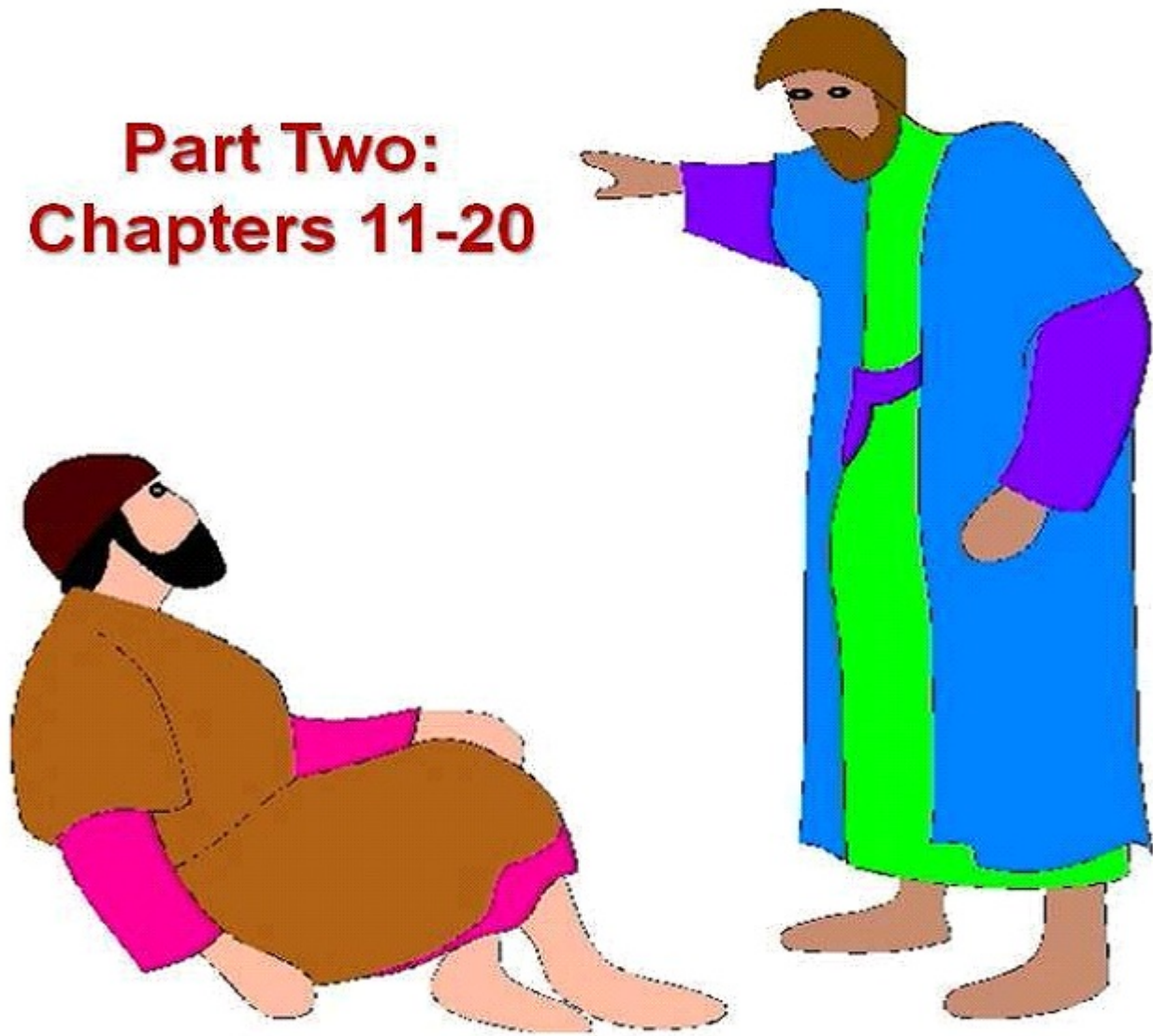


The Gospel of
Matthew

**Part Two:
Chapters 11-20**



The Forum Terrace Church of Christ
Adult Bible Class Sunday Moring Winter Quarter 2023

A Workbook By Daniel R. Vess

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Investigation, Generation & Invitation

Matthew 11:1-30

Having commissioned the twelve and sending them out two by two, Jesus continues to teach and preach throughout the land of Galilee. *“Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities”* (11:1). However, He was not alone. There were other disciples, such as, the ones He would send out as the Seventy.

This verse serves as a transition between the previous section (compare it to the previous transitional verse 8:1). In chapter eleven and twelve the opposition to Jesus is growing and more open. Both chapters begin with examples of negative reactions to Jesus and end with a positive entreaty.

John’s Bout with Doubt

“And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” (11:2,3). John is basically asking if Jesus is the Messiah. The *“Coming One”* is found in Psalms 40:7; 118:26. Doubt does seem out of place for the forerunner of the Messiah. Was he not inspired of God? Did he not witness the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism. Did he not hear the voice from heaven?

To have doubt even about Jesus being the Christ is not the same as disbelief. Oswald Chambers wrote, “Doubt is not always a sign that man is wrong; it may be a sign that he is thinking” and searching for evidence upon which to base his faith.

How did John deal with his doubts? He asked the right Person, Jesus, for help. He remained faithful to the belief that God would send the Messiah of prophecy. He continued to look for the Messiah.

There are several reasons why John’s was struggling at this time. First, John was in prison. He was innocent. He only justly condemned the sinful marriage between King Antipas and Herodias. According to Josephus John was in the fortress of Machaerus (Antiquities 18.5.2). John was a man who was used to preaching God’s Word in the wilderness. Now he was silenced and shut up in a prison. He went from the limelight to the dark dungeon. Second, John was a man who even though inspired was subject to doubts and discouragements. After all he came in the power and spirit of Elijah and that great prophet of old was discouraged and doubtful. This was even after his great victory over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Third, John was confused with regard to what Jesus was doing and what he expected Jesus to do. John had prophesied the Messiah would have a winnowing fan in his hand and would bring judgment when *“He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”* (Matt 3:12). From John’s limited view point, it would seem Jesus was not fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. Where is the fiery Judgment against the wicked? John is in prison for standing up Herod Antipas’ ungodly marriage and Jesus was just healing the sick and preaching to the poor. Many confused the Kingship and Kingdom of Jesus with a worldly political/militaristic movement to raise an army and overthrow the Romans. They also considered the welfare system where all their needs would be taken care of and no poverty and sickness would exist. Next, John had limited knowledge of the mission of Jesus. Yes, he was inspired but that did not mean he knew every aspect of God’s plan. Perhaps, John thought for sure Jesus would have procured his release from prison. After all would not the Messiah come and bring justice.

John’s is disappointed and disillusioned and this has led to doubt. He may have the feeling that his execution is near. Yet Jesus has not made some kind of open proclamation to claim the throne of David and challenge the Romans. Jesus is going to help him overcome this.

Jesus' Evidence for John

Jesus was to give John evidence or proof of His Messiahship. This was perhaps not the only time John was giving evidence. The King James translates verse four as *"Go show John AGAIN ..."* Several things are mentioned as evidenced. But notice how Jesus never seems to give a simple "yes" or "no" to enquires.

- **Proof From Jesus**

John may have been receiving reports about Jesus' ministry. However, he needed to send his own trustworthy disciples to tell him would was going on.

- **Preaching of Jesus**

The disciples of John were to go and tell John the things they heard (11:4). Jesus was preaching the Kingdom of Heaven was near or close by. It was not just what Jesus was preaching but to whom He preached: *"the poor have the gospel preached to them"* (11:5b).

- **Power of Jesus**

The disciples of John were also to bear witness to what they saw Jesus doing: *"The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them"* (11:5). The miracles Jesus performed were proof that Jesus was sent and commission by the Father (John 5:36; 14:11; 20:30,31).

- **Prophecy Fulfilled by Jesus**

Jesus' statement in verse five is an allusion to Isaiah 61:1-2a: *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"* (Also see Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6).

Jesus' Encouragement of John

Notice Jesus does not condemn John for his doubts or rebuke him for his "little faith". John was in need of information for conformation not condemnation. Instead Jesus encourages him with a beatitude: *"And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me"* (11:6). The Greek term for "offended" is *skandalisthe* meaning to cause one to be trapped or trip and fall. We derive the English word "scandalized" from it. God does not want to cause anyone to stumble over the Messiah or His Kingdom. However, many still do today. They reject the church, the blood, the cross, etc.

Jesus' Estimate of John

- ◆ **Not a Reed Shaken by the Wind, but One of Conviction**

When the disciples of John had gone, *"Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?'"* (11:7). The reed to which Jesus referred was common along Near Eastern river banks, including those of the Jordan where John baptized. A reed is a long slender plant, easily swayed to and fro by the passing breezes. In Matthew 12:20 Jesus quotes Isaiah 42:3 showing that this phrase denotes someone who is wavering and easily shook. John was not the type to sway here and there in the breezes of popular opinion, but he had unshakeable convictions. Christian are to be like him. *"We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting"* (Eph. 4:14). John is not a pushover or a rich shyster.

- ◆ **Not a Man of Soft Clothing, but one of Self-Denial**

Jesus continues with another rhetorical question: But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? (11:8). Jesus goes on and explains why they did not go out to the wilderness where John preached and baptized to see a finely dress herald to a king. *"Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses"* (11:8b). He looked more like a hermit or a bum. The king's announcers normally would dress in the finest clothes, eat the king's food, and stay in the best hotels. "Soft" has a meaning of effeminacy in 1 Corinthians 6:9. John was an outdoors man who ate wild locust and honey. He dressed in camel's hair. He knew what it was like to deny self in service of the King.

- ◆ **Not a Man who was a Prophet, but More than a Prophet**

A third time Jesus asks them, *"but what did you go out to see? A prophet?"* (11:9a). This time

Jesus answers in the affirmative: “Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet” (11:9b). Whereas all the previous prophets of the Old Testament era spoke of the coming Messiah, John was able to look at Him and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. Quoting from Malachi 3:1 Jesus said, “For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You’” (11:10). John was more than just a prophet. He was Christ’s messenger or Herald to the King. He was the forerunner to prepare the King’s approach. “Christ’s selection of this prophecy from Malachi 3:1 and application of it to John proves two things: (1) that John the Baptist is that first messenger mentioned in that passage, and (2) that Jesus Christ is the Lord, ‘the messenger of the covenant’ who even then had suddenly come to his temple” (Coffman).

Two things are noteworthy about this quote. First, Jesus does not continue with it to include the past part of verse two: “and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” Second, “Jesus shifts the person of the quote from first person “before me” to second person ‘before you.’ In wording the quote this way, Jesus puts himself as Deity addressing itself. As God in the flesh, this is not changing Scripture. God is the one who inspired Scripture.” (Pope 346).

◆ **Not a Citizen of the Kingdom, but one of the Greatest of Men**

Former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali used to boast, “I am the greatest”. Perhaps when it came to boxing he was. Just what does it take to be a great person? The world answers: outstanding athletic ability; to have a fortune; fame; great artistic talent; being a literary giant; possessing musical skills; military achievements; political office, intellectual achievements, great scientific discoveries, born into nobility, etc. If we are to ask Jesus who was a great man, he would say, “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11). The term “assuredly” which means “truly,” or “a fact beyond dispute.”

The phrase “born of women” is an idiom for “human being.” Jesus, although “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4), he is the King and Son of God. John’s greatness among men is a result of His position as the King’s herald.

No matter how great John was, he was not as great as someone in the Kingdom. Why? Because John did not live to see the kingdom established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. John died under the old covenant before Jesus died to establish the new (Heb. 9:16). John never experienced the blessings of being a citizen of the Kingdom. Christians today enjoy every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus when they are born again into the Kingdom via baptism (John 3:1f).

◆ **Not Just a Prisoner, but Advancing the Kingdom**

This is one of the more challenging verses in Matthew. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (11:12). Is it to be taken negatively? After all, John was in prison and about to be martyred for his faith. The people would try to take Jesus by force and make Him King (John 6:15). Does Jesus mean the coming Kingdom is under attack? Or does verse twelve have a positive meaning? The Kingdom has been forcefully advancing and the forceful are trying to gain control of it. So as Christ’s kingdom advances so does the opposition.

◆ **Not Just a Prophet, but the Last of the Old Testament Prophets**

Jesus says, “for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (11:13). The Messianic prophecies ended with Malachi and there was four hundred years of silence until John began to preach. He was to be the last in a long line of prophets. There was no longer a need for Messianic prophets after John. Because Jesus is the Messiah.

◆ **Not Just a Prophet but Elijah of Prophecy**

Jesus told the people that John was the Elijah of prophecy “and if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matt. 11:14). “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5). Perhaps they thought John was like a reincarnated Elijah or Elijah (who did not die) was sent back to earth. John was not literally Elijah but as the angel Gabriel said that John came in the “spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). John even dressed and

preached like Elijah (2 Kings 1:7–8; Matt. 3:4).

Jesus ends this section about John and his role in the Scheme of Redemption with an encouragement for all to accept John for who he was: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”* (11;15). This phrase is also found in Matthew 13:9; 13:43; Mark 4:9;23; 7:16; and Luke 8:8; 14:35. Essentially, it is demanding them to use their brains and they will come to the right conclusion. Jesus is explaining that those who really desire to know the truth about John are blessed. *“Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear”* (Matt. 13:16). However, mean would be “dull of hearing” or have itching ears to hear what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:4) or “hard of hearing”, etc. Some of the disciples would come to hear and accept the truth about John. Elijah literally came on the mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). The disciples clearly understood that this was really Elijah. Later Jesus would say, *“but I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”* Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist” (Matt. 17:12-13).

Generation of Brats, 11:16-27

In this next section of chapter eleven Jesus shows the end result of those who will not use their ears and understand the Good News. These would rather foolishly reject the message and the Messenger. To what can such a generation be compared? *“To what shall I liken”* was a common rabbinic introduction to a metaphor. Jesus goes on to explain that it is comparable to childish, blind generation that will face judgment.

■ **The Childishness of The Generation, 11:16-19**

Throughout the millennia children have enjoyed playing two games: wedding and funeral. Jesus uses them hear to demonstrate the childishness of the generation of His day. Perhaps He had just witnessed the children playing these two games. And as we all have seen, children will end up fighting over which one of these games they will play. One group wants to play wedding and other others respond with a desire to play funeral. Spoiled brats who will not play regardless of the tune or game.

Jesus is saying that the Jews are just like this in rejecting John and Jesus. They find fault with John and next with Jesus. John has a demon and is mad or insane for living an ascetic life in the wilderness. Jesus is worldly by socializing with others. He is accused of being a glutton, a winebibber, and an immoral friend of sinners. This is not true but an exaggeration to justify their rejection. Whether they fasted like John and feasted like Jesus the Jews were brats who would not go along. They could not be pleased. William Barclay explained, “the plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticism.”

However, Jesus exposed the foolishness by quoting a common proverbial expression. Wisdom, who is personified as a woman, will be proved right in the end by her actions.

■ **The Judgment of This Generation, 11:20-24**

Jesus ministry was concentrated in an area of Galilee where three cities served like three points to a triangle. Up to this point most of His miracles had be preformed limited geographical area. Most of His teaching had been done here as well.

For their failure to repent Jesus pronounces woes upon the cities. A “woe” is most often a denunciation. First, He rebukes of Chorazin and Bethsaida. Chorazin was a small village nestled in the hills some two and a half miles north of Capernaum. Bethsaida is located four miles northeast of Capernaum at the northernmost tip of the Sea of Galilee at the place where the Jordan River enters the sea. “Bethsaida” means “house of fishing.” They are contrasted with the ancient wicked cities of Tyre and Sidon. These ancient Phoenician cities with a long standing reputation for wickedness (Is. 23; Ezek. 27-28; Amos 1:9-10) involving the licentious Baal worship. Jesus did not minister to them, but had He the would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. Sackcloth and ashes were illustrative of the denunciation of ease in times of repentance.

Next, Jesus rebukes Capernaum. It was located on the north end of the Sea of Galilee. It served as a headquarters for Jesus ministry. Many miracles were performed there, such as, Peter's Mother-in-Law (8:14-15); two blind men (9:27-31); and the dumb demoniac healed (9:32-34); not to mention the raising of Jarius' dead daughter. Jesus contrasted their refusal to repent with that of the very wicked infamous city of Sodom. Sodom is a proverbial city of sin and Divine judgment. Even in the secular world, Sodom is a synonym for moral depravity. Jesus claimed even they would have responded to His miracles and teaching.

■ **The Blindness of the Generation, 11:25-27**

Jesus expresses agreement with God hiding the Gospel from wise. This is a bit of sarcasm. After all the wise represent those who have rejected Jesus like foolish children. "*Lord of heaven and earth*" is a Jewish title for God, stressing his lordship of the universe.

Ironically, the Bible praises those who are wise and prudent (Prov. 18:15). But Jesus is referring to the worldly definition: famous, highly educated, wealthy, powerful. Those who are so self-sufficient that they do not need Jesus or John. As Paul quoted, "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent*" (1 Cor. 1:19).

These self-willed blind are in contrast with babes. Who know they are dependent and have a humility and thus ability to accept and learn. They know they are the "*poor in spirit*" (Matt. 5:3) who humbly confess their dependency that God. Like a babe they are willing to hold out their hands for help. "The heart and not the head is the home of the gospel."

This was good in God's eyes (11:26). To conceal the truth from the worldly wise and reveal the Gospel to those with child-like trust who are teachable. Only the person emptied of human wisdom can be filled with divine truth.

