

And just like we didn't realise how our sin caused Him to go to the cross, we didn't know that in a sense we crucified the Saviour of the world. What we see here with these words is the great intercessor at work, Isaiah 53:12 / 1 John 2:1-2.

LESSON

Even on the cross hours before His death, we see Jesus thinking of others, and despite the evil that all of mankind had done through the ages, He still asks the Father to forgive them. The cross should always be our example when it comes to forgiving others. He taught us to pray in His prayer, Luke 11:4.
And if we have an example anywhere in Scripture of someone following Jesus' example in terrible circumstances, it's Stephen. Here he is in front of the religious leaders, who were getting angrier with him by the moment because he spoke the truth, and they didn't like it.

They picked up stones to stone him to death, and just before Stephen died, he said, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this, he fell asleep,' Acts 7:60.
The cross is our example for forgiveness, and Paul reminds us of this when he wrote, 'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you,' Colossians 3:13.

THE CONVERSATIONS ON THE CROSS

'One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:39-43

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.

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 our sins, Acts 17:30, confess the name of Jesus, Acts 8:37, and then be baptized 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 baptized 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.
Just outside the city of Jerusalem, there was a hill known as 'Calvary' or 'Golgotha.' It was also called 'the place of the skull.' Luke tells us, 'And when they had come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left,' Luke 23:33. There were three crosses in a row. Naturally, we are usually concerned only with the one in the middle. In this lesson, we want to take a look at all three.

THE ONE ON THE RIGHT

Here we see the figure of a dying thief. Yet, more significant than his physical anguish is his scorn and hatred of Jesus, who is also suffering agony. What had Jesus done to so arouse him?

This thief's cross was a cross of rebellion. This cross depicts the enmity of many toward Jesus. It clearly typifies the unbelief of the world at large toward Jesus. His statement points out several things.

1. He was in pain and agony, within the shadow of death, yet this did not humble him.

His sin did not even bother him in death. I have seen people like this.

2. He said, 'If you are the Christ,' Luke 23:39.
Has there ever been any 'if' about it? That little 'if' is a powerful word and has enough venom in it to destroy a soul.

Since the late eighteenth century, certain Bible scholars have been denied the authenticity of the Bible. Modern liberal theology denies that Jesus is the Son of God.

They look upon the Bible as mostly myth. On the whole, it usually takes many years for myths to develop because at the time, a myth would not be recognised as truth.

Yet we learn from Acts 2 that within fifty days after the death of Jesus, we have Peter affirming that Jesus arose from the grave. All his enemies had to do was produce a dead body to prove Peter was lying.
Just twenty-seven years after Jesus' resurrection, Paul devotes an entire chapter to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This doctrine was already formulated and widely believed in the Roman world. This stands in contrast to the hundreds of years it usually takes for a myth to be accepted.

A modern-day group of Bible scholars known as the 'Jesus Seminar' say that Jesus did not say eighty-two per cent of what is attributed to Him in the New Testament.

Most of the remaining eighteen per cent are considered somewhat doubtful, and only two per cent of Jesus' sayings are considered to be authentic. This reminds us of Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 3:7, 'Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.'
For them, it remains as Paul says, 'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.' 1 Corinthians 1:18.
3. He challenged Jesus to save both 'yourself and us,' Luke 23:39.
What impudence! What had he ever done that he could demand salvation? How much this reminds us of those today who live in sin all their lives, then when faced with death, they rail at God, accusing him of dealing harshly with them, demanding that He do something for them.

THEN THERE IS THE THIEF ON THE LEFT SIDE

Again, we have the figure of a dying thief. Yet, instead of one dying in his sin, he was dying to sin; his was a cross of repentance. This victim also twists himself upon the nails to look at the centre cross, but not in scoff and unbelief, but in recognition of Him.

He, like the other thief, would like to get his hands free, but not to smite but to deliver the sufferer from the middle cross. From his statements, we see unfailing evidence of genuine belief and repentance.

1. His reverence in the presence of Deity. 'Do you not fear God?' Luke 23:40.
2. His ready admission of his own guilt. 'For we receive the due reward of our deeds,' Luke 23:40.
3. His belief that Jesus was suffering wrongfully. 'But this man has done nothing wrong,' Luke 23:41.
4. His open confession of the Deity of Jesus. He calls him 'Lord,' Luke 23:42.
5. His humility. 'Remember me when You come into Your kingdom,' Luke 23:42.
What a difference between these two thieves. The first saw Jesus as only a man, but the second saw him as Lord. The first saw Jesus as a mock king, but the second saw Him as the 'King of kings.'

The first saw Jesus as a sinner, but the second saw Him as a Saviour. There were no 'ifs' in his words. The result was that Jesus answered him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'

‘TRULY I TELL YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE’

PARADISE IS HEAVEN

I think it would be useful to look at what the Bible says about heaven first. Genesis 1:1 ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’. The Bible tells us there are three heavens.
Speaking about himself, the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:2, ‘I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I do not know—God knows.’
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. The heaven where God has always lived isn’t physical; it hasn’t been created. ‘God is spirit’, John 4:24. He doesn’t need a physical place to live in. He doesn’t need pictures or images or temples or mosques or churches or shrines to live in, Acts 17:24-25.
Remember the rich man and Lazarus! Luke 16:19-22. Note the term, ‘Abraham’s side’, this is a Hebraism that the Jews understood to mean, ‘the paradise of God’. 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.
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.