Jesus explains how He alone as a unique relationship with the Father. 1) Jesus only has all authority from the Father (11:27a). Jesus equipped with the Father's Power to perform miracles. He had authority to forgive sins and preach the coming kingdom. In fact, he had this authority for the Father with regard to "all things." 2) Jesus is known only by the Father (11:27b). Because the Son is divine only the divine Father truly knows the Him. 3) Jesus alone knows the Father (11:27c). The word for "know" here is *epiginosko* "to know intimately by experience" as opposed to *oida* "to know factually". The father has an intimate knowledge and relationship with the Son. 4) Jesus alone can reveal the Father (11:27d). Jesus is God like His Father. God alone can reveal God.

The Great Invitation, 11:28-30

Today we send out invitations to weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, and parties of all types. An invitation is a powerful out reach to help build relationships by sharing one's joy. Some invitations are not that appealing. They require too much work, too much travel, too much clean up, too much expense, etc. To accept an invitation implies a willingness to comply with the requirements.

Jesus' invites by giving us three commands to follow. He makes His invite more appealing by promising that it is not too much of a burden on the invited to accept.

▶ **"Come"**

The first action is to "*come*." This indicates a acceptance not a demand.

But come where? "*To me*" that is to Jesus. In sin we are separated from God and He invites us to return (Is. 53:1-2).

Who is invited? "*All*" that is everyone is invited to come. The invitation is all inclusive. Many have invitation went out on behave of Jesus. Andrew invited Peter to meet Jesus (Jn. 1:40-42); Philip invited Nathaniel (Jn. 1:43-46); the Samaritan woman invited her neighbors (Jn. 4:28-30); Matthew (Levi) gave a feast to introduce Jesus to his friends an colleagues (Lk. 5:27-29); and Cornelius invited his family and friends to hear Peter preach Jesus (Acts 10:24,33). Although "*all*" are invited there is a subgroup who would in particularly be interested in the invitation. Those "*who labor and are heavy laden*." The term "*labor*" refers to working to the point of utter exhaustion or complete fatigue. A "*heavy laden*" is a massive load need relief in carrying. These are those who really can appreciate a little help. All labor under the

great burden of sin. Once I had offered this same invitation at the end of a sermon. An elderly lady who had been visiting our church came forward to be restored. She said, "I am Mrs. Laden and have come seeking rest for my soul."

The blessing in accepting Christ's invitation is rest from all labor and burdens. Rest from the burden of the quilt of sins. Help with the burdens related to the consequences of our sins. When this life is over God wants us to have an eternal rest.

▶ **"Take"**

The second requirement for the invitation is to *"take."* This too involves determination and actions on the man's part.

What is one to take? The yoke of Jesus. The invitation is not one to be lazy. We do not give up all work when becoming a Christian. We just receive a tailor made yoke that fits us perfectly. It is an easy yoke. A yoke was designed out of wood for oxen to be yoked together around their necks and shoulders. It allowed them to work effectively and more efficiently as one. Jesus as a carpenter had made these for local farmers. They needed to fit well. In fact, the Greek term from "easy" is *chrestos* meaning "well-fitting." Jesus is offering us to yoke with Him. By teaming up in a well fitting yoke we can work together. By doing so the burden is light. Oxen can pull far more of a load together than they could apart. God commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3).

▶ **"Learn"**

The term *"learn"* is from *mathetes* from which comes the term "disciple." Who is the teacher if we are the learners? Jesus said we are to learn "from me." He is the master teacher. He is not a harsh teacher. Experience can be a cruel teacher. Jesus is *"gentle and lowly in heart."* As the song we sing: "Jesus is tenderly calling Today"

▶ **"Find"**

One of the beatitudes of Revelation promises *"that they may rest from their labors"* (Revelation 14:13). To *"find"* one must search. Finding comes only after coming, taking and learning. Burdened souls need rest. In other words, souls find rest in salvation from the burden of sin. The rich young ruler came to find eternal life. He did not find the rest. He would not take the yoke and come follow Jesus.

Many will reject Christ's invitation. They will feel excused because of their prior engagements. Someone asked Emily Post, "What is the correct procedure when one is invited to the White House and has a previous engagement?" She answered, "An invitation to lunch or dine at the White House is a command, and automatically cancels any other engagement."

Questions:

1. Who is the *"coming one"*? Why is John asking Jesus about this?
2. Why would John struggling with his doubts at this time?
3. Why was John in prison?
4. What evidence of His Messiahship did Jesus provide John?

5. What was John NOT like?
6. In contrast, what great things did Jesus have to say about John?
7. Why could John not be in the Kingdom of God?
8. What two games are the children wanting to play? Why is the generation of that day like spoiled children?
9. Explain verse nineteen.
10. Upon what cities does Jesus pronounce woes? Why?
11. What is the contrast Jesus is making between these cities and three ancient cities?
12. From whom does God conceal truth? Why?
13. List four aspects of Jesus unique relationship with the Father.
14. Who invited are to come to Jesus?
15. What are they invited to "take" and why?
16. What kind of teacher is Jesus?

17. In accepting this invitation what will they "*find*"?

Application & Discussion:

1. Were John's doubts due to sinful unbelief? Explain. How can doubt prove to be healthy for one's growing faith?

2. Explain how this generation is a blind generation of brats.

Homework: Offer someone the great invitation of Jesus this week.

Experiencing Opposition

Matthew 12:1-32

Explaining the Sabbath to the Opposition, 12:1-8

The Ten Commands include a prohibition against working on the Sabbath Day (Ex. 20:8-10). The word *sabbath* means “cessation” or “rest.” The term is first used in the Bible in Exodus 16:23. Therefore the Law of Moses forbade work on this day under the penalty of death (Ex. 31:14-15). Sabbath violations was one of the reasons given for the Babylonian exile (2 Chron. 36:20,21; Jer. 17:27).

Breaking the Sabbath was considered a serious offense. The Pharisees had set up a series of Laws to keep fellow Jews from breaking Sabbath. Spitting on the ground would turn over a bit of soil which is plowing. To plow on the Sabbath was wrong. Carrying clothing was work but getting dressed on the Sabbath was not. If one’s house was on fire, he could not carry out his clothing. But he could wear several layers of clothing out of his burning home. No one could travel more than two fifths of a mile from home on the Sabbath. Soon these safety rules became traditions and then equal to the Laws of Moses.

Several times Jesus would come into conflict with the Pharisees and the scribes, because of what He did on the Sabbath Day. In this passage Jesus is rebuked for “*doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!*” (12:2). This same event is also recorded in Luke 6:1-6 and Mark 2:23-28.

When the disciples out of hunger “*began to pluck heads of grain and to eat*” (12:1) the Pharisees viewed this as Jesus permitting His disciples to reap, thresh, winnow, and prepare a meal. Jewish rabbi Maimonides said, “To pluck ears is a kind of reaping.” The Talmud said, “If a person rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is sifting. If he rubs the heads of wheat, it is threshing. If he cleans off the side adherances. It is sifting. If he bruises the ears, it is grinding. And if he throws it up in his hand, it is winnowing.”

Jesus defends Himself against this serious accusation by giving six arguments to show that the Pharisees, not His disciples are in error with regard to the proper use of the Sabbath.

▶ **David and His Men Eating the Shewbread**

To begin His first argument Jesus starts with a rather cutting sarcasm: “*Have you not read...?*” This is a rhetorical question. Of course the Pharisees of all people have read these passages. But did they really understand them. He goes on to remind them of an event in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 in regard to David did when he too was hungry. “*...he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?*” (12:3,4).

David and his men were running from King Saul. They came to the village of Nob about a mile north of Jerusalem to the tabernacle. It is here that David asked the priest Ahimelech for the twelve loaves of shewbread to feed him and his men. The bread was holy and only to be eaten by the priests (Lev. 24:9). However, the Pharisees did not condemn David’s actions or Ahimelech’s. Joseph Fletcher author of *Situation Ethics*, explains, “The plain fact is that love is an imperious law unto itself. It will not share its authority with any other laws, either natural or supernatural. Love is even capable of desecrating the Holy of Holies, the very tabernacle of the altar, if human hunger cries for help...The periscope Matt. 12:1-8...left no doubt about Jesus’ willingness to follow the radical decisions of love. He puts his stamp of approval on the translegality of David’s ...act” (Fletcher 85).

Fletcher believes that hunger outweighs the Laws of God. This same argument of necessity of the situation over the Law could be used to justify fornication, murder, lying, abortion, adultery,

instrumental music in worship to God. But there are several problems with this interpretation of David's actions. First, Jesus was not supporting David's choice by way of situation ethics. He claimed his disciples were "guiltless" because they did not break the Law of Moses. Furthermore, the old shewbread was removed and replaced with fresh every Sabbath Day. And consider the time when the priest Samuel gave his portion of a sacrifice to King Saul to eat (1 Sam. 9).

"The Jews did not criticize David for eating the shewbread under such trying circumstances, why criticize the disciples when they were but breaking the Pharisees interpretation of the Sabbath law?" (RC Foster, *Studies in the Life of Christ*, 457). But they were not breaking the Law of Moses.

▶ **The Priests Work on the Sabbath**

While on the subject of the priests Jesus focuses the Pharisees' attention on another argument. "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" (12:5). Every Sabbath in the tabernacle or the Temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law of Moses, Priests had to work harder than on any of the other days of the week. They had burn incense (Lev. 24:7), change out the old shewbread for the new (Lev. 24:8), and sacrifice a double brunt offering (Num. 28:9,10); etc. The essence of Jesus argument: if you do not condemn God servants the Priests for working on the Sabbath in Temple service, why rebuke me for having my servants working for Me - the Messiah, the Son of God.

▶ **Jesus Is Greater Than the Temple**

The previous argument about Temple service by the priests on the Sabbath enables Jesus to smoothly transition into His next defense. "Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple" (12:6). Since the only one greater than the Temple was the one who "dwelt" in it, Jesus is clearly claiming to be God (Matthew 23:21). Jesus had His servants just like the Temple in Jerusalem. They are serving something greater than the Temple. If the priest could work on the Sabbath, the disciples should be able to serve as well.

▶ **Hosea 6:6 - "I desire not only sacrifice but also mercy."**

Jesus once again uses sarcasm to point out their failures to understand basic well-known passages like Hosea 6:6. God has said, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' (12:7a). Sacrifices were connected with God's mercy. To show mercy to others was to be like God who shows mercy to those who sacrifice. Jesus along with His disciples were out and about showing mercy to the sick, possessed, sinners. The Pharisees were not will do show mercy to the hungry disciples on the Sabbath day.

▶ **The Disciples were Guiltless**

If the Pharisees truly understand Hosea 6:6, they "would not have condemned the guiltless" - disciples of Jesus (12:7b). The Law of Moses provided for the poor to pick grain from their neighbor's fields when hungry (Lev. 19:9-10). The Law even made a distinction between using a sickle to harvest the grain in their neighbor's field and just plucking a few grains with their hands (Deut. 23:25). Reaping was forbidden on the Sabbath day (Ex. 34:21), but Jesus' disciples were not reaping grain they were plucking grain. The disciples were only guilty of violating the traditions of men.

▶ **Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath**

Jesus final argument is rather bold: "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (12:8). First, He is greater than the Temple and now Master over the Sabbath day. Jesus was on a equal footing with God. He had the right or authority over the Sabbath and how it was observed. He made the Sabbath Laws as God. Just as a police officer can direct a parade going the wrong way on a one way street, so Jesus can direct men on what is permissible on the Sabbath.

As if these six arguments are not enough, in Mark's gospel in includes a seventh. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Jesus did not violate the Sabbath. Jesus did not let His disciples violate the Sabbath. Jesus' disciples were guiltless. Jesus did not approve of Situation Ethics. The Pharisees do not respond. The debate is over! Or is it?

Exposing the Hypocrisy of the Opposition, 12:9-14

After debating the Pharisees in the grainfield, Jesus later goes to the synagogue. Luke 6:6 indicates this was on another Sabbath. The Pharisees have set up a trap for Jesus with a local man with a withered hand who attends the synagogue. Wanting to find something with which to accuse Him they ask, *“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”* (12:10). They did not wish to learn but to continue the debate.

Staying true to His pattern, Jesus does not offer a simple “yes” or “no”. But puts forth an rhetorical question. *“What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?”* (12:11). Other places Jesus uses an ox in a ditch for His illustration (Luke 13:15-17; 14:5). The Jews accepted showing mercy and assistance to an animal on the Sabbath based on their understanding of the Law of Moses (Ex. 23:4,5 and Deut. 22:4).

If they can rescue a little lamb and it not violate the Sabbath, what about helping their fellow man. Men are indeed more valuable than sheep, flowers, little birds, etc. Animals were not created in the image of God and do not need to be rescued from sin. Jesus could have waited to heal the man on Sunday but instead said to him, *“Stretch out your hand.”* (12:13a). The hand was instantly healed and restored to perfect health. The Pharisees did not come denying Jesus could perform miracle, their question assumes He can. Now this miracle not only proves His authority from God to heal, but authority to heal on the Sabbath.

Mark says Jesus’ opposition was silenced by this and they consulted with the Herodians (Mark 3:4,6). After this one might think the Pharisees would concede the debate concerning their rules about working on the Sabbath, but instead *“the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him”* (12:14). How hypocritical of them. Jesus could not heal on the Sabbath according to man-made traditions, but they could plot on the Sabbath to have Him murdered,

Escaping the Treats of the Opposition, 12:15-16

- **Jesus Withdrew**

Jesus knew what they were up to (12:15a). He could perceive the thoughts of men (John 2:25). Jesus is not desiring to engage in public conflict with the Pharisees before the right time. To avoid a premature arrest and interruption of His ongoing ministry, He moves on to work elsewhere (12:15b). This seems to be the pattern employed by Jesus. He would go to a town and teach and heal. Some would accept. When opposition grew He moved to the next town and continued the cycle of His ministry. Sometimes He withdrew to be alone with the Father (John 6:15).

- **Jesus Worked**

The Pharisees left Jesus to plot, but the *“great multitudes followed Him.”* Jesus did not discontinue His work, but *“He healed them all”* (12:15). Why was Jesus going to the sick and poor and not the affluent and those in position of power?

- **Jesus Warned**

Next, He warns the crowd not to give Him publicity. It was not time for Him to be forced into a head on conflict with the Jewish and Roman authority and be prematurely executed.

Explaining His Reaction To Opposition, 12:17-20

- ▶ **Prophecy Fulfilled**

Jesus’ withdrawing and warning were not just His personal choices on how to fulfill His mission. He was fulfilling prophecy - the plan of God. Matthew quotes or better paraphrases Isaiah 43:1-4. This is the longest quote in the Gospel. This is from Isaiah’s first song of the Suffering Servant.

- ▶ **Picked as God’s Servant**

Jesus has been chosen by God not self-appointed (12:18a). God the Son had His role to play in the scheme of redemption.

- ▶ **Pleasing God**

Jesus is described as, *“My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!”* (12:18b). God would announce such from Heaven at Jesus’ baptism and at the Transfiguration.

- ▶ **Presented the Spirit**

God said He would put His *“Spirit upon Him.”* Perhaps referring to the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism. Also Jesus had been conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:20). *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him”* (Acts 10:38).

▶ **Proclaiming Justice to All**

Paul told the Gentiles *“that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”* (Eph. 2:12). But Isaiah promised that Jesus would *“declare justice to the Gentiles.”*

▶ **Preaches in a Quiet and Calm Manner**

When Jesus preached He did *“not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets”* (12:19). He did not go about like a rebel or politician stirring up the masses in a insurrection against the authorities. Jesus did not hassle and brawl with people or go about shouting and screaming. After all, Jesus was *“gentle and lowly in heart”* (11:29).

▶ **Practicing Compassion**

Jesus was also fulfilling prophecy concerning the compassionate treatment of the weak. Isaiah uses to illustrations. First, *“a bruised reed He will not break.”* Reeds were used to manufacture all sorts of ancient products from parchment paper, flutes for playing music, ink pens or walking sticks. However, if the reed was damaged, it was thrown out. Jesus will not break the broken, but find a way to use them. Second, a *“smoking flax He will not quench.”* Oil lamps if running out of oil or had an improperly trimmed wick would offer little light and emit smoke irritating those in the house. The logical thing to do was to snuff out the fire. Instead, of quenching Jesus is said to fan the flame back to life. Jesus practiced mercy on those who may be deemed useless or beyond redemption.

▶ **Pursuing Victory**

Jesus must continue His just work *“till He sends forth justice to victory”* (12:20). His ultimate victory is over death which is the wages for man’s sins (Rom. 6:23). This will be accomplished in His resurrection.

▶ **Providing Hope**

Jesus sums up the rest of the quote from Isaiah with *“and in His name Gentiles will trust”* (12:21). Jesus included the Gentiles in the Great Commission when He sent the apostles out to all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus came to give hope to all.

Execrating Attack by the Opposition, 12:21-32

To the Pharisees Jesus said, *“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come”* (Matthew 12:31,32).

No words of Jesus seem to have stirred more interest than the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Before anyone can learn just what this sin entails they must first investigate the context. According to Mark, scribes or experts in the Jewish law came down from Jerusalem to Galilee to access the work which, as they heard, Jesus was doing there, and especially His ministry of exorcism. Jesus had cast a demon out of a man who was blind and dumb. People were amazed and said, *“Can this be the son of David?”* They saw the miracles as evidence that Jesus may be the Christ who was to be of the lineage of David.

The Pharisees and Scribes, however, were quick to derail this Messianic speculation by the people. Although they could not deny that Jesus performed a miracle they could cast doubt as to the source of His power. By accusing Jesus of working by the power of Beelzebub they could seem justified before the people in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.

Simply stated the Pharisees were accusing Jesus of being in league with the Devil or Beelzebub. “Beelzebub” had once been the name of the Canaanite divinity, “the lord of the heavenly dwelling”, but by this time it was used by Jews to denote the ruler of the abyss, the abode of demons or literally, “lord

of the flies" originally the name of the Philistine deity.

Jesus knew what they were thinking and therefore showed by way of several arguments that this could not be true. First, if Satan were using Him to destroy another part of his dominion than this would be self-destructive. Satan would be instituting a civil war within his own kingdom. No kingdom could survive such an internal war. Next, Jesus warned that their own sons (or relatives) would judge them because some of them cast out demons. The Jews could not really cast out demons but made a pretense at doing so (cf. Acts 19:11-20). Although, it could be that some of the 70 disciples that Jesus sent out two by two could cast out demons and were related to some of the Pharisees. Nonetheless, to accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the Devil would also indite their sons or at least display their inconsistency. Third, if Jesus does not cast them out by the power of the Devil than He must be casting them out by the Power of God, since there is no other alternative. Fourth, the only way for a strong man (Satan) to lose some of his goods (demon possession of the man) in his house (the body of the demoniac) would be if a stronger man defeated him. Jesus was saying that the only way He could have cast out this demon was to overpower Satan. This in turn demonstrates that the Kingdom of God is coming and He really is the Messiah. Finally, Jesus tells of the parable of the good tree. Good fruit comes from good trees. Thus, the good deed of casting out the demon comes from a good source, Jesus through the Holy Spirit cast out demons and not from evil, Satan. In contrast, the Pharisees spoke evil of Jesus and have an evil heart, just as an evil tree will produce evil fruit.

The evil produce of the Pharisees' evil hearts was blasphemy. The term "*blasphemy*" comes from the two Greek words "blapto" and "phemi"; "blaptoi" means "to hurt", while "phemi" means "to speak," hence "to blaspheme" means "to speak to hurt," to Speak against." It means to "speak hurt", "speak evil of" or "rail upon" or "to offer intentional indignity to God or sacred things." Blasphemy was a very serious charge. In Old Testament times was punishable by death (Lev. 24:16).

Note, Jesus says they have not blasphemed the "Son of God", but God the Spirit or the Holy Spirit. To speak evil of Jesus (Son of Man) while He lived in His flesh was done many times by the people, a thief on the cross, the Pharisees, Sadducees and so on. However, Jesus warns that they are going too far with this blasphemy. They have deliberately and maliciously defamed the power of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit was to produce miracles allowing Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God (Jn. 20:30,31). By attributing the power behind this miracle to the Devil they not only rob the Holy Spirit of His due glory, but they also discredit Jesus of being the Son of God.

Jesus warned them about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. "*He said this because they said...*" Now, what they said was directed at Him: "*This man cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub*". This was not an offhand remark, but an intentionally speaking out against the Holy Spirit. It might have been argued by the Pharisees, "What do you mean we blasphemy the Holy Spirit. We did not say any thing about the Holy Spirit. We are saying that this miracle of yours was done in league with your master, the Devil." Jesus was telling them there is no logical way He could have done this miracle by the power of the Devil. Therefore, they are attributing the true power behind the miracle (which is the Holy Spirit) to the Devil. This is blasphemy against the Spirit.

"*Jesus knew their thoughts*" (Mt. 12:25). He could identify the source of this blasphemy: an evil heart (33-37). Jesus described them as corrupt trees, an offspring of vipers, having evil hearts producing evil fruit and speaking words by which they would be condemned. Blasphemy like all sins begins in the heart before it ever pours past the lips. This heart disease is fatal because it rejects the only witness to the truth of Christ's identity.

So what is this sin? Perhaps the best answer is by J.W. McGarvey who wrote: "*Blasphemy against the Son may be a temporary sin, for the one who commits it may be subsequently convinced of his error by the testimony of the Holy Spirit and become a believer (I Tim. 1:13). But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is in its nature an eternal sin, for if one rejects the evidence given by the Holy Spirit and ascribes it to Satan, he rejects the only evidence upon which faith can be had; and without faith there is no forgiveness..*" (The Four fold Gospel, p. 303).

Questions:

1. Why did the Pharisees condemn the actions of Jesus disciples?
2. Does Jesus approve of Situation Ethics when referencing David eating the showbread? Explain.
3. Was it proper for Priests to work on the Sabbath Day? Explain.
4. How is Jesus greater than the Temple?
5. How does Hosea 6:6 apply to the Pharisees?
6. Why did Jesus consider His disciples guiltless of a Sabbath violation?
7. How does Jesus being Lord of the Sabbath factor into this argument that the Disciples are guiltless?
8. When Jesus heals the man's hand on the Sabbath, how does He imply the Pharisees are hypocritical?
9. Was it a Sabbath day violation of the Law of Moses to help an animal? Explain.
10. What three things did Jesus continue to do after escaping from the opposition?

Condemning Evil

Matthew 12:33-50

Condemning Evil Hearts, 12:33-37

The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by accusing Jesus to casting out demons by the power of the Devil is not just a problem with speech but an evil heart.

■ **Trees & Their Fruit**

The term “*make*” is not about planting trees, but the Pharisees making up their minds about Jesus. Either His deeds or fruit are evil making Him evil. Or He is good and so are His deed. But stop accusing Him of doing good deeds and being evil. A diseased tree does not produce good fruit. As mentioned in Matthew 7:20 a tree is known by its fruit.

■ **Tongue & Its Venom**

Jesus like John the baptist (3:7) calls them “*brood of vipers!*” (12:34a). He will call them this again in (23:33). Vipers were a poisonous species of snake known to inhabit Palestine. “The mother viper normally lays a large number of eggs, and when they hatch the brood of little potential killers scurry around like insects...The Pharisees...like a brood of vipers poisoned the minds of fellow Jews...when someone reached into the woodpile of religion, thinking to pick up a stick of truth, he could be bitten to death by those soul-damning liars” (MacArthur 317,318). Thus Jesus asked the rhetorical question, “*how can you, being evil, speak good things?*” (12:34b). Satan took the form of the serpent when he lied to Eve about God. James warns of the tongues’ danger: “*for every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*” (James 3:7,8).

■ **Treasure & Its Produce**

Jesus used another illustration: “*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things*” (12:34a,35). The Greek term for “*treasure*” is *thesaruos* from which we get “*thesaurus*”, a word treasury. If our heart is the treasury of evil or good in it. This it would will overflow from the mouth. Evil will be spoken from a heart full of evil and good spoken from a heart filled with good.

■ **Terms & their Judgment**

The words we speak matter. The saying “sticks and stones may brake my bones but your words will never hurt me is not true. They heart the one who is the target of the evil words and the one who speaks them out of an evil heart. Jesus said, “*but I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*” (12:36,37). The term “*idle*” literally means “*does not work*” and refers to words that worthless or useless. Wiersbe calls them “*words that accomplish nothing.*” The type of worthless words are the one’s the Pharisees were using against Jesus.

Our words can condemns us. Or as in the good confession our words can lead unto salvation. “*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*” (Rom. 10:9,10). We must to careful what we say, because “*death and life are in the power of the tongue*” (Prov. 18:21). And pray: “*set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips*” (Ps. 141:3).

Condemning Evil Sign-Seeking, 12:38-42

Not only do the Pharisees have an evil heart they are evil sign-seekers. This accusation by Jesus is also covered in Matthew 16:1-4 and Luke 11:29-32. The phrase *“He began to say”* indicates that this was something that He repeatedly said.

In most cases it would be wise to request a sign from someone who claims to be God’s representative. Such would prove his credentials. Yet Jesus calls these sign seekers *“an evil and adulterous generation.”* Just who is included in this *“evil generation”*? First, there are *“the scribes and Pharisees”* (12:38). Next, passage dealing with the subject includes the Sadducees (16:1). Luke includes the crowds (Luke 11:29).

◆ **Sign Seekers Flatter**

They flatter Jesus by calling him *“Teacher”* attempting to cover up their hatred and *“how they might destroy Him”* (12:14) They did not come to learn from but to destroy the Teacher.

◆ **Sign Seekers are Evil**

Jesus calls them *“evil”*. Why so evil? Pharisees were known by the populous to be extremely moral, religious, and God-conscious. They had an evil heart and evil fruit from their lips.

◆ **Sign Seekers are Adulterous**

Jesus also calls them *“adulterous.”* The Jews had a unique covenant relationship with God in terms of marriage (Ps. 73:27; Is. 50:1; Jer. 3:6:10; 13:27; Hos. 9:1). However through their idolatry and immorality, they have committed spiritual adultery (Jer. 3:9; Ezek. 23:27). James also included his generation of saints among adulteresses. *“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4).

◆ **Sign Seekers Only Shown Ultimate Sign**

A sign demanded and a sign denied. Jesus’ miracles were part of His proclamation, never a performance. Men will try to dictate how God should act. Jesus knew that miracles rarely convince the skeptical. Many signs had been given, but they have rejected them. Jesus said, *“the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me...If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”* (John 5:36; 10:37-38).

Only one final sign is to be given that generation. The Deity of Christ was to be proven finally by one sign. The one sign to know that Jesus is truly God, the Savior of the world. It a riddle Jesus calls it *“the sign of Jonah.”*

Jesus obviously accepted the story of Jonah and an actual historical event. Jonah served as a type of Jesus: *“as Jonah was... so will the Son of Man be.”* Jonah was good as dead, but in three days was brought back to the land of the living.

There are some differences between Jesus and Jonah. Jonah was a rebellious prophet who ran from God’s orders and pouted when God’s will was accomplished. Jesus never failed to do the will of the Father. And Jesus actually died. Jonah’s resurrection came after his repentance. Jesus never sinned and had no need of repentance.

The sign was the resurrection of Christ. It served as the core of the apostles preaching. *“Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone”* (Acts 4:10-11; Acts 5:30-31; Rom. 1:3-4).

Jesus was to be in the *“heart of the earth”*, that is, the place of departed spirits, the abode of the dead. And He would be there *“three days and three nights.”* This does not demand a full 72 hours. The Jewish Talmud held that *“any part of a day is as the whole.”* So the first day is the last part of Friday. The second day is all of Saturday. And the third day is the first part of Sunday.

◆ **Sign Seekers Will Face Judgment**

The consequence for ignoring this sign is Judgment. The Ninivites themselves will rise up in Judgment against that generation. *“Rise”* means *“stand up”* The reference is to a custom in both Jewish

and Roman law courts that required a witness to stand when testifying in a criminal case.

◆ **Sign Seekers Do Not Repent At the Preaching of One Greater Than Jonah**

The message Jonah preached produced repentance (Jonah 3:5-6). Jesus is greater than Jonah. He is not a reluctant runaway prophet and he performs miracles.

◆ **Sign Seekers Fail to Discover Wisdom of One Greater than Solomon**

The queen of the south or Sheba is used as an example of one seeking wisdom. She traveled more than 1200 from Yemen in Saudi Arabia to Jerusalem to see King Solomon. She was seeking and testing the reputation of Solomon's wisdom and found him to be a very wise servant of God. This pagan woman believed after going to the trouble of investigating the evidence. Jesus generation did not have to travel far and have had many miracles preformed and yet still thye do not believe. So the queen will *"rise up in judgment"* over them. The is especially true since Jesus is greater and wiser than Solomon. Jesus' generation opposed, insulted, and ultimately crucified Him.

So If you were waiting for a sign this is it. A resurrection is really pretty easy to disprove. All you have to do is go to the tomb and produce a corpse. Yet there were many eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. Plus there is the empty tomb. Some the enemies of Jesus became disciples like Paul. Paul was killing and persecuting Christians because he believed that Jesus was an impostor and not the Messiah. What changed Paul to become a disciple of Jesus who gave his life for Jesus? Paul saw the risen Lord. If you are not convinced by the empty tomb, what else can God do to convince you?

Condemning the Evil of Empty Hearts, 12:43-45

Some call this "the parable of the unclean spirit." Indeed it is a parable of Jesus. Though it appears at first glance to be out of place, it goes well with the demon exorcism in the first part of the chapter and the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders and others.

A man has been freed from a demon. It appears he has had help through exorcism. The focus is on the demon who looks for a habitation but without avail. Remember, legion asked to be cast into swine rather than cast into the abyss.

Returning to the man the demon has taken with him several more demons. From this parable we learn a great deal more about demon possession. First, demons long to inhabit or incarnate. Demons can communicate. Some demons are worse than others. Demons cannot just possess anyone at anytime.

"The house" was found by the demons to be *"empty, swept, and put in order"* (12:44b). "Both the words 'swept' and 'garnished' are perfect passive participles. The passive voice means that someone else did these things to or for the man's life. The perfect tense suggests a finished work or a through job" (Blair 167). Just what this cleaning up is referring to is not specified by Jesus in the context. However, it could be Israel's rejection of idolatry. Although that was great, they needed to except God 's Son. It could be their repentance at the preaching of John and Jesus. Or more likely, He is focusing on the Pharisees who are attempting to keep the Law but are not accepting Jesus as the Lord of their life.

Evil loves a vacuum. An empty heart devoid of a relationship with the Divine is prime real estate for the Devil. Because the man did not fill the vacancy of his heart with a relationship with Christ his cleaning was only temporary. To decided not to give room to the Devil is not enough we must became a slave to Christ. The old man is out the new man is in. An house or heart left empty is a invitation to a spiritual squatter. Time is running out to make a decision about Jesus. If they leave the vacancy sign up too long, they are inviting an even greater disaster. Perhaps, destruction with Jerusalem and Judaism in 70 AD or dying in their sins. The demon thought of the man has "his house" and since Christ had not moved into the man's heart, it was free and clear for him to take up ownership once more.

The vacancy left the man more vulnerable to something worse. *"The last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation"* (12:45).

Peter makes a similar application of this. *"For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning"* (2 Peter 2:20). This parable also shows

a man can be saved and lost.

Jesus' True Family, 12:46-50

The parallel accounts in Mark 3 and Luke 8 provide additional information. Jesus family may have come with the motives of an intervention. *"They went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind'"* (Mark 3:21). Or they could be concerned for Jesus safety. The opposition was growing and getting ugly. He had no place to call his own. What family would not be concerned?

Jesus had a large family. The people who knew Jesus and His family said, *"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?"* (Matt. 13:55-56). Since there is no mention of Joseph, it is assumed he has already passed away. Despite the teachings of the perpetual virginity of Mary by Catholicism, she had plenty of children. Some of them did not believe in Him (John 7:5). Later we find many of his family as part of the prayer group awaiting the coming of the Kingdom on the Day of Pentecost. *"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers"* (Acts 1:14).

Jesus is not disowning his family for a new one. He was not being disrespectful or dismissive. Jesus is giving a subtle rebuke to his family. His work will not be interrupted or interfered by them. Being biologically related to Jesus did not give his family any preferential treatment. Jesus' treatment of family was in keeping with the rules He had Himself laid down for His disciples. *"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me"* (10:37).

Jesus used this interruption for a timely lesson on having a close relationship with Him. Jesus contrasted His earthly, biological family with that of His spiritual family. *"He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers!'"* (12:49). Anyone can become part of his family by obedience to the will of God. *"For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"* (12:50). Notice the "whoever" implying the whole of humanity is invited to be part of one big happy family with Jesus and God.

Jesus wants us to have the power to become children of God (John 1:12). We must be born again into the kingdom (John 5:3f). He has made arrangements for our adoptions as sons (Gal. 4:4-6).

Questions:

1. True False The Pharisees indicated Jesus was an evil tree even though He produced good fruit.
2. How are the Pharisees like a *"brood of vipers"*?
3. From where does evil speaking emanate?
4. Who all made up an *"an evil and adulterous generation"*?
5. What is spiritual adultery?

6. What is *"the sign of Jonah"*?
7. Did Jesus believe in the story of Jonah in the great sea creature? Explain.
8. Who would rise up against the evil generation? Why?
9. How is Jesus greater than Jonah?
10. What do we learn about demons from the parable in verse 43-35?
11. How could the man have prevent being repossessed?
12. What Jesus being rude to His family?
13. Who did Jesus say was His family and how do they become part of His family?

Application & Discussion:

1. Are those of the world today represent an evil and adulterous generation? Explain.
2. What does the fact that Jesus had brothers and sisters indicated concerning the Roman Catholic doctrines concerning the perpetual virginity of Mary?

Homework: Share the *"sign of Jonah"* with someone this week.

Kingdom Parables (Part 1)

Matthew 13:1-33,36-43

On the same day that Jesus was visited by His mother and brothers, he went out from the house and down to the seaside. He entered a boat which became the platform from which He would speak while the people stood on the shore of the sea of Galilee. Jesus began to tell them seven or eight parables about the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. These stories were based on simple every day objects with which the people would be very familiar. Perhaps while Jesus was telling them the parable of the Sower there was off in the distance an actual sower in his field broadcasting the seed.

This is one of the few parables in the New Testament where Jesus gives a full explanation of what He meant. When His disciples asked him why he taught in parables He unfolded the meaning of the soils to them. This parable helps serve as a key on the proper way to interpret other parables of Jesus. Mark 4:3-9; 14-26; Luke 8:4-15

The Parable of the Sower, 13:1-23

- **The Seed**

The Parable of the Sower contains three basic elements: the sower, the seed, and the soils. Jesus explained to His disciples, *"the seed is the word of God"* (Luke 8:11). The Word of God is that seed which produces spiritual life. In real life there are good seeds and there are bad seeds, but in Jesus' parable there is nothing wrong with this seed.

According to Galatians 6:7, all seed is designed by God to reproduce after its kind. *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."* This is a fact of nature which is still true regardless of how many thousands of years the earth has existed. It is still true even though man has learned to clone trees and breed new species of apples, pecans, etc. When a walnut seed is planted everyone knows to expect a walnut tree to be reproduced. One does not plant corn seed and expect to harvest bananas. Likewise, when the pure seed, the Word of God, is planted into the hearts of men, it produces a true citizen of the Kingdom or a New Testament Christian.