Look at what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. Notice that Paul says he was caught up to the 'third heaven', whilst in the same setting says, caught up to 'paradise'.
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! 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, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise,' and the place where God was before the other heavens were created and where He resides now and forever and the Christians final home.

Paradise is a Persian word for 'an area enclosed by a wall' or 'garden,' Nehemiah 2:8 / Ecclesiastes 2:5 / Song of Songs 14:13. The Greek word, 'paradeisos', is used for the garden in Eden in Genesis. Genesis 2:8-16 / Isaiah 51:3 / Ezekiel 28:13.
The intermediate state was transformed by Jesus' emphasis on being with him 'today,' Luke 22:43. There's no denying where Jesus was going; he was going to 'paradise'.
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.
And Jesus promised the thief that he would be with Him in paradise that day, not weeks, months or years from now, but that day, 'today, you will be with me'. Now, we must be careful that we don't make the same mistake that many have made about this thief, that his example means that today one can be saved without baptism.

We must remember that even as Jesus was dying on the cross, this event transpired during the period of the Mosaic dispensation. The Christian age wouldn't come into effect until fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost.

But there may be more here than meets the eye. We're somewhat amazed by his knowledge and faith. Could he have heard him preach on different occasions? According to Matthew 3:5-6, as a result of John's preaching, 'Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.' Could it be the thief was one of these?
John 3:26 says, 'all were coming to Jesus to be baptised.' There were several occasions during his ministry when Jesus forgave sins. He had the authority to do this. While we admire the thief, we mustn't use him as our example of what to do to be saved.
In Matthew 3:13-17, we have the example of the Saviour of mankind coming from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised. If Christ had to be baptised in order to remain in favour with His Father, can we remain in His favour and refuse to obey?
Obviously, baptism is important. At first, John refused, but Jesus said, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness', Matthew 3:15. The Book of Acts gives us eight specific examples of conversions. In every example, the person or persons were baptised. There are no exceptions.
It still amazes me the animosity that many in the religious world have against baptism. At the very suggestion that baptism is for the remission of sins, as stated in Acts 2:38, one will most often encounter hostility toward this simple command that is so important to our salvation.
This is sad, yet probably sadder is the fact that out of the six billion people on this earth today, probably nearly one half or more have never heard the name of Jesus.

We have failed greatly in the great commission that was given to us by Jesus. His final words before ascending to heaven were, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' Matthew 28:19.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

‘It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.’ Luke 23:44-46

JESUS WAS ON THE CROSS ABOUT SIX HOURS

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, Mark says, ‘They crucified Him and divided His garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified Him,’ Mark 15:24-25

According to this, 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. These were Jesus’ final hours on the cross.

THE DARKNESS

Both Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus has been on the cross for three hours, Luke 23:44-45 / Matthew 27:45. 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, Luke 23:44-45 / Matthew 27:45. 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, Luke 23:44-45 / Matthew 27:45, 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 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’.

Herbert 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, Luke 23:47 / Matthew 27:54. 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, Luke 23:44-45 / Matthew 27:45, 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.

'FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT'

This was the final of the seven words from the cross, Luke 23:46. The three utterances given by Luke are omitted in the other Gospels, just as Luke omitted the utterances they included. All seven of these utterances of Jesus are authentic, historical words truly spoken by the world's Saviour while upon the cross.

When He had accomplished all that was predetermined before the creation of the world in relation to the salvation of man, He gave up His spirit into the hands of the Father. The first part of the plan of redemption was accomplished. Jesus died with a prayer on His lips.

The words, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,' are from Psalm 31:5, with one word added, Father, Psalm 31:5. That verse was the prayer every Jewish mother taught her child to say the last thing at night.
Just as we were taught, maybe, to say, 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' so the Jewish mother taught her child to say, before the threatening dark came down, 'Into your hands, I commit my spirit.' Jesus made it even more intimate, for He began it with the word Father. Even on the cross, Jesus died like a child falling asleep in his father's arms.

1. A word of intimacy.

It was also a moment of intimacy. The two belong together, trust nurtured by intimacy; intimacy nurtured by trust. The intimate word Jesus added to the words of David was Father.

David cried out to his God, 'O Lord,' he would say, 'You are My God,' Psalm 31:5. In David's time, such language was radical. The Psalms of David personalise the spiritual life in a way that earlier biblical literature did not.
But Jesus took it even further. He consistently spoke of and to his Father. And to his disciples, he said, 'When you pray, say, 'our Father', Luke 11:2. This language of intimate converse with his Father he shared with his followers. He prays to the Father as he has done throughout his ministry. For Jesus, death is no out-of-control enemy. No matter how bleak the moment, he knows his Father is present with him, now present to receive his spirit.