All seeds are powerful regardless of their size. In another parable Jesus will note the power of the very small mustard seed as it produces a tree large enough for birds to land. Have you ever seen a sidewalk cracked and broken because of seed? Or a watermelon seed produce not just one but many melons 200,000 times its size and filled with seeds all potent enough to reproduce more watermelons with more seeds? The seed in this parable is powerful enough to reproduce children of God among both the Jews and the Gentile nations. Paul said of the Gospel, *"for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16). Every time it is planted in good soil it produces.

- **The Sower**

What is the purpose of this parable? Some believe it should be called the parable of the seed, others the parable of the soil, however Jesus called it *"the parable of the sower"* (Matt. 13:18). As sowers of His seed the disciples needed to realize that not everyone was going to accept the message in their heart and even those who did may later reject it. They needed to be prepared for the day when Jesus and His message would not be popular among the masses. Jesus wanted them to understand they would not always have a welcome reception.

Who is the sower? Jesus was the original sower of the seed which would be called the Gospel. God has always used men (prophets) to broadcast His message. The sower in the parable of the Wheat

and the Tares is the “*Son of Man*” (Matt. 13:37). However, there is no need to assume that in this parable it refers only to Christ. The sower would be anyone commissioned to sow the seed of the kingdom. When one becomes a Christian, they become responsible for sowing the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).

What is the duty of the sower? He must sow the seed among the nations of men (Mark 16:15). He has no right to withhold the seed from certain races of men. He is not at liberty to mix the seed with any other seed. The Bible makes it clear that God gives the increase, not the sower. Paul told the Corinthians “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase*” (1 Cor. 3:6). He must patiently for the seed to do its work in the soil.

What if the soil is defective? Since there is no problem with the seed and if the sower sows only the pure seed, the Word of God, the effectiveness of the sowing depends largely on the condition of the soil. The object of the seed is to produce fruit. Yet some soil is not as good as other soils. Once the sower has done his duty, it is the duty of the hearer to listen and accept the message of the Gospel into his heart. Faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). When the seed fails to take root it does not mean that it was because of a lack of effort, ability, knowledge, fervor, etc. on the part of the sower.

What if the seed is still in the barn? Many congregations will bemoan the lack of conversions among the community where they live. The seed will not leave the barn and sow itself in the soil. The sower must take the seed and go forth, for the soil will not come to him. And all the farming equipment in the world will produce nothing until it is used.

- **The Soil**

In this parable there is but one seed, but it can be sown on four different kinds of soil.

First, there is the **wayside soil representing the hard heart**. In Palestine the land was divided up into small tracts. There were no fences or walls to separate the parcels of land, only narrow paths that were accessible to everybody. Some of these became well worn and compacted. The sower would broadcast the seed and some would likely bounce upon the hardened pathway. These seeds had about as much of a chance of growing on these pathway as they would on a sidewalk made of concrete.

Often it is sin which has seared the conscience and hardened the heart (Heb. 3:13). The human heart can be hardened like pavement by persisting in wrong and rejecting the right. Each refusal to do God's Will is like ten thousand steps on the human heart.

In the parable the seed which fell on the hard ground of the wayside was devoured by the birds of the air or “*the wicked one*”, which is the devil (Matt. 13:19). He still uses many means to neutralize the effects of the Word of God on the hearts of men.

The second type of soil is the **rocky soil representing the shallow heart**. The rocky soil was not earth mixed with countless small rocks, but soil which lay one or two inches deep upon a ledge of submerged stone. The plant may begin well just as any other, but the tender roots will not penetrate the rock and when the heat of summer come they will wilt and die.

This type of soil may come to represent the emotional hearer who lives by their feelings rather than by their convictions. When John the Baptist came preaching the common people heard him and were baptized. When Jesus came preaching and healing, they were all excited and Jesus was popular. Their faith was shallow like a thin layer of soil over solid bedrock. Thus, their commitment to Christ was “easy come, easy go.”

Next, is the **thorny soil representing a crowded heart**. Surely the sower did not broadcast seed into the thorns. Instead he cast them into soil which had an abundance of thorn seeds which he could not see. When the thorns and briars grew they often develop more rapidly and robbed the good seed of light, moisture, nutrients, etc. As a result they do not grow to maturity and produce fruit.

Jesus says these thorns are “*the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches*” (Matt. 13:22a). Mark adds “*the lust of other things*” (4:19) and Luke, “*pleasure so this life*” (8:14). These consist of the pernicious p's of the pre-occupied hearer: profession, position, power, prestige, profits, possessions, pastimes, pleasure, projects, or politics.

The cares and worries of this world leave no room for the Word to develop and grow. The English

word “worry” is derived from the old German word *wurgen*, which means “to choke.” So this type of hearer is suffering from a type of mental strangulation. When one is so busy with the cares of this world so as not to be concerned about the Words of eternal life He is choking out the seed.

This soil lacks room to the seed which is the Word of God. If it does produce any fruit it will stop soon. Thorns and weeds can be weeded out. All they need to do is repent and have a thorn pulling day in their heart and make room for the Word to grow.

Finally, there is the **good soil representing the fruitful heart**. The best soil to receive the seed is fertile and loose. It is able to receive good seed without interference by weed seeds. It is deep enough to allow the roots to go down.

The Bible speaks of various types of hearers. This soil represents the good hearers. The first soil produces nothing. The second produces some roots but withers away. The third produces even some fruit but is choked out. Only good soil brings forth fruit in abundance for harvest. The crowds were filled with these various types of hearers. The hope is that enough seed will fall on good ground.

What is the fruit? Bearing fruit would equate to simple obedience to the Word. Notice that the soil brings forth fruit “*with patience*.” The sower does not expect a harvest overnight.

Three things are important for a good harvest: 1) the seed must be unadulterated; 2) the sower must be faithful; and 3) the soil must be good. The most important thing for good soil is for the hearts of the hearers to truly listen to the Word. Nineteen times in Matthew 13, Jesus used the word “*hear*.” To be fruitful and more fruitful hearers of the Word should take soil samples to see what kind of heart they possess.

The Parable of the Wheat & the Tares, 13:24-30, 36-43

Matthew 13 is called by some as the *Sermon on the Sea*. The Parable of the Wheat and Tares is only found here. This parable appears to pick up where the Parable of the Sower has left off. However, it must be noted that in the Parable of the Sower, there was one sower, one kind of seed, and four results. In contrast, there are two sowers, two kinds of seed and two harvests in the Parable of the Tares and Wheat.

The explanation to this parable is given by Jesus in response to the disciples' inquiry (13:36). It is one of the few in which we have Jesus' own explanation.

- **Field = the World (13:38)**

The field is the world, the human race or society. The place where the Gospel is preached to men. In that world of humanity the Lord Jesus has scattered His own.

- **Good Seed = Children of the Kingdom (13:38)**

Notice that Jesus uses the same metaphor: seed to represent two different things in two different parables. The disciples are those who compose the “*good soil*”, in which the seed has been sown in the Parable Of The Sower. In contrast, in the Parable Of The Wheat And Tares, the disciples are the “*good seed*” themselves. Thus, when one receives the “seed” of the kingdom (the Word of God), they become “good seed” (a son of the kingdom).

- **Tares = Children of the Wicked One (13:38)**

The servants of the owner were dismayed to find that weeds, that is, darnel or “false wheat” growing among the wheat. Darnel is “a troublesome weed in the grainfields, resembling wheat” (Arndt and Gingrich 340). Thayer says it resembles “wheat except that its grains are black” (272).

This parable explains that there are children of the kingdom in contrast with the children of the wicked one. This children produced by the false seeds of the Devil are false disciples or brethren though not limited to them. “*He who commits sin is of the devil*” (1 Jn. 3:8). They would compose any soul who is not a child of God. Perhaps unfaithful Christians who have gone back out into the world. The tares have the ability to mimic the appearance of wheat, the good seed. However, when the head of grain is formed the tares have black kernels whereas the good wheat has golden heads. As Jesus said, “*by their fruits ye shall know them*.”

- **Sower of the Good Seed = Christ (13:37)**

In this parable the sower is clearly identified as the Son of Man, that is, Jesus Christ. It is His seed (faithful Christians) versus the Devil's seed (his children). He owns the field, the good seed and controls the servants and the harvesters and the time of harvest.

- **Sower of the Tares = the Devil (13:39)**

The enemy of the Son of Man is Satan. Notice he is a coward and does his diabolical work at night when the servants are asleep. In Ireland, an outgoing tenant, in spite, sowed wild oats in the fields which he was leaving, and it was next to impossible to exterminate them. Rome had a law forbidding such activity. The enemy has sown tares in the world (field) in an effort to confuse the reapers and destroy by imitation. This adversary is seek to destroy faithful Christians (1 Pet. 5:8).

- **Reapers = Angels (13:39)**

When Jesus comes again it will be harvest time. He will be accompanied by His angels *"in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"* (2 Thess. 1:8,9).

- **Harvest = End of the World (13:39)**

The harvest is the end of the world (verse 39) or the Judgment Day. The word *"harvest"* is an Old Testament metaphor for judgment (Jer 51:53; Hos. 6:11). In Matthew 3:12, John the baptizer said that Christ will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat in His garner; He will burn up chaff with unquenchable fire. *"God hath appointed a day in which He [Jesus Christ, drv] will judge the world"* (Ac. 17:31). This punishment of the wicked and reward of the righteous is a recurring theme in several of the parables (Mt 13:49-50; 18:34-35; 25:41, 45-46).

Parable of the Mustard Seed, 13:31,32

In the parable of the Sower, the disciples had heard that only a fourth part of the seed sown had prospered; in the Tares, they had heard of the hindrances which beset even the part that remained. Now Jesus gives two parables for their encouragement. Both address the small beginning and rapid growth of the kingdom. First, the parable of the Mustard Seed prophetically addresses the rapid growth of the Kingdom.

- **Small Beginnings of the Kingdom**

The growth of trees is slow, but that of a herb, like mustard seed, is abnormal, developing without the strong wood-tissue of a tree, and living only long enough to develop flowers and seed. *"Mustards have notably small seed, and under favorable conditions grow in a few months into very tall herbs - 10-12 ft."* (ISBE).

The mustard seed was proverbially small. Although it was not literally the smallest seed known, but "small as a grain of mustard seed" was a proverbial expression among the Jews (Lk. 17:6). It was symbolically small.

Jesus had small beginnings. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem and the son of a carpenter of Nazareth. Sometimes His disciples must have despaired. Only twelve of them, let the world was so large. Their faith began unnoticed, like a tiny mustard seed, but nevertheless has gone around the world.

Beginnings are important. Little beginnings have great potential. When we are tempted to complain, "the job is too big; it won't do any good to start it" let us remember the mustard seed.

- **Great Growth of the Kingdom**

Great things come from growth. The difference between a small mustard seed and large mustard tree is growth. Like the mustard seed the kingdom began to grow rapidly (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 6:1,7; 8:4-6; 11:21; 12:24).

Christianity has altered the course of human history and survived the passing of two millennia. H.G. Wells has said, "his is easily the dominant figure in history...a historian without any theological bias whatever should find that he simply cannot portray the progress of humanity honestly without giving a foremost place to a penniless teacher from Nazareth."

Parable of the Leaven, 13:33

Bread has been a very common food staple throughout the ages. In Palestine at this time the expression to "break bread" meant to eat a meal. Bread was so nearly their total diet that "bread" equated with "food."

This parable, while it teaches the same general truth as the previous, holds forth the inward growth of the kingdom, while "the Mustard Seed" seems to point chiefly to the outward growth. In the parable of Leaven the King of kings informs His disciples of the transforming power of the Kingdom.

- **Transforming Power From Without**

Generally, leaven has been a symbol of evil's corruption (Mk. 8:15). Our great-grandmothers would have had a different image from the parable: a small container on the back of the kitchen range containing a piece of dough rescued from a loaf of bread before it was baked, bubbling in a nutrient solution of potato water or a flour mixture. This "starter", as it was called became the leavening agent for future batches of bread. The parable's leaven was probably a piece of fermented dough kept over from a former baking.

- **Transforms Silently and Slowly Within**

Leaven works from within. We cannot see the leaven working. Bread is set aside to rise for several hours. Naturally, the Gospel of Christ has an inner influence. It must work within man's heart (Mk. 7:21-23). The process of conversion is gradual, but thorough. It is silent, for it operates silently within the heart. Sin is forgiven at once, but growth is gradual.

The Kingdom works unseen. No troops or tank movements or planes flying overhead. The Kingdom did not appear all at once. Yet, the soldiers of the cross following their marching orders transformed the world.

- **Transforms Quality**

Leavened bread is not like the dull, tasteless unleavened bread. Yeast makes bread raise, light, and tasty. Nor does it make sourdough Christians.

Christianity transformed life for the individual man (I Cor. 6:9,10). When Christ comes new deeds (Col. 3:5-17). He has new thoughts (Col. 3:1-4). He is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

The early Christians exerted a powerful influence in the pagan world of the Roman Empire. The critics of Christianity complained: "*They are disturbing our city*" (Ac. 16:20). and "*These people have turned the world upside down*" (Ac. 17:6).

- **Transforms Completely**

Although speaking of leaven as a negative influence in a congregation, Paul wrote, "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump*" (I Cor. 5:6). The process is complete - "the whole is leavened." It has a contagious characteristic. Leaven is aggressive. Truly, the leaven like influence of the Kingdom has transformed all aspects of life in all the kingdoms of the world.

Questions:

1. Who is the sower in the parable?
2. What does each type of soil represent?
3. What is the seed? After 2000 years what does the "seed" of the Gospel produce?
4. Give examples of thorns in the hearts of men which choke out the seed.

5. How much can we expect to reap from our sowing? Why the differences?
6. How many sowers are in parable of the wheat and the tares? Who are they?
7. When does the second sower come to plant the bad seed? What does this tell us about his nature?
8. What do the two types of seeds represent?
9. What is the difference between the two seeds planted? How and when can the owner tell the difference?
10. Why does the owner of the field delay in removing the bad seed?
11. When is the harvest?
12. What will happen at Judgment to this world filled with saints and sinners?
13. What do the parables of the Leaven and the Mustard Seed teach about the Kingdom?
14. Was the parable of the Mustard Seed in conflict with modern science which says that the mustard seed is not the smallest? Explain.
15. Explain how Jesus and His church began small and insignificant?
16. Both parables deal with growth, but how are they different?

17. How is leaven used in the making of bread?
18. T F Generally, leaven has been a symbol of evil's corruption in the Bible.
19. How does the Gospel (leaven) work silently within?
20. Give examples of how the Gospel (leaven) transforms the quality of the person?
21. Give examples of how the Gospel (leaven) has transformed the world we live in today?

Application and Discussion:

1. What are ways we can we take a personal spiritual soil sample? How can we fix bad spiritual soil? Are these soil conditions permanently set or can they be changed?
2. Does the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares negate the use of church discipline? Explain.
3. Are the branches of the mustard tree denominations? Just as the birds come and sit in the branches of the tree, so it is said that people come and enter the different branches or denominations of the church.
4. What factors might influence the leaven like transformation of the individual's heart? That is, what things help or hinder the transformation within a man by the Gospel?

Homework: Sow some of the seed of the kingdom of God in the hearts of men this week.

Kingdom Parables (Part 2)

Matthew 13:34-58

Jesus utters two parables to highlight the priceless value of the Kingdom and the delight and desire to obtain the kingdom by those who find it. These two twin parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price are only found in Matthew and spoken only to the disciples in private.

As were all the parables, Jesus uses a common every day illustration to make a discernible lesson. It was the custom of rich men of the middle east at this time in history to bury up to one third of their treasure in their field. Since they could not go to the bank, their own backyard became their trusted repository. The sudden death of the owner would result in the loss of the treasures' location until someone stumbled across it.

Parable of the Hidden Treasure, 13:44

Some have trouble with the man who finds the treasure purchasing the field while withholding from the owner the presence of the treasure. However, this is entirely in accordance with Jewish law which entitled the buyer of a crate of fruit to have ownership of anything found in the fruit. Furthermore, the parable was given to spotlight the man's delight in and his desire to obtain the treasure and not to imitate his every action. It is a mistake to carry each detail of a parable too far.

◆ The Treasure

The kingdom is the most glorious of all treasures. Yet, if one does not see or comprehend its value they will not pursue its purchase.

A geologist sees a precious stone where others see only a rock. An antique dealer sees a priceless one of a kind chair while a mere shopper sees only a old piece of junk. An admirer of art sees a pretty picture while an art critic sees a priceless painting by a master. The first thing necessary in making the sacrifices to purchase an expensive item is to first see its true value. Jesus uses this parable to focus our attention on the great value of the Kingdom. Once we have seen how grand it really is we will stop at nothing to make it ours.

◆ The Sacrifice

Once he has felt the shear delight of his valuable find, the man will sacrifice anything and everything to make the field his own. Legally, if he buys the field he inherits the fortune. Being a citizen of the Kingdom demands that one count the cost to see if the sacrifice for salvation is real worth it all (Luke 14:26-33).

◆ The Joy

The man has no regrets in parting with all that he has. Joy of obtaining the treasure replaces and justifies all his loss. He makes no complaints. The buyer sheds no tears. The joy over the buried treasure buries the pain of parting with his possessions. He has not lose everything. Instead, he has gained everything. It is like the joy of Paul who found Christ. *"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ"* (Philippians 3:7,8).

Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, 13:45,46

◆ The Pearl

The pearl is the most unique gemstone due to its origin. A grain of sand or some other foreign

substance invades the shell of an oyster. By way of protection, the oyster secretes a coat of calcareous matter in thin layers over the intruder. Eventually, it enlarges and hardens into a beautiful sphere. The pearl's value is determined by its shape and size.

The pearl adequately represents the kingdom. Both the pearl and the kingdom are not made by the hands of men, but by God. The pearl is produced by God's laws of nature and the kingdom by His spiritual laws. The kingdom is not found without effort.

◆ **The Merchant**

The merchant's business involved finding and investing in gemstones. Such a wise business man would always be on the look out for the perfect pearl. His traits of ambition, vigilance, and determination are characteristics which Jesus esteems. This is how to seek for the Kingdom of God.

■ **The Quest**

The merchant is not out searching for the second best pearl. He wants the most perfect one that can be found. They give their time and effort to the pursuit of the mundane worldly goals which are of very little value to their souls. Jesus tells us to "*seek first the kingdom of God*" (Matt. 6:33).

■ **The Price**

The merchant knows a good value when he sees it. No matter what it takes he is prepared to pay the cost for this perfect pearl. The price paid for this pearl could have required the man to sell all his other gemstones. Is Christ and His kingdom worth the sacrifice of your job, your family, your friends, your money, your car, yes, and even your own life?

Parable of the Dragnet, 13:47-50

"Dummmm! dumda-Dum-DUM!" So each episode of the TV police drama show *Dragnet* was introduced. Detectives would use a police dragnet to sweep through the city of LA and bring all kinds of people in to be investigated. Some of the would turn out to be good law-abiding citizens. Others were criminals and had to be put away from society. And so the Parable of the Dragnet brings in those who will be good or bad citizens of the kingdom. The bad are removed and punished.

Jesus had a three-dimensional powerpoint presentation with the sowers on the hillsides near by and the mustard tree in the field along a fence row and while in a boat He could point to other boats bringing in their catch and sorting out the good and bad from their nets. Many of those listening including some of His disciples were fishermen and well acquainted with fishing nets. The Sea of Galilee is believed to have been teeming with fish. Fish was a major part of the Jewish diet.

In Galilee, the most effective means of commercial fishing was to use a large net which was weighted on the bottom with lead weights and on the top of the net, it was supported by floats. Two boats were used to encircle a large area and capture every fish, creature, trash, etc. This dragnet could corral a large catch of fish which would then need to be sorted.

• **The Sea = World of Lost Sinners**

In the previously studied parable the field was the world but in this parable the sea is the world. In the sea there are all sorts of fish. The Kingdom is composed of all kinds of people and sinners.

• **The Fisherman = Preachers of the Gospel**

Even in the Old Testament God's fishermen were soul-winners. "*Behold, I will send forth many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them*" (Is. 19:8). When Jesus called His disciples He said, "*from henceforth thou shalt catch men*" (Lk. 5:10) and "*follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men*" (Mark 1:17). The job of a fisherman is to catch fish. Likewise, the duties of the soul winner is not to judge which fish can come into the net. A fisherman of men must proclaim the Gospel message to all the world. The Gospel is for all not just the select few.

• **The Net = Kingdom or Church**

Those taken by the dragnet in this parable do not represent all men but those specifically drawn in by the Gospel into the kingdom. All types of men and woman obey the Gospel.

• **The Fish = Good and Bad Christians**

All congregations are composed of good and faithful brethren and those who have denied the

faith. There are men like Judas, or Demas, or Hymenaeus, or Diotrephes, as well as men like Aquila, James, and Barnabas. The church at Corinth with its immorality and carnal divisiveness. The churches of Galatia with Judaizing teachers of righteousness by the law. Five of the seven churches of Asia were plagued with idolatry, immorality, false teaching, loveless and smug complacency. The church at Laodicea was lukewarm, but they no doubt reasoned that they were not doing any great sins. Of course, mere church membership is no proof of Christianity.

- **The Separation = Judgment Day**

Not all the fish in the net were worth keeping. Some would be too small. Others were considered unclean. The judgment under consideration is not corrective discipline. Instead it is speaking of the final judgment. Sometimes the contents of the net can not be sorted while it is being drawn. At other times the sorting takes place after the boats arrive back on the shore. If the parable of the tares emphasizes the waiting, the parable of the net emphasizes the careful sorting.

Separation is a major theme of the parables. In The Parable of the Tares the separation is between wheat and tares. In the Parable of the Dragnet, the separation is between good and bad fish. The Parable of the Marriage Feast, the separation is between guests with and without a wedding garment. In the Parable of the Household, the separation is between good and evil servants. In the Parable of the Virgins, the separation is between wise and foolish virgins. In the Parable of the Talents, the separation is between profitable and unprofitable servants. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats the separation is between faithful and the wicked.

- **The Casting Away = Hell**

The bad fish would be thrown out to have either rotted under the hot sun of Galilee or they were burned in a large fire. The oft-used expression in scripture, "cast away" or "cast out", denotes a state of condemnation: "cast out from the presence of God."

Weeping speaks of remorse and sorrow. Gnashing of teeth speaks of frustration and hostility and anger. Jesus is speaking of the horrors of Hell. The cast-away fish of the parable are the "wicked," and those who remove them are the "angels," and the time is "the end of the world."

The net or kingdom is now filled with all kinds of souls. Truly Judgment Day is coming. There are only two kinds of fish: good and bad. If one is not good he will not be cast into the fire and eternally rejected.

Parable of the Householder, 13:51-53

The Parable of the Householder is the eighth parable Jesus told in the sermon on the seashore of Galilee in Matthew 13. Some commentators and scholars do not regard this as a parable. However, the context says "*when Jesus had finished these parables*" (13:53).

This final parable of that day can be compared with the first Parable of the Sower. Both parables speak of the treatment of God's Word by the individual hearer. In the first parable the Word of God comes into the good heart and bears fruit. In this final parable the Word is given to others. In The Sower, fruit bearing is shown to be understanding, receiving and keeping the Word. In the Householder we are taught that the best way of keeping the Word is to transmit it to others.

In this short parable Jesus pointed out five responsibilities that Christians have toward God's truth.

- **The Duty of Ascertaining the Truth That Is Taught**

There are two groups involved in this parable. First is the scribe or *gramma* in the Greek which is the source of our English word, *grammar*. The scribe was one whose job was to write down the Law for others to have a reliable copy. They were the human xerox machines of their day. Because they dealt with the scriptures on such a constant and intense way every day, they were well instructed, and learned men of the Law of Moses. A scribe's work was to examine the Law and discover its teachings.

The second group here in the parable are the disciples. The disciples of Jesus are to be the next generation of scribes or teachers of Truth. All scribes or teachers must be trained. Like Mary, they studied in the College of the Feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39).

- **The Duty of Apprehending the Truth of What Is Learned**

Learning must produce understanding. The instruction given to the scribes was scholastic. They were taught in all the wisdom of the rabbis. Their exposition of Scripture consisted of citing a text and then quoting the opinions of the Rabbis. This is not understanding.

Jesus asked his disciples, *"Have ye understood all these things?"* Whether they fully understood all the implications of His teaching in the seven previous parables is to be doubted. A disciple of Christ must learn with a view to understanding what He has taught.

□ **The Duty of Applying the Truth to One's Life**

A sermon is prepared to prick the heart of a certain man in the worship services. The man comes out and vigorously shakes the preacher's hand and tells him what a good job he did getting after those in the congregation that need to be awoken to their failures and duties. The man listened, but he failed to apply it to his own heart. Teaching must be applied in over for faith to grow.

Ezra was *"a ready scribe in the Law of Moses"* He *"prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord"* (Ezra 7:6,10). A disciple means a "learner," or one who follows another's teaching, and who is not only a pupil, but an adherent and imitator of his teacher (Jn. 8:31; 15:8). A true scribe of God lives what he has learned and practices what he teaches.

□ **The Duty of Accumulating the Truth in Time**

The scribe not only deals with the truths of old, but he mines the scriptures to find new treasures. All true students of the Bible are ever learning. They may even find new insights into old lessons learned years ago. This is true not because of the failure of any teacher but because the Word of God is given by the omniscient mind of God.

The Law is old, and the Gospel is new, yet the latter came as the development of the former. The teaching of the Kingdom, for instance, was a well-known doctrine taught by the prophets of old. It has been said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed while the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

□ **The Duty of According the Truth to Others**

A householder was a "house-despot." It is the word that shows one's authority. He was the head of his house, with authority to control his treasured store, and who brought forth the right kind of food at the right time, suiting meals to eaters.

The treasure is the same as treasury or a place of deposit. Two different words are used for "treasure" in the New Testament. The one means to lay up and keep. The other word implies that which is spent. The first insinuates a tightwad, the second, a extravagant spender. As householders, teachers have vast treasure in the Scriptures. These must not only be hidden within the heart but scattered lavishly to the hearts of others.

Teachers of the Word in a way are accumulating by giving away. This is a paradox. It is those who obey God's Word who learn the most of God's Word and have the most to share.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth, 13:53-58

Jesus decides to leave Capernaum. It had been his base of operation for the first part of his ministry. Many miracles and much teaching had been done there. However, it was time to move on. He would not be back to the city unless He was just passing by.

His first stop was back home in Nazareth. It was an uphill trip of about forty miles and would have taken two days travel time. His family had just come to see Him and now he is going back home. As was his custom He taught in the synagogue. This is the one he went to growing up. There response was twofold: astonishment and later offence. First, they were astonished as his miracles and words of wisdom. This is not the astonishment that led to belief. In Mark's account we find Jesus *"He marveled at their unbelief"* (Mark 6:1-6).

There is a saying the "familiarity breeds contempt." The Nazarenes sized Jesus up not because of His wisdom and miraculous power, but five rhetorical questions showing that they know Jesus. They know his mother, brothers and sisters. They even know him to be a mere carpenter's boy. How could He being anything special? They were focused on the outward attributes and not His spiritual character.

Oddly enough, many great men and women have come from humble beginnings and the people were proud to have known them.

The Son of God would be known as “Jesus of Nazareth,” and His followers would be called “Nazarenes.” But the people of Nazareth would not proudly place a sign up at the entrance to their village bragging about it being the hometown of the Messiah. Instead they were offended by Him. “Offend” comes from the Greek from which we get scandal. Jesus was a scandal in Nazareth or a stumbling block to their belief.

No other town except Capernaum had been as blessed as Nazareth. Jesus had lived among them for almost three decades. Those it is obvious by their response they had not see him perform any great signs, wonders or miracles during that time. So where did He get this power to all the sudden go about healing everyone. He never went off to one of the rabbinical schools for training. Where did He get His wisdom? They rejected Him because this confusion about Jesus offended them.

Jesus’ response was to reject them. They had rejected him twice. The first time is recorded in Luke 4. In parting he left them with this bit of wisdom: *“A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house”* (13:57). Nazareth just rejected their prophet and they would rob themselves of mighty works. Mark says He did a few miracles. But due to their unbelief Jesus was not going to cast anymore pearls their way.

This section serves as a transition from chapters eleven through thirteen into the events of chapter fourteen. The last transitional passage was 11:1.

Questions:

1. What is the main purpose in the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price?
2. Why is it so important that Jesus' disciples know the true value of His Kingdom?
3. Why is it so important for the man to buy the field where the treasure is located? Why not just go in and get the treasure?
4. How can the man be joyful over his treasure when it has cost him everything?
5. How is the Kingdom like a priceless pearl?
6. What is the merchant willing to pay such a great price for the pearl?
7. Where was Christ when he spoke this parable of the dragnet?

8. What does cast away refer to?
9. Why did the parable relate so well to the audience in Christ's presence?
10. How did a dragnet work? How many workers would be needed?
11. What does the sea represent?
12. Who do the fisherman represent?
13. Who are the fish and what does the net represent?
14. What happened to the fish that were cast away?
15. The word used for "scribe" in the original text is the source of what English word?
16. What must teachers of Truth be trained in and study?
17. What had happened to scribes during Christ's time of teaching this parable?
18. How should we apply what is learned in Scripture?
19. What purpose does the Old Law serve?
20. What are two meanings of the word "treasure" in the New Testament? Which meaning is used in the parable and why?

21. Why were the people of Nazareth astonished at Jesus?

22. Why were they offended by Jesus?

23. How did Jesus respond to His hometowns rejection?

Application & Discussion:

1. What are some things people need to be willing to give up in order to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven?

2. Why do you think the theme of separation has such an important part in the Kingdom parables? How does this relate to the everyday life of a Christian?

3. What does the parable of the Householder teach us about how to treat the truth?

Homework: Examine how much you truly value the kingdom of God.

Loss of Head, 5000 Fed, on Water Tread

Matthew 14:1-33

John Loses His Head, 14:1-12

John had an unwavering commitment to preach repentance. His courage did not waver when criticized, rejected by the religious establishment; or faced with governmental powers. He called the Pharisees a *"generation of vipers"* (Luke 3:18-19).

The greatness of his courage is seen in he rebuking of Herod, *"It is not lawful for you to have her"* (Matt. 14:4) . As the fame of Jesus spread throughout Galilee and Perea during those early days of His earthly ministry, it was inevitable that news of Him should reach the ears of the governor of the region, Herod Antipas. *"Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"* (Mark 6:14-16). Herod's guilty conscience compelled him to make this assertion. As if trapped in a Shakespearean tragedy Herod feared John even though he was beheaded.

Why was John the Baptist feared so much by Herod? It was not simply because he had beheaded an innocent man. Another Herod beheaded the apostle James without any appearance of regret. Perhaps, Jesus' estimate of John can shed some light on this. *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"* (Mt. 11:11).

Before looking at John let us take a look into the background of Antipas and Herodias who were involved in John's death. Herodias, therefore, had married her uncle Herod Philip I, who was disinherited by Herod the Great, and lived as a private citizen in Rome. Antipas on a visit to Rome stopped to see his brother. During that meeting, Herod proposed marriage to Herodias; Herodias agreed to the proposal on the condition that Herod should divorce his first wife, the daughter of Aretus IV, king of Nabatean. So Antipas, sent her back to her father at Petra for the sake of Herodias. Herodias was actually his own niece as well. Josephus tells us that Herodias's daughter was named Salome; she was both the niece and great-niece of Herod Antipas

John opposed the marriage of Antipas and Herodias as unlawful for three reasons: 1) The husband of Herodias was still living. The Mosaic law forbade the marriage of a brother's wife (Lev. 18:16; 20:21) except for levirate marriage (Dt. 25:5). Since Antipas's brother had a daughter Salome, and more importantly, his brother was still living, levirate marriage did not apply. 2) The lawful wife of Antipas was still living. And finally, 3) Antipas and Herodias, being nephew and niece, were related to each other within the forbidden degrees of blood relationship. But keep in mind Herod was a Idumean not a Jew.

Today, many have the concept that "we will live together so long as we both shall love", instead of "so long as we both shall live". When any trouble comes in the marriage, the two parties throw up their hands in disgust, get a no-fault divorce, and go their separate ways. Modern type preachers flatter the great and honorable ones of the earth to secure their favor. Faithful preachers need to preach the same message as John preached. John the Baptist had condemned the marriage of Herodias and Herod Antipas by proclaiming to Herod, *"it is not lawful for you to have her"*.

Notice how Herod responds to John's preaching. He shut up the preacher by shutting him up in prison. Herod wanted to please his wife, but killing John would displease he people. Herod seems to have a respect for John. He knew John was right.

Drinking dulls the ability to reason and stay focused on what is right. Herod had drank freely and was soon freed from his faculties. A drinking king is not a good judge.

During a party for his lords Salome danced. Oriental dancers were immodest and lascivious in movement. She danced in such impressive way that Herod momentarily "lost his head," and made the rash vow.

Herod soon regretted his rash vow. If the making of the oath was wrong, it was a greater sin to perform it. Two wrongs do not make a right. It merely doubles the wrong. Sinful oaths must be repented of, not performed. He had promised a dancing girl up to half of his kingdom rashly motivated out of his own lust. The mother of Salome told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Herod should have refused Salome, telling her that John's head was not in the half of the kingdom he promised her.

Herod was led on step by step from one degree of wrong to another. Herod lusted after Herodias and was in an adulterous marriage. He threw John in prison to stop his preaching. Next, Herod's lust for Herodius' daughter caused John to lose his head. When Herod lost his head over lust, John lost his head. John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway."

Jesus Five Thousand Fed, 14:13-21

After hearing about the martyrdom of John, Jesus leaves the west coast of Galilee and by boat travels to the northeastern side and lands near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). The boat most likely followed the shore. The people followed Him. They ran ahead (Mark 6:33) and were waiting by the thousands when Jesus made land fall. Only the number of men are mentioned. If each man was married and had two children we are look at about twenty thousand people making it indeed is a "*great multitude*."

Jesus wanted some time alone perhaps to rest, mourn the loss of John, be with His disciples and/or commune with His Father. However, He put those desires on hold when He saw the multitude. Like several other times in the Gospel Jesus was moved with compassion. The term literally refers to movement in one's bowels. The bowels not the heart were considered the seat of ones emotions. So Jesus resumed His work among the masses by healing those in need. Jesus cares (1 Peter 5:7).

It was already evening when the disciples came to Jesus with a problem they observed. The people needed supper. They had run after His boat all day. Whatever limited supplies they brought were long gone. The disciples pointed out the serious nature of this problem. It was late, evening is between three and six. Too late to do much about that many hungry mouths. It was a "*deserted place*" this does not mean a place without water. After all there was "*green grass*" (Mark 6:39) and "*much grass*" (John 6:10). The time of the year was spring. John's account tells us it was around the time of the Passover (John 6:4). This was not a desert but an unpopulated area. So the disciples resolved the problem: Jesus should send the away so the masses could buy there food.

Imagine their utter shock when Jesus said, "*They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat*" (14:16). The term "*you*" is emphatic meaning "YOU need to take care of this problem." John tells us this as said in order to test the disciples. "*He said to test him [Philip], for He Himself knew what He would do*" (John 6:). This was not just an opportunity for a great miracle before the people and a show of Divine compassion, Jesus turned this into a teaching moment for the Twelve.