2. A word of trust.

Second, Jesus entrusts himself to his Father. In Psalm 31:5, the word 'commit' is the Hebrew verb 'paqad'. The corresponding Greek word means to entrust to someone for safekeeping, give over, entrust, commend. As He lets go of this life, Jesus trusts his eternal destiny to the Father's everlasting arms.
3. A word of surrender.

Finally, Jesus speaks a word of surrender, Luke 43:46. He gives up His human life to His Father, who gave it to Him thirty-three years before. The word 'spirit' is the common word 'pneuma', which means breathing, breath of life.
It can refer to the Holy Spirit, but here it refers to the personal spirit of Jesus, part of the human personality, Hebrews 4:12 / 1 Thessalonians 5:23. He gave up his life as a voluntary sacrifice. The loud voice just mentioned was significant. The loud voice shows that Jesus did not die of exhaustion.
If death had come from exhaustion, his vocal cords would not have functioned at all. Jesus' death was conscious and voluntary, fulfilling his prophecy recorded in John, John 10:17-18.
Jesus prays his final prayer with this kind of equanimity and peace because He knows the Father and knows that there is life with the Father beyond death. As a devout Jew, He has prayed these words as part of an evening prayer all His life.

Now, at the end of His life, He prays them one last time and lets go of human life in order to embrace the Life that the Father has to offer in His own presence. Death had no legitimate power over the sinless son of God, Philippians 1:20-23.
All seven of these utterances of Jesus are authentic, historical words truly spoken by the world's Saviour while upon the cross. When He had accomplished all that was predetermined before the creation of the world in relation to the salvation of man, He gave up His spirit into the hands of the Father. The first part of the plan of redemption was accomplished.

'The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all

those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.' Luke 23:47-49

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! Luke 23:47 / Matthew 27:54. Here are more Gentiles confessing who Christ is, something which the religious leaders refused to accept.
Henry, in his commentary, says the following.

'The centurion who commanded the guard. This testimony amounts to the same as 'Truly this man was the Son of God', for if Jesus was a righteous man, he said very truly when he said he was the Son of God, and therefore that testimony of Jesus concerning himself must be admitted, for, if it were false, he was not a righteous man.'

Luke records that the centurion says that Jesus was a righteous man, Luke 23:47, but Mathew, Matthew 27:54, and Mark, Mark 15:39, record the centurion as saying that Jesus was the Son of God.
Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'From Matthew's account, it is clear that the words, 'Truly this was the Son of God,' were not spoken by the centurion only; they that were with him' also being subjects of the verb 'saying'. Thus, there were multiple speakers, and this necessarily means that there were multiple sayings also. The most astounding physical wonders ever known on earth were occurring. The miracles of the loud voice and it was that, was precisely the act that prompted the centurion's utterance that 'Truly this man was the Son of God', as plainly stated in Mark's account. Note that it was when the centurion saw that Jesus so gave up the ghost, that he recognised Jesus as the divine Son of God.'

When everyone saw what had happened, that is, when they witnessed the earthquake, the graves opening up and the darkness over the whole earth, Luke 23:48 / Matthew 27:51-53, they all beat their breast, Luke 23:48, because they knew that an innocent man had just been crucified.
By the time Jesus went to the cross, multitudes of people from all over Palestine knew Him, including the woman who had followed Him from Galilee. 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, Luke 23:49 / Matthew 37:55-56 / Luke 8:2-3 / 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.
It was these people who stood at a distance watching the events happen, Psalm 38:11. These were Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, Luke 24:10. To these three, Mark, in Mark 16:1, adds, Salome, but some think that this was only a surname of one of these Marys.

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.

'But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they DID NOT BREAK HIS LEGS. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'NOT ONE OF HIS BONES WILL BE BROKEN,' and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.' John 19:33-36

Notice, John says that Jesus' bones were not broken. 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

‘Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.’ Luke 23:50-56

Since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Mark 15:42, Joseph of Arimathea had to act quickly, Luke 23:50. 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, Luke 23:52 / Matthew 27:58 / Mark 1543 / 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, Luke 23:53 / Matthew 27:59 / Mark 15:46, and put it in a hole chiselled into the wall of a cave, Luke 23:53 / Matthew 27:60 / Mark 15:46, 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, one hundred 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, Luke 23:52 / Matthew 27:60 / John 19:41. 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, Luke 23:54 / Matthew 28:5-6.

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.'

THE GUARD AT THE TOMB

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.

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 Songs 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.

CHAPTER 24

INTRODUCTION

'On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.' Luke 24:1-8

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, Luke 24:1 / Matthew 28:1 / Mark 16:2 / John 20:1.
2. Mary Magdala and the other Mary were going to anoint Jesus with spices, Luke 24:1 / Matthew 28:1 / Mark 16:1 / 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, Luke 24:2 / Matthew 28:2 / Mark 16:4 / 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, Luke 24:4-6 / Matthew 28:5-6 / Mark 16:6.
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, Luke 24:9 / Matthew 28:8 / Mark 16:7 / 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, this tells us that the resurrection of Jesus happened on the first day of the week, that is, Sunday morning, Luke 24:1 / Mark 16:2 / Mark 16:9 / John

20:1. A few loyal women had prepared spices and went out to Jesus' tomb early on Sunday morning, Luke 24:1 / Mark 16:1-2.
These were the women from Galilee who saw Jesus put in the tomb, Luke 23:55-56, which included Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joanna, Luke 24:10 / Mark 15:47 / Matthew 27:61. There were other woman unnamed, present too, Luke 24:10.
They were planning to embalm His body in order to give it a more honourable burial than had been possible in the few minutes that had been available on Friday afternoon.

As they walked down to the cave, they thought about how hard it was going to be for them to roll that large rock away from the entrance of the burial cave, Mark 16:3.
When they arrived, however, they saw that the rock had already been removed and the cave was open, Luke 24:2 / Mark 16:4. Matthew's account tells us that there was a guard set around the tomb, Matthew 27:65-66. And Matthew also tells us that it was an angel who rolled it away, Matthew 28:2.
When they entered the tomb, they found that Jesus' body had gone, Luke 24:3. Suddenly, two angels appeared with very bright garments on, and because they were afraid, they bowed down with their faces facing the ground.
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, Luke 24:4 / Mark 16:5, 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 angels ask them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?' Luke 24:5. In other words, Jesus is not dead; he is very much alive, Revelation 1:18. And then says the words that no one, not even the disciples, ever expected to hear, 'He is not here but is arisen!' Luke 24:6 / Mark 16:6 / Romans 1:4 / 1 Thessalonians 4:14.
With these words, the women who had come to the tomb of Jesus at dawn on the first day of the week were greeted by an angel who stood before them. When the angels said, 'the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again,' Luke 24:7. It's not surprising that they remembered what Jesus said, Luke 24:8 / Luke 18:31-3.

'When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.' Luke 24:9-12

I'm sure the women could hardly contain themselves as they ran back to the eleven and the others, Luke 23:9. Mary Magdalene, Mark 15:40 / John 19:25, the woman who Jesus drove out seven spirits from her, Luke 8:2 / Mark 16:9, Joanna, Luke 8:2-3, Mary the mother of James, and the other women, Luke 24:10, with them are the women who found the empty tomb, Luke 24:1.
These were given the privilege of being the first to tell others of the risen Jesus. When they spoke to the disciples, the disciples didn't believe a word they said; they thought it was all nonsense, Luke 23:11. Remember, the Bible says women's testimonies really counted for nothing.
Morris, in his commentary, says the following.

'The disciples were not men poised on the brink of belief and needing only the shadow of an excuse before launching forth into a proclamation of resurrection. They were utterly sceptical.'

Peter appears to be move so such an extent that he actually runs to the tomb, Luke 24:12. In John 20:3-9, we see that these two were most excited. Peter was the oldest of the disciples, and John the youngest.

John ‘outran Peter’ and so arrived at the tomb first, stooping to look in; it was a low entrance. He saw the linen cloths and bandages lying on the ground, but was afraid to enter the tomb. Peter then arrived, and true to his natural impulsive character, he went into the tomb.

What met him was indeed amazing, all the linen bandages were there, Luke 24:12, the sheet-like cloth was there, even the cloth ‘soudarion’, handkerchief or napkin, used to wrap up the Lord’s head was there, folded neatly apart from the rest of the linen, John 20:6-7.
Everything was there, but Jesus wasn’t. No one would steal the body and take the time to remove the linen, even folding some of it up; this was not done by the hands of man, but by the power of God, John 5:21-22 / Romans 6:23.
The lined bandages would be wrapped around Jesus’ limbs and body. The napkin was ‘still in the folds as it had been about the head of Jesus,’ John 20:7. John next entered, ‘and he saw and believed’, that Jesus had risen, ‘chrysostum’, John 20:8.
For neither, if any persons had removed the body, would they before doing so have stripped it, nor if anyone had stolen it, would they have taken the trouble to remove the napkin, roll it up, and lay it in place by itself, but how? They would have taken the body as it was.

John tells us by anticipation that Jesus’ body was buried with much myrrh, John 19:39, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead. Now, finally, all the pieces fitted together, all the teaching Jesus had given fell into place, and the two believed with a clear understanding of all the relevant facts.
‘They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead,’ John 20:9. The ‘scripture’ could refer to Jesus’ own predictions that He would rise, John 16:16-17 / Matthew 16:21, and or to Old Testament predictions, Psalm 16:10-11 / Psalm 110:1 / Psalm 110:4 / Psalm 118:22-24 / Isaiah 53:11-12.
They believed from experience, then later saw it in the scriptures; they hadn’t been aware of all that the Old Testament said about Jesus’s death, burial and resurrection. Notice also the words, ‘had to rise’, John 20:9, the resurrection is essential to prove His claims, Luke 24:44-47.

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.