In response to Jesus command, they countered with another problem. "*We have here only five loaves and two fish*" (14:17). In the other accounts, Philip points out the 200 denarii is not enough to bother trying to buy enough bread.

The disciples failed the test. They had enough evidence that Jesus could deal with the issue. He had demonstrated the power to turn water into "wine" (grape juice) at the wedding in Cana (John 2). They were too focused on the lack of food, the little bit of money in the treasury, the late hour of the day, and distance to the nearest food source. Instead they should have focused on Jesus who had the power to solve the problem without losing an audience. They needed to trust Jesus with the impossible. "*Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You... 'Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?'*" (Jer. 32:17;27). In the hands of the disciples it was indeed impossible to feed the multitude. But

when he turned over the little they had to Jesus the impossible became possible with miracle of duplication and multiplication.

Jesus needed the masses to stay to teach with an objective lesson. The lesson to both the twelve and the multitude was the miracle of how Jesus fed the five thousand. It is the only miracle by Jesus found in all four gospels demonstrating how important it is (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:35–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:4–13). Jesus would later feed four thousand in a similar manner (15:32-39).

After the disciples bring Him the boy's sack lunch *"He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes"* (14:19). Jesus used His excellent managerial skills to have the people sit down in fifties and hundreds. The apostles were the distributors but not the manufacturers. They were the waiters and Jesus was the chef. Jesus took the little boy's lunch and prayed a prayer of thanks giving. Imagine that, Jesus the creator thanking the Father who was the creator with Him from the beginning. Jesus still thanked the Father. This is not to be compared with the Lord's Supper. It is true Jesus broke the bread. But breaking of bread is the act and description of a common meal.

The results of this miracle were amazing. The people *"all ate and were filled."* The term *"filled"* means they were stuffed they were completely satisfied to the point they could not eat one more bite (see 5:6). Jesus is not stingy. He gives abundantly. *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10; also see Eph. 3:20). This single meal turned out to be 20 or 30 thousand meals. With *"twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained"* (14:20b). That is one basket for each disciple. This also may be representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The people wanted Jesus to be like Moses according to John's account and continue to feed them manna from Heaven. Jesus would not. His mission was to supply their spiritual needs not to solve world hunger. Unfortunately, the multitude left having tasted the bread without having an appetite for The Bread of Life (John 6:27). A way to a man's soul is not through his stomach.

Peter On Water Thread, 14:22-33

Seeking to find some alone time, Jesus commanded His disciples to leave to the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee by way of their boat, Meanwhile He went alone to the mountain to pray.

◆ **Faith Big Enough To Obey the Lord**

Notice Jesus compelled or made the disciples leave (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45). Obeying Jesus is not without difficulty. He sent them into a storm. If you are going to be following Jesus you need to obey Him, but do not expect smooth sailing. The first time they were caught up in a storm which tested their faith, Jesus was asleep in the boat, but at least He was with them (Matt. 8:23–27). Now they are alone.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Overcome Fear**

The multitudes were fed earlier in the evening. The disciples were sent away by Jesus in the later part of the evening between seven and eight o'clock. Jesus did not come to them until the fourth watch of the night. Whereas in the Old Testament the Jews had three watches in the night, in the first century they went by the Roman method which called for four watches in the night. These watches started at six in the evening, the second started at nine, and third at midnight. The fourth watch would have been some time between three and six o'clock in the morning. Therefore, he had been on the mountain praying for several hours, while they were on the sea rolling against the wind and waves for about the same amount of time.

After several hours fighting the waves and rowing against the wind the disciples were only three or four miles across the lake. This would have put them right in the middle of the sea in waters about two hundred feet deep and far from any help from land. Although there were twelve in this boat. Only four were experienced fishermen. The boat would have been large enough. A boat about eight feet wide and over twenty-five feet long was found preserved in the mud along the shore of the sea in the mid-eighties. However, their faith in the boat would have been waning at this point. Perhaps all twelve were bailing water and rowing as fast and hard as they could hoping just to stay afloat long enough to last out the

storm.

The Twelve would have had a good reason to be afraid. The worst part of the storm was that Jesus was not with them. Where was He when they needed Him most. He commanded them to get into the boat and sent them into a storm only to be absent when they needed Him to command the winds and the waves to be still. He was miles away on the mountain. Jesus making intercession for them in prayer was all the help they needed. Despite the distance He knew their plight. No matter what the distance, Jesus is near and He can hear our cries for help. No matter what the storm, He can calm it.

Why did Jesus not come earlier? Did He not care about their plight? The purpose of sending them into the storm without His physical presence was to strengthen their faith. Fear and faith do not go well together. Fear stunts the growth of faith. Yet to get past their fears, they had to face the storm. Faith is victorious, only when fears are conquered. They saw the storm as the means of their destruction, Jesus used it as a means of instruction. They were getting no where on their current course in the storm, though Jesus used the waves as a path to walk to them.

When Jesus did come to them by walking upon the water in the middle of the night, they were even more afraid. They thought Jesus to be a ghost. The Greek term for "ghost" is *phantasma* from which is derived the English terms "phantom" and "phantasm." They were being attacked by the physical storm and now a spiritual attack forewarning of their imminent doom. Fortunately as He came nearer, they were able to see and hear His voice.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Trust in the Power of the Almighty**

As Jesus approached the boat, He encouraged the disciples by calling out three statements of comfort: "*Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.*" To "*be of good cheer*" is the opposite of "*do not be afraid.*" Fear was robbing them of joy. However, the basis of being cheerful and not fearful is found in who was speaking to them. He is the great I Am not a ghost. The literal translation of the Greek is "I Am" which is more accurate than the English rendering of "*it is I.*" It is not just their Teacher and Master, Jesus. The one coming to them upon the waves of the sea is God. The great "*I AM*" (Ex. 3:14). He is the Almighty One who has authority and might over the wind and the waves.

Recognizing Jesus, Peter longs to come to Him. So he requests in faith that Jesus ask him to come out upon the water. If Jesus is really the Almighty One, Peter can do anything. After all, "*with God all things are possible*" (Mat. 19:26b) and "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" (Phil. 4:13). One might think that Peter was expressing a bit of doubt when he asked Jesus: "*Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water*" (Matt. 14:28). James Coffman explains what the statement really meant: "Peter's 'if' in this place is not a word of doubt but an argumentative 'if' such as Christ himself used when he said, 'if I go, I will come again.' The true meaning is, 'Since it is you...'"

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Get Out of the Boat**

Big faith required Peter to get out of the boat. He needed to have more trust in Jesus power to keep him safe on the waves and in the wind, than the trust he put into the boat. Jesus was not in the boat.

Faith is often demonstrated by taking risks. We are not talking about the risk of sky diving or bungee jumping. Peter had the risk stepping out of the logical place to be and onto a raging sea. It is impossible enough to walk on the waters that are still and the wind is calm. Peter got out of the boat onto waves that would toss him around and wind which would blow him over. Life is risky. Eighty percent of all accidents take place within a mile of home. When I told that to my neighbor he moved.

The failure of Peter was not getting out of the boat. The failure is seen by the other eleven who stayed in the boat. They are not noticed in the story, because they did not even try to get out of the boat. Peter is the only other man (except Jesus) to walk upon the water. He alone experienced the glory with the Lord. However, you will never experience the joy and thrill of walking on the water with Jesus until you are brave enough to get out of the boat. Never play football and you will never suffer from getting tackled, however you will never know the thrill of making a touchdown.

Did Peter fail? Yes. But he alone could learn from the failure, because he alone got out of the boat. He was the only one who could experience the joy in Jesus being there to pick him up out of the

water. Peter, not the other eleven, would demonstrate what a *“little faith”* could do. Anyone can sit in the safety of the boat and watch. Peter had enough faith to get out of the boat and do with God’s help what no other man has ever done.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Stay Focused on Christ**

Peter’s failure was when he took his eyes off of Jesus and started to focus on the waves and the wind of the storm. The sinking feeling came over him when he forgot about the presence and power of the Lord out of the fear of the storm. France wrote, “true faith is single-mindedly focused on Jesus”. Big faith keeps one focused on Jesus in the storms of life.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Look Jesus for Salvation**

Peter’s faith may have been paralyzed by the winds and the waves, yet this was only for a moment. He still believed in Jesus’ power to save. He cried out, *“Lord, save me!”* He did not turn back to the boat or cry out to the other disciples to rescue him. His request showed even more faith. Even in his failure Peter’s faith could still grow bigger.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Overcome Doubts**

Jesus’ saving of Peter came with a scolding: *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”* (Matt. 14:31). Jesus did not rebuke Peter for getting out of the boat or even sinking, He noted his little faith which led to doubt. Bengel put it this way: “he was not blamed because he came out of the ship, but because he did not remain in the firmness of faith.”

Did Peter have *“little faith”*? Yes, but look at what he could do with the little faith he had. Jesus did not reject Him for his little faith and doubting, but saved him. Peter’s faith was not enough to get him across the waves to Jesus but Jesus was willing to come to Peter. Peter means “rock.” Peter sunk like a rock because of his “little faith.” The Lord is able to take that rock and build upon it a big faith.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Understand the Truth**

After Peter and Jesus got into the boat the storm suddenly ceased. As a result of the three miracles of Jesus and Peter walking upon the water and the immediate calming of the storm, the disciples were amazed. Before they witnessed these events *“they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened”* (Mark 6:52). Now they know the truth. Jesus is able to do anything because of who He is: *“the Son of God.”*

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Worship Christ**

With Jesus in the boat, the disciples no longer feared Him as a ghost. They did not see Him as a great prophet who happened to do great wonders by God’s power. They worshiped Him, because He is God.

◆ **Faith Big Enough to Confess Jesus as the Son of God**

Although God and demons have addressed Jesus as deity in the past, the disciples as a whole proclaim: *“Truly You are the Son of God.”* When He had calm the sea before the disciples merely asked, “What manner of man is this?” (Matt. 8:23–27). Now they recognize this man was the Son of God.

This event has more than just one miracle. First, Jesus even at a great distance knew of the disciples plight as they suffered in the storm. He walked upon the water to them. Jesus enabled Peter to walk upon the water. He was able to stand on the water and save Peter. The storm ceased when they entered the boat. Finally, they were transported in the boat *“instantaneously”* to the shore (John 6:21). All these were faith builders.

Questions:

1. Why was it not lawful for Herod Antipas to have Herodias?

2. Who did Herod think Jesus was?

3. What request did Salome make of Herod? Why do you think he granted this request?
4. What problem did the disciples notice with the 5000? What solution did they propose?
5. How did Jesus feed the 5000?
6. What is unique about this miracle in the Bible?
7. Did anyone go away hungry? Explain.
8. Why did the disciples cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee?
9. Did the disciples know they were heading into a storm when they got into the boat? Did Jesus?
10. What happened during a previous storm (Matthew 8:23-27)?
11. List the various fears and difficulties that the disciples had to contend with in crossing the Sea of Galilee that night.
12. What did they believe Jesus was when He came walking to them upon the water at night?
13. What three things did Jesus say to the disciples to give them courage?
14. Did Peter express doubt in His ability to come walking on the water to Jesus? Explain.

15. How would you evaluate the faith of the eleven other disciples?
16. What benefits did Peter receive from getting out of the boat?
17. What was Peter's failure?
18. Instead of crying out to "*Lord, save me!*" when he was sinking ,what could have Peter tried to do?
19. Why did the disciples worship Jesus in the boat?
20. What are the various miracles which take place in our texts?

Application & Discussion:

1. When we are faced with the impossible and have very little in our possession to resolve the problem, what should we do?
2. What can be done to grow our little faith today?
3. What are the fears which hinder our faith today?

Homework: Would you have had a big enough faith to get out of the boat and walk upon the water to Jesus? Better yet, do you have enough faith to get out of your comfort zone and walk to the water to be baptized into Christ to wash away your sins?

Unclean, Unclean, Unclean

Matthew 14:34 - 15:28

Unclean Healed, 14:34-36

After Jesus rescues Peter from sinking into the waves and they enter the boat. Instantly the boat is at the shore. An example of a great miracle over space and time. They land on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (also known at the Sea of Gennesaret) in an area between Capernaum to the north and Tiberias to the south. This area was called Gennesaret and was known for its fertile farm land and was not as densely populated as other areas.

Jesus was sought after not for Him to touch them. Instead they requested permission to just be able to touch the hem of His garment. They expected to be healed by the mere touching of Jesus' hem. Many of whom may have been ceremonially unclean under the Law of Moses or even according to the traditions of the Jews. Many of the other leaders among the jews would not even permit this much contacted with the unclean. Perhaps the story of the woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years and being healed by touching the hem of Jesus' had spread to the masses (9:20).

"The different word for 'healed' used here (from Greek *diasozo*) may carry extra emphasis on mean completely healed (Weymouth, "restored to perfect health")" (Blomberg 237). Those who touched were made perfectly whole. They were not told to go home and expect to gradually improve of time.

Note the faith of the people of Gennesaret. They had an active working faith which caused them to recognize Jesus and send out to the community to come meet Jesus. They would bring the sick to Jesus. The sick would beg Jesus and touch the hem of His garment believing this alone would heal them. Five verbs are used showing they active faith. Sadly, many of those healed had little of nothing to do with Jesus after they had been blessed with perfect health. The same was true of those who had been miraculously fed. Such superficial followers would rob themselves of the spiritual healing and nourishment needed.

Unclean Hands, 15:1-20

Up till now most of the opposition Jesus faced seemed to come from the local Pharisees and centered around the local synagogue. Now it would seem, a delegation of Pharisees (perhaps sent by the Sanhedrin) arrived from Jerusalem to test Jesus. This scrupulous speck searching squad of Pharisees attack Jesus again for what He is permitting His disciples to do. "*For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread*" (15:2). The implication is that if Jesus were a real spiritual leader, He would do a better job teaching His disciples and demanding them to keep the elders' traditions.

This is not over a mere hygienic practice of washing one's hands for eating. All of us should consider this practice or tradition. It is a healthy but not a sinful tradition of men. Failure to wash may be unhealthy and at times careless but not sinful. The Law of Moses is concerned with one becoming ritually unclean. Leviticus 11 commanded washing after coming in contact with things considered unclean. The Pharisees had a tradition of washing which originally was to keep one from contaminating their food and then ingesting that unclean food. It would result in their eyes in making the consumer unclean. The manner of washing of hands before meals was a highly detailed process. (For a description of the ceremonial procedure for washing the hands before a meal see Alfred Edershiem's *The Life and Times of the Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2: pp. 10-13). No law specified the washing procedure before a common meal.

Instead of defending His disciples' transgression of man-made traditions, Jesus attacks the

Pharisees' transgression of the Law of Moses. He gives one example of their traditions violating Moses' Law. First, He reminds them of the fifth commandment of the Ten Commandments: "*Honor your father and your mother*" (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Next, He warns them of the punishment for its violation: "*He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death*" (Ex.21:17; Lev. 20:9).

Implied by necessary inference although not specified in the Law of Moses, honoring one's parents includes taking care of their needs especially as they age (1 Tim. 5:4,8). To get around this, the Jews had a tradition of dedicating their wealth and even their possessions to the Temple. This would not have to be honored until their death. So they maintained control of their money as long as they lived. If their parents made a request for assistance they would reply, "*whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God*" (15:5). It was a loophole for the greedy, heartless Jew to keep for himself what could and should have been used to honor his parents.

Mark uses the Hebrew word "Corban" or Korban meaning "a gift." It is like the old saying used when someone comes ringing the door bell and asking for donations: "no thanks, I already gave at the office." In fact, it was considered a sin to help your parents with your money and material goods once you vowed to give them to the Temple. A vow made must be kept according to the Law of Moses (Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21; Jer. 44:25). But an unscriptural vow does not have to be kept (Ex. 23:32; Ezra 10:3).

Once again mercy has been negated by sacrifice. And they have set aside a commandment of God to honor a tradition of men.

"The value of ceremonial rinsing was held so high that one Rabbi insisted that 'whosoever has his abode in the land of Israel and eats his common food with rinsed hands may rest assured that he shall obtain eternal life.' Another rabbi taught that it would be better to walk four miles out of the way to get water than to eat with unwashed hands. A certain rabbi who was imprisoned and given a small ration of water used it to wash his hands before eating rather than to drink, claiming he would rather die than transgresses the tradition" (MacArthur 453).

Keep in mind that not all traditions are wrong or unscriptural. Some of them aid us to accomplishing the will of God in edifying and worshiping. Many have a tradition of using multiple cups at the Lord's Supper, song books for singing, whiteboards for teaching, etc. However, when a tradition of men becomes a law that if broken is considered a sin or when it is placed on an equal plane with the Law of God or if it leads to a violation of God's Law, that tradition is a transgression. The Talmud, which is a collection of man-made traditions, claims, "The words of the scribe are lovely above the words of the law: for the words of the law are weighty and light; but the words of the scribes are all weighty (Berachoth 3.2)...Whoever eats bread without previously washing the hands is as though he had intercourse with a harlot (Babylonian Talmus, Sotah 4b)" (Pope 468).

Before the Pharisees have a chance to respond, Jesus hits them with "*Hypocrites.*" They were wearing a mask like the Greek actors of old, it displayed them as righteous when in fact their hearts were evil. The outward show of compliance with the Law of Moses was covering up the true rebellion from within.

Next, Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13 from the four oracles of woes found in Isaiah chapters 28-31. These gave the reason for the Divine Judgment being sent upon Jerusalem. "*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matt. 15:8,9). Notice the use of "mouth" and "heart" in this text. Jesus is going to focus on the source of real defilement. It is the heart not the mouth. The phrase "*teaching for doctrines*" literally means "teaching teachings."