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

'Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him.' Luke 24:13-16

A few hours after the women had reported that Jesus was resurrected, Luke 24:22, we find two disciples, one named Cleopas, Luke 24:27 / John 19:25, and the other's name isn't mentioned.
They were on their way to their hometown, Emmaus, Luke 24:13, which was around seven miles from Jerusalem.
They were chatting about everything which had happened in Jerusalem, Luke 24:14.
It seems that they had given up hope concerning the Messiah establishing a physical kingdom; they, just like the other disciples, obviously didn't expect or believe that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, Luke 24:25.
Notice that when they were talking, Jesus walked with them, but they didn't recognise Him, Luke 24:15-16. Jesus joined them, but He didn't allow their minds to notice that it was actually Him in their presence.
In what way were they kept from recognising Him? Luke 24:16. Who knows, but Jesus Himself. Why did Jesus keep them from recognising Him? Possibly because He wants to hear their thoughts about what happened in Jerusalem, or possibly this was a testing of their faith. One thing is clear, though: all will be revealed later.

'He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' 'What things?' he asked. 'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.' Luke 24:17-24

We're not to think that Jesus didn't know what they were discussing. He knows all things, Luke 24:17 / John 2:24 / Matthew 9:4. He simply asked, what are you discussing together as you walk along? in order to partake in the conversation they were having.
Notice that when Jesus asked them the question, they stood still with their faces downcast, Luke 24:17. It seems the question puzzled the two disciples, and Cleopas asks Jesus if He is the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? Luke 24:18.
It appears that everyone knew, the religious leaders knew, the Roman government knew, the common people knew, and all were very much aware of everything which happened concerning the death of Jesus, Acts 26:26. They all knew about this Jesus who grew up in a small village named, Luke 1:26 / Luke 2:39 / Luke 18:37.
When Jesus asked them what things, notice that they said that Jesus 'was a prophet who was powerful in word and deed,' Luke 24:19. They recognised that Jesus performed many miracles and taught many powerful things, Matthew 21:11 / Luke 7:16 / John 3:2 / John 12:17 / Acts 2:22 / Acts 7:22.
Jesus wasn't just a prophet, but the prophet, Deuteronomy 18:15 / Deuteronomy 18:17-19. Jesus had a huge reputation throughout all of Palestine, but notice they use the word, 'was', Luke 24:19, which is past tense.
They told Jesus that the Messiah for whom they hoped was condemned to death and crucified, Luke 24:20. In other words, their hope in the Messiah is gone, all their dreams and expectations have gone. How could a dead prophet establish a new kingdom and redeem Israel? Luke 24:21.
They obviously thought that the Messiah story ended at the tomb, despite the women reporting about the resurrection, Luke 24:22-23. It's clear they had witnessed the death of Jesus, but not His resurrection.

We know that the crucifixion of Christ took place on Friday, since Luke here tells us that this event took place on Sunday. John 21:19 tells us that Jesus appeared to the disciples on this same day.
By the time these two disciples had left the other disciples, Jesus hadn't appeared to any of them yet. Peter and John had gone to the tomb to confirm the report of the women, Luke 24:12 / John 20:3-6, but they themselves hadn't seen the risen Lord yet, Luke 24:24. And so, at this moment of time, it's time to go home and get back to living as normal.

'He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.' Luke 24:25-27

I don't believe Jesus was rebuking them by calling them 'foolish', Luke 24:25. I believe He recognised that these two disciples had fallen victim to the attitude of the Jewish nation as a whole. The Jews were looking for an earthly Messiah, 1 Peter 1:10-12, who would establish an earthly kingdom, Acts 1:6.
Imagine being a Jewish child, going to the temple and the synagogue, listening to the Word of God being proclaimed and explained, week in and week out, all of your life.

Imagine wondering who the Old Testament prophets were speaking of and listening to the descriptions of the coming Messiah. Imagine hearing Isaiah 53, which speaks about the suffering Servant of God, imagine hearing how He was to be despised and rejected by many, even His own people.
Imagine hearing about how He is a man of sorrows and accustomed to grief. Imagine listening to how the very details about how He was to be crucified, Psalm 22. Imagine hearing this all your life, from a young Jewish child to adulthood, even to the point of reciting many of the texts so that you knew them off by heart.
And yet they didn't get it, they didn't see Jesus as the Messiah, they didn't believe in His resurrection, everything they practised and heard was pointing to Jesus, but they missed it.

This is surely a lesson for us today, to get very familiar with the Scriptures. Jesus tells them that the Messiah had to suffer and was glorified in His crucifixion, Luke 24:26 / John 13:31 / Isaiah 53:5 / Hebrews 5:8-9.
Notice that Jesus began to explain the Scriptures to them, Luke 24:27. Which Scripture do you think He began with? Remember, there are over three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament that refer to Jesus and the events surrounding His coming and establishment of His kingdom reign, all of which were fulfilled in Christ, Ephesians 1:18-21.
Spence, in his commentary, suggests the following Scriptures may have been explained to the two disciples by Jesus.