Having openly rebuked the Pharisees' turning aside from the Law with their man-made laws. He calls the multitude in closer, so He can give a further explanation to them in the form of a parable. He encourages them to listen carefully, so they can understand. It is "*not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man*" (15:11).

Mark tells us that it was after they had entered a house that the disciples told Jesus He had offended the Pharisees. They may have still viewed the Pharisees more favorable at this time as the standard of righteous living in Israel. Their sympathetic view of the Pharisees are about to change the

more these religious leaders have conflicts with Jesus and later the apostles.

Jesus responded, *“every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted”* (15:13). This could refer to the uprooting of their system of oral traditions. More than likely Jesus is applying the parable of the wheat and the tares. The Pharisees are the weeds or tares planted in the world. At judgment these bad seeds resulting in useless weeds will be uprooted and burned.

How should the disciples respond to the Pharisees? Jesus told them to just leave them be. Sometimes the wicked leaders need to be offended to stop their evil influence over the masses. And some of the wicked are left to the judgment which they have brought upon themselves.

Jesus uses a humorous turn of phrase to describe the leadership of the Pharisees. *“They are blind leaders of the blind”* (15:14). Again he would call them *“blind guides”* (23:16). *“Guide of the blind”* may have been a self-description used at this time by the Pharisees (Rom. 2:19). Jesus turns it around, showing the Pharisees were like a blind man trying to lead the blind and the both end up in a pit. This would have put a smile on the faces of their listeners as they visualized this outrageous scene. Blind people need seeing people to lead them. Could you imagine a blind man being given a blind and deaf dog to lead him?

The end result of the blind leading the blind is falling into the pit. The pit may refer to the final judgment (25:30). The pit is a deep hole which was very difficult to get out of. The Pharisees are leading people to destruction. Today, many of our religious leaders are blind and are blindly followed by the masses of blind men and women who believe and do what they are told without investigation or questioning.

Peter needed an explanation of the *“parable”* in verse about what goes into and comes out of the mouth. Most do not list them among the parables of Jesus. Modern man has limited the definition of a parable. *“A parable need not involve an extended story, with characters, plot, and climax. Teaching a lesson through comparison of a known material phenomenon to illustrate an unknown spiritual truth is a parable”* (Pope 478).

Jesus rebukes Peter for his failure to understand. It is as if Jesus could not get over how Peter could misunderstand His parables so badly at this point in his training. However, that being said, Jesus does go on to explain the parable. *“Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man...”* (15:17-20a)

The uncleanness of their hands may have resulted from touching the dead or someone who was considered unclean such as a leper or a Gentile or human or animal waste. The term *“drought”* (KJV) means toilet. Whatever enters the mouth eventually goes into the stomach and comes out in human waste. Food never touches the heart. Jesus reverse the order in what makes one impure. Hands which are soiled by let's say human waste may pick up food to eat. The food goes in the mouth and next digested in the stomach and eliminated into the toilet. This does not defile a man. Although he may be made sick as a result. However, a man's heart is corrupted by sin and the man speaks out of his mouth such corruption and hence defilement. For example, the words out the Pharisees mouths were more defiling than eating with unwashed hands. Those who vowed Corban to dishonor their parents were defiling themselves.

The body does not care whether the hands are washed in the proper ceremonial procedure. It takes in the food, digests it, and eliminates the waste. Even if a person becomes ill by not washing the bacteria off his hands in proper hygiene, this still does not affect his spiritual condition or relationship with God. Cleaning one's hands has nothing to do with sanitizing the soul. Nor does outward cleanliness of the hands demonstrate or prove inward purity of the heart.

Clean hands are associated with a clean heart. *“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol nor sworn deceitfully”* (Ps. 24:3-4). But unclean hands either ritually or due to bad hygiene cannot make for an impure heart. Therefore, *“create in me a clean heart, O God”* (Ps. 51:10). Pilate

foolishly tried to wash the guilt of crucifying an innocent man from his hands. Even after declaring Jesus innocent three different times.

Jesus lists seven sins from the Ten Commandments which also come from the heart. He lists “*evil thoughts*” (Ex. 20:17); “*murders*” (Ex. 20:13); “*adulteries*” and “*fornications*” (Ex. 20:14); “*thefts*” (Ex. 20:15); “*false witness*” (Ex. 20:16) and “*blasphemies*” (Ex. 20:7). By no means is this list comprehensive. They are examples from the Ten Commandments of sins coming from a defiling heart. Just like transgression of the tradition of Corban which comes from the defiled heart and breaks the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12).

Jesus finally ends with a defense of His disciples and Himself: “*to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man*” (15:20).

A word of warning is in order. Jesus is not discouraging good hygiene. Neither is He teaching us that it does not matter what we put into our bodies: alcohol, drugs, smoking, etc. Once during a business meeting over discouraging brethren from smoking at the entrance of the church building a brother quoted Jesus. “There is nothing wrong with smoking. Jesus said, ‘it is not what goes into a man that defiles him but what come out of a man,’” he argued. I responded, “in that case Joe, you can inhale and not be defiled but the minute to exhale you are defiled by the smoke. So you can smoke all you want just never exhale.”

Unclean Gentile, 15:21-28

Leaving Galilee Jesus travels with the Twelve forth some forty miles to the pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon. Sidon was about twenty-three miles north of Tyre and it was about that same distance from Galilee to its south. There is nothing here to indicate Jesus went into these cities. It is the only time during His ministry He journeyed into the territory of the Gentiles. Both of these pagan cities had been greatly condemned and Divinely judged in the Old Testament. Jews would have avoided this area filled with mostly “unclean” Gentiles. But this is exactly where Jesus was taking His disciples who eat with “unclean” hands.

Why did Jesus go to the pagan lands of Tyre and Sidon? Mark’s account sheds some light on the question. “*He entered a house and wanted no one to know it*” (Mark 7:24a). Jesus wanted to take his disciples and get away. He had been trying to do this for some time. He needed rest like any other human being who had been working tirelessly. He needed time to train His disciples away from the pressing mobs. Herod had killed John and now Jesus might be perceived as a threat. Jesus needed to escape the growing opposition from the religious leaders. All these answers are reasonable, including the need to get away to spend time with the Father in prayer.

A parallel may be seen in the ministry of Jesus and that of Elijah. Elijah went to this area to hide from the evil king Abab and his queen Jezebel during a drought. Jesus came to area during a great spiritual drought of faith among His followers being threatened by the evil king Antipas and his queen Herodius. They had John who came in the spirit of Elijah killed. Just as Elijah found faith in the widow at Zarephath a town belonging to Sidon (1 Kings 17:9). So Jesus finds great faith in a syro-phoenician woman.

Jesus plans to get away did not work. He could not be hidden. (Mark 7:24b). “*A woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him*” (15:22). Although Mark calls her “*a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth*” (Mark 7:26) Matthew appealing to his Jewish audience calls her a Canaanite. She already had being a Gentile and a woman against her, but being called a Canaanite is worse!

■ **Great Faith Appeals to the Mercy of Jesus**

The Jews may have felt entitled to the Messiah’s miracles, she makes no such demand. Knowing she is undeserving cries out to Jesus, “*Have mercy on me*” (15:22b).

■ **Great Faith Recognizes the Lordship & Messiahship of Jesus**

Although the Jewish leadership rejected Jesus claims of Lordship and Messiahship, she recognizes Jesus: “*O Lord, Son of David!*” (15:22c). In fact, all three times she addressed Jesus she begins by calling him “*Lord.*” “*Son of David*” was a name for the Messiah (Matt. 22:42). She accepted

Jesus' messianic identity.

■ **Great Faith Trusting in the Power of Jesus**

It is highly unlikely this woman would have witnessed any of Jesus' prior miracles. Evidence of His power would have come by word of mouth and perhaps by those who were there or had benefitted from His healing power. She cries out to Jesus, *"My daughter is severely demon-possessed"* (15:22d).

■ **Great Faith Can Be Tested By Jesus**

How rude, cold and calloused can Jesus be? *"He answered her not a word"* (15:23a). This could have easily discouraged the woman and caused her to turn away.

The disciples appear to be irritated at the intrusion of this woman. They tell Jesus, *"Send her away, for she cries out after us"* (15:23b). Based on how Jesus responds, it appears they wanted Him to just give her what she requested and tell her to go away. Most women would have been so offended they would have given up. Even the Pharisees were offended by Jesus (15:12).

When Jesus does respond, it is not very encouraging, *"I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* (15:24). Jesus' response is well in keeping with the limited commission he gave to the Twelve when he sent them out to the *"lost sheep of Israel"* (10:6).

Jesus had answered the Samaritan woman and spoke the Roman centurion even healing his servant. Jesus, knowing her heart, knew He could test her faith. She had a faith strong enough to be tested and to grow stronger.

■ **Great Faith Humbly Worships Jesus**

Her second request brings her closer to Jesus and she falls down to worship Him. *"Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!'"* (15:25). The fact that Jesus accepts this worship shows Him to be God. It also shows that He is willing to accept reverence from a Gentile. Her actions are a further demonstration of her great faith.

■ **Great Faith is Persistent in Hope Before Jesus**

The second answer seems to be ruder than the first response which most likely was given to the disciples' in ear shot of her. *"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs"* (11:26). It is true that the Gentiles were not included in the covenant of Israel made at Mt. Sinai. However, there are many prophecies which show God had from eternity included them in the blessings of the scheme of redemption.

Jesus is making a play on words here. The Jews often referred to the Gentiles as dogs. Dogs of this time and place in history were regarded by God's people as unclean. These mangy mongrels roamed the streets and countryside eating garbage and dead animals. However, Jesus does not use the Greek term generally used for dogs. But He uses meaning little dogs or puppies. It refers to household pets or lap dogs.

This woman is not to be deterred by the reference to her and her daughter being compared to dogs. For many others would have been offended at given the silent treatment, called a dog, and treated like a nuisance. She is not arguing with Jesus or contradicting anything He had said. However, she has a quick wit and continuing with Jesus' illustration adds, *"Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table"* (15:27).

The children referred to the Jews. She conceded that she was undeserving of setting at the table with the Jews and partaking of the blessings. But all she and her daughter needed was a few crumbs of falling off the table. An leftover like this would not take away anything from the Jews but would be more than enough for them. The table is the masters' and not the Jews'. She is appealing to Jesus as the master over the Jews.

Just as in the parable of the persistent widow, persistence paid off. *"And her daughter was healed from that very hour"* (15:28b). Taking Jesus at his word *"let it be to you as you desire"* (11:28c). She left for home. *"And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed"* (Mark 7:30).

■ **Great Faith is Pleasing To Jesus**

"Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith!'" (15:28a). Jesus seems

amazed at her quick witted answer taking up His play on the term “dogs.” Perhaps, He was smiling and laughing with great pleasure at her great faith.

The Twelve could not help but recognize a contrast between Jesus’ rebuke of their “*little faith*” (14:31) and her great faith. The only other time Jesus publically praised anyone for their faith is the Centurion who was also a Gentile. Her faith is greater than others in that she did not have the promises given the Jews or the inspired words revealed in the Old Testament scriptures.

Jesus had pointed out that Tyre and Sidon would have repented at this teaching and healing had they been privileged as were the cities of Galilee (11:21-23). Now He has demonstrated the truth of that claim.

Questions:

1. What did the unclean request of Jesus?
2. What is unique about the meaning of the word “*healed*”?
3. List the five verbs showing the active faith of the people of Gennesaret.
4. According to the Pharisees what were the disciples of Jesus doing that was wrong?
5. List the passages from the Law of Moses commanding an Israelite to wash their hands before they eat.
6. Explain the tradition of the elders called “*Corban*”.
7. True False All traditions of men are wrong and unscriptural under any and every circumstances.
8. How is a man defiled according to Jesus?
9. What is the result of teaching the commandments of men?
10. What will become of the Pharisees and their traditions?

11. How should the disciples respond to and view the Pharisees?
12. In your own words what was Jesus explanation of His parable?
13. Compare Jesus visit to the area of Tyre and Sidon with that of Elijah centuries earlier.
14. How did the Syro-phoenician woman view Jesus?
15. How was her faith tested?
16. To what does Jesus answer compare the woman and her daughter?
17. What was the woman's answer to Jesus?
18. How did Jesus view her faith? Why?

Application & Discussion:

1. What are some traditions of today which make men's worship to God vain?
2. Compare and contrast the "great faith" of the Canaanite woman with that of the "little faith" of the Disciples.

Homework: Today, there are still those treated as the untouchable unclean. Reach out and touch someone.

Times of Testing

Matthew 15:29 - 16:20

The following events in this lesson deal with times of testing. First, those in Decapolis are tested as to how they respond to Jesus. Second, the disciples are again tested in regard to feeding thousands of hungry men, women and children who had been following Jesus for three days. Next, the Pharisees and Sadducees test Jesus in seeking a sign from Him. Jesus again tested the Twelve with a warning about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Finally, they are tested as to the Son of Man's identity with two questions from Jesus.

Healing on the Mount, 15:29-31

Leaving the area around Tyre and Sidon Jesus goes to another area which was mostly inhabited by Gentiles; Decapolis (Mark 7:31). It literally means "ten cities". Decapolis was a semi-independent area where Rome allowed them more self-rule, minting their own currency, having an army, their own courts system, etc. Pagan influence is abundantly attested to by the number of statues of the Greek gods and goddesses. This area is now called the Golan Heights.

On a mountain Jesus sits and waits to receive the masses. For three days He heals them. Just about every category of the needy are covered in this healing on the mount. "*The lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others*" (15:30). The list seems to allude to the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-6. In Mark's account he includes the story of the deaf and blind man being healed as an example (Mark 7:32-35). Those who are "*maimed*" include the loss of a limb. The term is so used in Matthew 18:8. The term for "*laid*" implies placed before Jesus in haste. Perhaps showing their eagerness to have friends and relatives healed.

After witnessing the great miracles of compassion by Jesus "*they glorified the God of Israel.*" This phrase represents the terminology used by the Gentiles not the Jews. The pagans were polytheistic and thought of the God of the Jews as just one of the local gods. Now they are seeing the true nature of God. Charles Swindoll observed, "The glory of God is the fruit of compassion" (Swindoll 334).

Feeding on the Mount, 15:32-38

The feeding of the four thousand has come under attack by liberal biblical scholars who claim Matthew is guilty of doubling. This is where an author doubles a story in his Gospel account. Other examples they allude to are the two times Jesus calms the storm (8:23-27; 14:22-36) and the accusation is the author has recreated a new story based on the same event. Adapting a prior miracle to falsifying the records.

The comparisons between the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000 are many. Both started off with a small amount of food, the people were told to sit, Jesus prayed to God giving thanks for the meal, the disciples help distribute the food, the masses ate and were completely filled, the abundant leftovers were collected, and baskets were used.

The difference between the two events is just as great. The number of people are different. First there is five thousand men and next four thousand men. The amount of food they begin with differs: five loaves and two fish versus seven loaves and a few fish. The quality of left overs is different: twelve baskets and then seven baskets. Even here there is a major difference. Jews use the small basket (Gk. *kophinos*) whereas here the "*baskets*" are translated from the Greek term (*spurias*). The latter basket was much larger and could hold a several dozen loaves of bread. It is the same kind of basket

that was used to lower Paul over the Damascus wall (Acts 9:25). Also the first is primarily made up of a Jewish audience whereas the second are mostly Gentiles. In the first miracle the people set down in much grass but here they are told to sit upon the “ground.” Perhaps the spring grass is gone as it is now summertime. In the previous miracle Jesus first asked the disciples to take care of feeding of the multitudes and here He does not. The location is not the same in both. The feeding of the five thousand took place near Bethsaida and the location this time is on a mount in Decapolis. The crowds are with Him a Decapolis for three days but only one day at Bethsaida. The first feeding the Jews tried to take Jesus by force and make him king. The Gentile audience did not have such an inclination.

Is it possible that while writing his Gospel, Matthew forgot what he had just written a few pages earlier about the feeding of the five thousand? Mark’s Gospel also records the feeding of the four thousand as a separate event from the 5000. Could both of these author being guilty of using the same doublet? If you believe Matthew and Mark to be inspired by God than NO he was not confused.

So, there is no evidence of logic in concluding the Matthew is guilty of using a doublet here.

Jesus sees the multiple and has a great feeling of compassion for them. Jesus’ compassion was not limited to the Jews or just those who were handicapped. He could not send the people away after three days and have them fainting from hunger along the way. Such would not be a good look for His ministry which was centered upon doing good for others.

So we summons the Twelve and asked, “*where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?*” (15:33). Notice they again focus on the limited food supply and not the infinite power of Jesus. Why were the disciples so slow to catch on to Jesus ability and willingness to perform a miracle? Was it because these were mostly Gentiles? The disciples often would miss the point that we can see clearly from our vantage point as readers.

Jesus again is seen giving thanks for food He is about to create. How much more should we will willing to give thanks for the food we may have tilled the ground to prepare for the seeds, water, weeded, picked, prepared and served.

This miracle, the previous healings, and the feeding of the five thousand demonstrate the compassionate power of Jesus. Jesus gave abundantly to the hungry. They were not just fed a little food. The people went away complete stuffed as was the case with the feeding of he 5000. Jesus created the food. If God could create the universe out of nothing and if Jesus could restore the flesh of a leper or the leg of an amputee, truly feeding 4000 plus from a meager amount of food is nothing. Jesus kept on healing and healing and feeding and feeding. His resources were never used up or running low. Jesus did not have to use the food provided. He could have created the food from nothing. He did not have to use His disciples for distribution. He could have gave directly to the people. However, He wanted to start with what the disciples had and work with them has they all served the needy masses of Gentiles.