The promise to Eve. Genesis 3:15. The promise to Abraham. Genesis 22:18. The Paschal lamb. Exodus 12. The scapegoat. Leviticus 16:1-34. The greater Prophet. Deuteronomy 18:15. The star and sceptre. Numbers 24:17. Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14.
Unto us, a child is born. Isaiah 9:6. The Good Shepherd. Isaiah 40:10-11. The meek Sufferer. Isaiah 50:6. He who bore our griefs. Isaiah 53:4-5. The Heir of David. Ezekiel 34:23. The Ruler born in Bethlehem. Micah 5:2.
The Branch. Zechariah 6:12. The lowly King. Zechariah 9:9. The pierced Victim. Zechariah 12:10. The smitten Shepherd. Zechariah 13:7. The Messenger of the Covenant. Malachi 3:1. The Sun of Righteousness. Malachi 4:2.
Please remember the above texts are just suggestions and cannot be proven, and there is a good chance that on that long seven-mile walk home, Jesus used many other Old Testament Scriptures to prove His Messiahship.

We can only imagine the excitement in their minds as Jesus taught them from the Scriptures. For once, they were getting a true interpretation of the Scriptures and not some rabbi's opinion. Now they're thinking, 'this all makes sense now'.

'As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So, he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.' Luke 24:28-31

It seems that Jesus was eager to go further with the two disciples, Luke 24:28, but He wasn't invited as their guest, hence why they urged Him strongly to stay with them as their guest, Luke 24:29.
Notice that they didn't recognise Jesus until after he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, Luke 24:30-31. Why? I guess it's possible that they remembered how Jesus broke bread when He instituted the Lord's Supper.
There was definitely something in the manner in which Jesus took that bread, gave thanks and gave it to them that sparked something in their minds, Luke 24:35.
Their eyes were opened when Jesus decided to open their eyes, Luke 24:31. We don't know how He opened their eyes but when they did have their eyes opened, they knew exactly who Jesus was, He was the risen Lord, the Messiah, Luke 24:31.
Notice also that Jesus disappears from their sight, Luke 24:31. We must remember that Jesus now has a new resurrected body in which He could do things that He couldn't do before, John 20:19-20 / John 20:26. This is His real body, but it's not limited like our physical bodies, 1 Corinthians 15:52 / 1 John 3:2.

'They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' Luke 24:32

There's nothing like studying the Scriptures and learning new things. Jesus interpreted the prophecies so that they could finally understand the true nature of the kingdom of God, it was spiritual, Luke 24:32 / Luke 17:20-21. The Messiah was to be King, but not one who would rule physically here on Earth.

'They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.' Luke 24:33-35

After walking seven miles to get to Emmaus they decided that everything they had witnessed and learned from Jesus was simply too important to keep to themselves, and so, they get up and walk back the seven miles to Jerusalem, Luke 24:33.
We don't know how many people were assembled as the text says, 'they found the Eleven and those with them', Luke 24:33. They are now truly convinced about Christ being the Messiah and, more importantly convicted that He indeed did rise from the dead, Luke 24:34.
Luke tells us that Jesus appeared to Peter, Luke 24:34, as does Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:5, but there's no Scripture reference to say that He actually did. That's not a problem, though, because we know that Jesus did many other things which weren't recorded in the Scriptures, John 21:25. Why did Jesus appear specifically to Peter?
We don't know the answer, possibly to let him know that everything went to God's plan, or to reassure him after he denies Christ. We simply don't know, but we do know that Peter was never the same person again, Acts 2:16-38.
Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple explained everything which had happened to all those present, Luke 24:35, which I'm sure would have brought a lot of comfort to everyone. Their testimonies about the risen Lord would only strengthen the testimonies of the women and all those present.
The resurrection of Christ is fundamental to the Christian faith; everything, our hopes and dreams, is realised in and through the resurrection of Christ, because without it, we have no hope, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. We can only imagine the excitement in those two disciples as they learned from the Master teacher, realising that He is the risen Messiah.
When was the last time you learnt something new and exciting from the Scriptures? Are we just as eager to learn from God's Word? It's no surprise that the very first disciples sat at the apostle's feet to learn and grow in their faith, Acts 2:42.

Imagine all the questions they must have had. It's not surprising that the Scriptures command us over and over again to brow grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 3:18.

JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES

After Jesus had risen from the dead, He appeared to the eleven at different times and spoke about different things with them concerning their future mission, Matthew 28:16-20 / Mark 16:15-20 / Acts 1:1-12. The appearances occurred over a period of forty days, Acts 1:3.
John tells us that Jesus appeared to His disciples on 'the first day of the week', Luke 24:1 / John 20:19 / Matthew 28:1 / Mark 16:2 / John 20:19 / John 20:26 / Acts 20:7 / 1 Corinthians 16:2.
The disciples 'gathered behind closed doors, with the doors locked,' John 20:19. This was 'for fear of the Jews', the Sanhedrin had killed the Master, they might decide to kill His disciples. As rumours of His resurrection began to spread, the apostles, close companions of Jesus, would be special targets.

'While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 'They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 'Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.' Luke 24:36-40

They were in a secure room, but Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst, John 20:19. Jesus says, 'peace be with you', Luke 24:36, which was a common Jewish salutation.
The greeting, 'peace be with you' is repeated in connection with the word of commission, 'As the Father has sent, 'apostello' me, even so, I send 'pempo' you,' John 17:18.
The apostles must have heard Jesus say this many times, but surely it now took on new meaning. Peace had been His last message to them in their sorrow, John 16:33.
It was His first word to them on His reappearance. He had been crucified, His corpse had been buried, yet here He was, before their eyes, speaking words they had heard Him utter many times.

WHAT WAS THEIR INITIAL REACTION?

At first, they simply couldn't believe their own eyes, which is understandable, Matthew 14:26 / Mark 6:49. Jesus' resurrected body still had the nail marks, John 20:27 / Psalm 22:16.
He tells them that a 'ghost doesn't have flesh and bones', Luke 24:37-39, which is the defined nature of a ghost. If they wanted proof that Christ had indeed risen from the dead, here He was right in front of them. He shows His wounds and emphasises that He isn't a ghost, Luke 24:40.

'And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.' Luke 24:41-43

The disciple's emotions went from unbelief to total joy. It seems the disciples were overwhelmed with joy to the point they couldn't believe Jesus was in front of them, Luke 24:41 / John 20:20-21.
Jesus asks them if you have anything here to eat? Luke 24:41. Jesus' new resurrected body was still able to do physical things, in this example not only did the disciples touch Jesus, John 20:20 / John 20:27 / 1 John 1:1-2 / 1 John

3:2, but He is eating, He is eating broiled fish, Luke 24:42-43, which again was further proof that they weren't seeing things, or seeing a ghost, a ghost doesn't eat because it's not physical.
Remember that John wrote his Gospel at a time when the church faced the Docetic heresy, the claim that Jesus had no real, human body, 1 John 4:1-3. Some 'modernists' today say that Jesus 'spirit' arose, not His body.
John presents conclusive evidence that the body that was crucified was the body that was raised. Then, after being convinced of Jesus' identity, the disciples were glad; they were overjoyed, John 16:22.

'He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Luke 24:44

All of the Old Testament prophecies which spoke about the work and reign of Jesus would be fulfilled when He ascended to the right hand of the Father, not long from now, Luke 24:44. Jesus, here is confirming that all the Old Testament prophecies concerning His work and reign in reference to the disciples have now been fulfilled.

'Then he opened their minds, so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.' Luke 24:45-46

We don't know how He opened their mind in order for them to understand the Scriptures, but he opened their mind so that they could understand that He is the Christ, the promised Messiah, Luke 22:45.
Over and over again, Christ told them that He, the Messiah must suffer, die on the cross but rise on the third day, Luke 24:46. In a nutshell, this is the Gospel of Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

'And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' Luke 24:47

The word repentance simply means to reconsider, in other words, reconsider your life and the direction it's going and after considering, change the direction of your life and go towards God and His way, Luke 24:47 / Acts 2:38 / Acts 3:19 / Acts 5:31 / Acts 10:43 / Acts 13:38 / Acts 26:18.
The preaching involved here is simply the great commission, which He gave the apostles, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15. In other words, it's the Gospel, the good news concerning the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Notice where the preaching was to start, at Jerusalem, Luke 24:47. This is exactly what happened, Acts 1:8 / Acts 2.

'You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' Luke 24:48-49

Far too many Christians claim they are witnesses for Christ, but this is impossible because they weren't around back then when Christ lived. A witness is someone who saw and heard what Christ said and did, Luke 24:48. It's also sad that many Christians take these promises of Jesus and make them their own promises.
We must remember that it was these disciples who were to be witnesses; it was they who had personally spent time with Christ and witnessed His death, burial and resurrection, Acts 1:8. They were the ones who were to preach to others what they had seen and heard from Christ.
This is seen further in the fact that Jesus uses the word 'you' when speaking to the eleven, Luke 24:49. This promise is the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, John 14:26 / John 16:13-14, and He was promised only to the apostles, Acts 1:8. It was them and them only who would be 'clothed with power from on high', Luke 24:49, which is clearly seen in Acts 2:1-4.
Others were present with the apostles, Luke 24:33-36, but note that in Acts 1:2-8, Luke includes only 'the apostles whom he had chosen' as the ones to whom the Holy Spirit baptism was promised.

They, the apostles, would 'receive power' and be Jesus' witnesses. Also, the 'they' of Acts 2:1 most naturally connects with Acts 1:26, indicating that on the Day of Pentecost only the apostles were so baptised, Acts 2:7 / Acts 2:14 / Acts 2:37, see also the use of power in Acts 4:33, and Acts 5:12.
John 20:22 tells us that Jesus 'breathed' on them, Genesis 2:7 / Exodus 37:9, and there are three views of what 'receive the Holy Spirit' means.
1. It was a symbolic act, indicating what would happen at Pentecost.

2. That He actually imparted the Spirit to them then.

3. That He gave them a specific 'gift' of the Spirit, with the fullness coming at Pentecost.

John 20:23 is wrongly used to support the claim that a human 'priest' has divine power to absolve man from sin. Absolution is the privilege of Deity, Mark 2:5-10.
No human being can make terms or conditions on which another human being may be forgiven or not forgiven by God. God has already made those conditions, and they are unalterable, Matthew 28:18-20 / Mark 16:15-16 / John 3:3-5 / Acts 2:37-38 / Acts 22:16 / 1 John 1:7-9.
The apostles, as the inspired representatives of the Lord Jesus, had the responsibility to make known those terms and conditions, Matthew 16:18-19 / Matthew 18:18 / John 14:26 / John 15:26-27 / John 16:7-11.
This doesn't mean that the power to forgive sins was even entrusted to any man or any men. It means that the power to proclaim the forgiveness was so entrusted, and it means that the power to warn that forgiveness isn't open to the impenitent heart was also entrusted to them. So, we see that it's through the Gospel that the apostles had the ability to forgive people's sins, by their acceptance of Christ.

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

'When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.' Luke 24:50-51

After Jesus told His disciples they would be witnesses, and they would receive the Holy Spirit with power in Jerusalem, Luke 24:48-49, He leads them to somewhere near Bethany, Mount Olivet, Luke 24:50 / Acts 1:12, which is east of Jerusalem, where He blessed them, it was then that He was taken up into heaven before their very eyes, Luke 24:50-51 / Acts 1:9.
This happened ten days before the first Pentecost after the resurrection. His new resurrected body was raised up into heaven so that He could assume His authority, Daniel 7:13-14 / Ephesians 1:20-22 / Philippians 2:9-11.
Jesus is now at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords, 1 Timothy 6:15. He is now reigning over all things, Ephesians 1:22-23 / 1 Peter 3:22. And He will continue to reign until the last enemy, death, has been conquered, 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.
Notice that Jesus was taken up 'before their very eyes,' Acts 1:9, why? Simply because they had to witness this to further establish their faith in Christ, and when they were sharing the Gospel, they could tell people that what they had witnessed was real and not some made-up story.
We must remember there had been at least ten appearances of Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection, but this was to be an event they would never forget in a hurry.

Luke tells us that a cloud hid Jesus from the disciple's sight, Luke 23:43 / Acts 1:9 / Daniel 7:13-14 / Psalm 68:18 / Psalm 110:1 / Mark 16:19 / John 20:17 / Hebrews 4:14 / Hebrews 9:24 / 1 Peter 3:22.

When we think about, there were clouds involved in His transfiguration, Matthew 17:5, Jesus speaks about His coming 'in the clouds of heaven', Mark 14:62, and when we read the Old Testament we read about a cloud being visible to let the Israelites know that the glory of God was present at the tent of meeting, Exodus 40:34.

THE TWO MEN

Two men appeared to the apostles, Acts 1:10-11, and there's no doubt that these two men were angels dressed in white clothing, Matthew 28:3 / Mark 16:5 / Luke 24:4 / John 20:12.

THE QUESTION

The angels ask the disciples, 'Why do you stand here looking into the sky?' Acts 1:10-11. To me, this is one of the most unfair questions we find in the Scriptures. Think about it! If you were there and witnessed someone ascending into the heavens, wouldn't you be amazed and just stand there looking up?
Notice that the angels tell them that 'This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven,' Acts 1:10-11.
If this doesn't tell us about how He will return, I don't know what will. There's no secret or invisible return of Christ mentioned here or anywhere in the Scriptures.

He left in the clouds, and He will return in the clouds, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. 'Coming in the clouds' is simply judgment talk which speaks of God coming in judgement on people or a nation, Matthew 24:30 / 1 Thessalonians 4:17 / Revelation 1:7.
The reasons the angels asked the question wasn't to rebuke them but to remind them that there are more important things to be getting on with, specifically, they had to get on with the great commission, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15, and wait on the promised Holy Spirit from the Father to come upon them with power, Luke 24:49 / Acts 1:8.

'Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.' Luke 24:52-53

Notice that the disciples worshipped Him, Luke 24:52. This would simply be the natural response to witnessing the Lord going up into heaven. If they didn't believe He was the Messiah, the Christ, if they believed He was Deity, up to this point, they certainly would have after witnessing His ascension.

WHY DID THEY RETURN TO JERUSALEM?

They returned to Jerusalem, Luke 24:52, simply because this is what Jesus commanded them to do, Luke 24:49 / Acts 1:4. He commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until they had received the promise, the Holy Spirit with power, Acts 1:5.
Although Jesus brought an end to all the temple ceremonies and traditions, the disciples went back to the temple to praise God, Luke 24:53. Why? Possibly out of habit or possibly because that's where a great number of people would be gathered, and this could be an opportunity to share the Gospel with others.

Remember, the temple is still standing at this point and wouldn't be destroyed until 70 A.D. When we read the account of Jesus' ascension, we read it as if it were a common, everyday event. I can imagine the disciples being a little frightened, whilst being in complete awe as they witness their Master being raised into the sky.

This would have been incredible to see, and I'm sure we would speak about it all the days of our lives, to anyone who would listen. When Jesus returns, it will be personal, 1 Thessalonians 4:16; it will be visible, 1 John 3:2; it will be audible, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 / 1 Corinthians 15:22; it will be communal, 1 Thessalonians 4:14 / Matthew 16:27 / 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7; it will be final, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

The question we all need to ask ourselves, whether we're Christians or not, is simply this: Are we ready for His return?