Having dismissed the crowd Jesus takes a boat “*to the region of Magdala.*” Mark refers to the region as Dalmanutha (Mark 8:10). It would not be unusual for a place to be known by two different names especially in regard to who is speaking and/or to whom. This would have been on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Some believe this the where Mary Magdalene was from. Awaiting for Jesus was another group of Jewish leaders ready for another round of opposition hoping to deliver their knock out punch.

Sign-Seeking Pharisees and Sadducees, 16:1-4

Matthew 16 is the high point in Jesus’ teaching and the disciples’ growth in spiritual understanding. Previously the scribes and Pharisees had sought after a sign (12:38-40). Now the Sadducees have joined the ranks demanding a sign. Jesus again condemns them and adds to the infamous characteristics of sign seekers.

▶ Sign Seekers are Insincere

Jesus knows their motives in seeking a sign. The had come “*testing Him*” (16:1). They had no particular sign in mind; they were merely targeting Him (11:16). In verse three He calls them “*Hypocrites!*” Once more He rips off their mask of deception exposing their lying hearts. They did not want to believe.

He had already given them enough signs for belief. They wanted to find fault, a reason to discredit Jesus before the disciples and the crowds. This is the reason these two opposing sects of the Jews were uniting. "Fighting dogs, stopping their own fight to chase a rabbit" (Chumbley 291).

▶ **Sign Seekers Are Demanding**

Rejecting all the other signs they "*asked that He would show them a sign from heaven*" (16:1). This is not a polite please can we see, but you must demonstrate for us a sign. Perhaps they were saying that Jesus need to give them a sign in the heavens relating to the moon or sun or stars. Something line a rainbow or manna coming down. However, Jesus had twice stilled the storm, and twice fed hungry multitudes, twice raised the dead, and once walked on the waves.

▶ **Sign Seekers Can Understand Signs from Heaven**

Jesus points out they already know how to discern the signs. "*When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening'*" (16:2b,3). It is like saying, "you want a sign you can understand - look." The word "heaven" in verse one is the same Greek word for "sky in verse three. And yes, Jesus made use of another pun. According to folk meteorology there was the mariner's ditty, "Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning."

▶ **Sign Seekers Cannot Discern the Times**

Jesus rebukes them for there comical like failure to see what He was doing and teaching right in front of them. They were blind religious leaders but better weathermen. "*You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times*" (16:3b). Having seen sign after sign and prophecy and prophecy fulfilled was not enough. They are suffering from a from of self-imposed blindness. Voltaire declared, "Even if a miracle should be wrought in the open marketplace before a thousand sober witnesses, I would rather mistrust my senses than admit a miracle." If God rearranged the very stars of heaven to read, "Jesus is my Son with whom I am well pleased, believe on him" it would not have been believed.

▶ **Sign Seekers are an Evil and Adulterous Generation**

Jesus explains that they are not able to discern His signs, because they suffer from heart trouble leading to their blindness. "*A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign*" (16:4a).

▶ **Sign Seekers are Given the Ultimate Sign**

Although Jesus was not going to give into their demands for a sign, He was going to give them one last sign. He warned, "*No sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah*" (16:4b). The sign of Jonah is the Resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 12:39-41). The sign of Jonah was the final sign Jesus gave to the world, the sign of His victory over sin, death, and Satan through His resurrection.

▶ **Sign Seekers are Abandoned by Jesus**

Jesus does stand around to argue with a bunch of blind men who would demand to call the sky pink when it is blue. "*And He left them and departed*" (16:4c). Jesus went back across the Sea of Galilee, taking His disciples with Him. What a terrible thing it is to have Christ turn His back on you and sail away.

Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, 16:5-12

Jesus uses this confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees to teach and warn them: "*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees*" (16:6). They misunderstand Jesus warning about leaven. They thought it was because, they did not bring bread. The Jewish leadership refused to see the truth, but the disciples are missing the spiritual truth because they are so focused on the physical. Just as they were when dealing with the hungry masses. He reminds them of those two miracles of the feeding of the thousands. Notice Jesus here removes any question about whether there were two miraculous feedings or only one. When it came to spiritual lessons their discernment was limited, because their attention span was so short.

Finally, they get the point. Leaven is the spiritually contaminating influence of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Luke calls their leaven "*hypocrisy*" (Luke 12:1). Their hypocritical doctrines are dangerous.

The Great Confession, 16:13-20

Crossing the Sea of Galilee Jesus heads north along the Jordan River to the head waters just below the nine thousand foot peak of Mount Hermon. A little less than thirty miles puts Jesus and His disciples in *"the region of Caesarea Philippi"* (16:13a). This city is now named Baniyas but had been known prior to Jesus' visit as Paneas in honor of the Greek god, Pan. It was called at this time Caesarea after Caesar Augustus and Philippi after Herod Antipas' brother, Philippi, the tetrarch. It is so named so as not to be confused with the Caesarea on the Mediterranean coastline of Israel. This is close to the ancient city of Dan which denoted the northern most extent of the kingdom of Israel. Dan was also the location of calf worship set up by King Jeroboam. The area therefore was historically known for its idolatry, Greek gods, and Roman emperor worship.

Along the way Jesus asks two questions. The first one He seems to repeatedly ask going around to each disciples seeking their answer. *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* (16:13b). They had several answers which were popular among the people at the time. First, *"some say John the Baptist"* (16:14a). Herod Antipas was of this opinion believing Jesus to be John *"risen from the dead"* (14:2).

He next poll on the identity of Jesus was *"Elijah."* This belief was based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:5,6. *"In modern Jewish Passover celebrations an empty chair is reserved at the table of Elijah, in the hope of his one day coming to announce the Messiah's arrival."* (MacArthur 19).

"And others Jeremiah" who according to 2 Maccabees had taken and hidden the ark of the covenant and the altar of incense on Mt. Nebo before the invading Babylonians. It was hoped that he would come at the time of the Messiah and restore these to a new Temple.

Finally, the disciples summed up the list *"or one of the prophets."* In addition to the prophets just mentioned there was belief that arose among the Jews during the inter-testamental period about both Jeremiah and Isaiah returning (2 Eadras 2:16-18).

In each of these answers the masses have failed to see that Jesus is the Messiah. The only one to accept Him as a forerunner to the Messiah. This is in part to their disappointment with Jesus not using His great powers to overthrow the Romans and establish the throne of David in Jerusalem.

The next question is of far greater importance and marks a climatic point in the testing of the disciples. Jesus asked, *"But who do you say that I am?"* (16:15a). This is still one of the most important questions facing every man today. One's answer could very well help determine one's eternal destiny. Some today say Jesus was a good man, the greatest of men, a great moral teacher, etc.

Peter answers, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (16:16). Several other confessions have been given concerning Jesus several of them came from demons (Luke 4:41). Other disciples had professed their belief in who they thought Jesus to be (John 1:41; 49; 14:33). This time Peter not only accepts Jesus as the Messiah, he also believes him to be the Son of God. Jesus is more than just the Christ, He is deity.

Note Peter mentions the *"living God."* This is in contrast to the many idols who are non-living. The expression is found throughout the Old Testament (Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:36; Dan. 6:26). Peter is identifying Jesus as the Son of the only God.

Jesus accepts this confession and pronounces a beatitude: *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah"* (16:17a). Simon was the name given Peter by his parents. Bar-Jonah means Peter is the son of Jonah.

Why did Jesus bless Peter? What was significant about the confession. According to Jesus the source of his confession was not *"flesh and blood"* an idiom denoting humanity. Peter did not and could not have arrived at this conclusion apart from divine revelation. Just how did the Father reveal this to Peter? He could have given Peter direct revelation. This is not likely. Jesus was revealed by the Father at Jesus' baptism. Through the prophecies Peter witnessed Jesus fulfilling the Messianic predictions. By the testimony of John Peter learn who Jesus was. And the witness of the many signs, wonders and miracles Peter had seen Jesus perform. There was also the times when Jesus declared Himself to be deity, for example, His claim to be Lord of the Sabbath.

- **Foundation of the Church: "upon this rock"**

Jesus makes a confession of Peter: *"and I also say to you that you are Peter"* (18:18a). By pointing out the nickname Jesus had given Peter (John 1:42), He will make a play on words. "Peter" is from the masculine Greek word *petros* meaning "peddle" or small rock. He then said "on this rock" coming from the Greek word *petra* which is feminine. It means bedrock or solid slab of bedrock. Jesus used the term to refer to the wise man building his house upon the "rock" (7:24-25). Peter is just one little rock among many "living stones" which will one day make up the church (1 Peter 2:5).

It is on the *petra* "bedrock" that Jesus promises to build his church. Notice the term refers not to Peter but to his confession. Jesus is saying, "you are a little pebble, but I will build my church on the solid foundation of the sturdy bedrock of the truth you have just confessed."

The church Christ is building is raised up on the sure foundation of apostolic doctrine and ministry. The church *"having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"* (Eph. 2:20). The saved at Pentecost were added to the church *"and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* (Acts 2:42). Throughout the rest of the book of Acts, apostolic teaching and ministry continues to be the foundation on which every local congregation is built.

- **Builder of the Church: "I"**

The builder is not Peter or Pope Boniface III or Martin Luther or John Calvin or Joseph Smith or John Smyth or any other man. The Christ, the son of the Living God is the only one who could build the church. The church is still under construction by the Lord today as He continues daily to add the saved to it (Acts 2:47).

- **Prophetic Fulfillment of the Church: "I Will"**

The building of the church is still in the future. Daniel 2, Isaiah 2, and Joel all point toward Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost, when the work that Christ came to do culminated with the sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would fulfill this promise. It was on the first Pentecost after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus that the Spirit was poured out with power on the apostles (Acts 2:1-21). That the "last days" prophesied by Joel had come, Peter preaching the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:22-40), three thousands souls saved, and the Lord added them to His church (Acts 2:41,47).

- **Owner of the Church: "My"**

Jesus is the possessor or owner of His church. It is *"the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"* (Acts 20:28). All the names used in the New Testament to refer to His assembly or congregation denote a group of people belonging to deity. It is called the *"the body of Christ"* (Eph. 1:22-23); *"the household of God"* (1Tim. 3:15); *"the temple of God"* (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet, 2:5); *"the kingdom of Christ"* (Col 1:13); and local congregations are called *"the churches of Christ"* (Rom. 16:16).

- **Number of the church: "church"**

Note the singularity of churches Jesus promised to build. It is only one church He ever promised to build. God *"gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all"* (Eph. 1:22,23). *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all"* (Eph. 4:4). Clearly Jesus has but one body, the church.

The term church comes from the Greek term *ekklesia* meaning "a gathering, assembly, congregation." It is used in the Bible most often in two senses when referring to the congregation belonging to the Son of God. The church "universal" - the whole assembly of people who are saved, both living and dead. And second, the church "local" meaning a gathering saved people at a geographical location who work and worship together as a local congregation Here it is used in the universal sense

- **Indestructibility of the Church: "The Gates of Hades Shall Not Overpower It"**

"Hades" is the realm or abode of the dead. The Old Testament equivalent is the term *"Sheol."* The King James uses the word "hell." Back then "hell" was used for the realm of the dead. Today, hell stands for the final and eternal abode of the wicked for the purpose of punishment. Gates are not offensive weapons; they are barricades used in defense or to imprison. Jesus was picturing Hades like a prison, its gates would not be able to contain or imprison the church.

In extra-biblical literature of the time Jews used the phrase to denote the powers of death. The power of death cannot stop the building of the church. It cannot destroy its foundation. Many kingdoms have come and gone. Death has slain all its kings and imprisoned all the citizens. Why is Jesus going to build something more powerful than death. He will resurrect from the dead. *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:14-15). Those of belonging to Christ’s assembly may die but even death cannot hold them. Jesus has the keys of Death and Hades (Rev.). Death could not restrain the King (Acts 2:24f; Rom. 1:4) and will not be able to restrain His Kingdom.

● **Authority of the Church: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven”**

Jesus promises to give Peter *“the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.”* Notice kingdom is used here in conjunction with the church. Both the church and the kingdom are yet in the future. “Heaven” here stands for God. It is the kingdom of God. These two terms are not synonymous in that “church” refers to people whereas the idea of the realm of the King’s rule is implied in the term “kingdom.”

The term “keys” is symbolic of authority to open or close and to lock or unlock. When Peter preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14ff), he unlocked the entrance for the Jews to enter the kingdom via repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). Later Peter would open the door of the church to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1ff). Notice even on Pentecost Peter was not alone in his efforts, he was *“standing up with the eleven”* (Acts 2:14). Peter was not superior to the other apostles. Later he was *“sent”* by the Twelve to the Samaritan saints (Acts 8:14).

The extent of this authority is described in the rest of verse nineteen: *“whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”* (Matt. 18:19). This same promise was made to the rest of the disciples was promised similar power (18:18f). This promised authority is not inherent in the disciples and the church is not the source of authority. Jesus is not giving legislative authority to the apostles. All authority is delegated to the apostles and to the church.

Rabbis often spoke binding and loosing or forbidding or permitting. Jesus is not telling them that they get to set the terms of whatever goes in His Kingdom. If they decide anything, this would mean God will have to just go along with it. A better translation comes from Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest reads, “And whatever you bind on earth [forbid to be done], shall have been already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth [permit to be done], shall have already been loosed in heaven.”

With regard to the great confession Jesus commands the twelve *“that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ”* (18:20). The time was not right and the means was not correct for the people to know what Peter had confessed. They (“flesh and blood”) do not need to reveal who Jesus was. Just like Peter, they need the Father to reveal it to them through the miracles, prophecies, divine teaching, etc. and most of all the *“sign of Jonah”* - the resurrection.

Questions:

1. Where and what is Decapolis?
2. List some of the comparisons between the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000.
3. List some of the contrasts between the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000.

4. Why couldn't Jesus just send the multitude away?
5. What is ironic about Jesus giving thanks for the food?
6. Who has joined the sign seeking Pharisees? Why?
7. What does it mean they wanted to see "*a sign from heaven*"?
8. Why does Jesus point out they are already able to discern the signs in the heavens?
9. What was the proper discernment of the "*signs of the times*"?
10. What was the sign Jesus was going to give them?
11. What did they believe Jesus' warning about the Pharisees and Sadducees to be in reference to?
What was Jesus real warning?
12. What did the people believe Jesus to be?
13. What sets Peter's confession of Jesus' identity apart from all previous?
14. What is the "*rock*" upon which the church will be built by Jesus?
15. When did Jesus build His church?

16. What does it mean that the "*gates of hades will not overpower*" Christ's church?
17. What does Jesus mean by "*keys*"?
18. Does Jesus give Peter the right to make laws on earth for God in Heaven? Explain.

Application& Discussion:

1. Does the feeding of the five and four thousand along with the healings prove the New Testament church is to be involved in the social gospel? Explain.
2. List the ways the church is not a denomination.

Homework: Share with someone the true about the church Jesus built.

Failures in Discipleship

Matthew 16:21 - 17:21

This lesson demonstrates the failures of the disciples. First, Peter fails in following Jesus by rebuking Him. As a result Jesus needs to remind the Twelve of true conditions and compensations of discipleship. Next, Peter fails to recognize the proper role of Christ when he blurts out a desire to make three tents during the transfiguration on the mountain. Third, Peter, James and John fail to understand the prophecy of Elijah. But finally do with further help from Jesus. Finally, the other nine apostles fail to cast out a demon. Jesus will further train the Twelve in the midst of these failures in discipleship.

The Temptation of a Crossless Christ, 16:21-23

Peter had just proclaimed Jesus as being *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (16:16). Jesus had blessed Peter, now Jesus rebukes him, *"Get behind Me, Satan!"* What happened? Jesus had *"began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day"* (16:21). The idea of the Messiah suffering on the cross was anathema to Jews and a massive stumbling block to their faith in Jesus (1 Cor. 1:23).

This is the first of several direct predictions made by Jesus of His death and resurrection (16:21; 17:22,23; 20:18; 26:2).

"From that time" is a transition phrase used in 4:17 to mark the beginning of the Lord's public ministry to Israel. It denotes a shift in the ministry of Jesus. He must now prepare the disciples for His passion and ultimate rejection by the Jews. He had alluded to this in the *"sign of Jonah"* (12:40) and in His comment about the destruction and the raising up of the temple (His body) in three days (John 2:19).

The event predicted is not an option in the mission of the Messiah. He *"must"* go and it is to Jerusalem. The suffering of the Messiah was foretold in Isaiah 53. It is be the Jewish leadership which will carry out their murderous plans against the Christ. Jesus must not just die, He must be killed at Jerusalem. He must be raised from the dead. And finally it must occur on the third day.

Peter just does not correct or disagree with Jesus, he rebukes Him. This is truly out of place for a disciple of the Master. The tense of the verb used here indicates that Peter kept up rebuking and rebuking Him. How his intentions were good just as when he promised never to deny Christ or when he cut of the ear of the High Priest's servant.

Jesus predicted plan did not fit Peter's (and most like the rest of the disciples) understanding of the Messiah's mission. Dead Messiahs cannot lead a rebellion against the wicked Romans and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel. *"Far be it from You"* is a colloquialism in the Hebrew which is equivalent "gracious to you" or "may God be so merciful as to keep you for this"

Jesus' rebuke of Peter seems to be a bit overkill: *"Get behind Me, Satan"* was the harshest rebuke given to Peter by Jesus. This is especially true when you consider that Jesus had praised his confession with *"blessed are you"* (16:17). "Jesus recognizes here His old enemy in a new and even more dangerous form. For none are more formidable instruments of temptation than well-meaning friends, who care more for our comfort than for our character" (AB Bruce, "The Gospel According to Matthew," 226). After being tempted in the wilderness by Satan, Jesus said to him, *"away with you, Satan!"* (Matt. 4:10). The temptation to avoid the suffering associated with the cross was a real trial for Jesus. He prayed three times in the Garden on the night of His betrayal that God *"Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me"* (Lk. 22:42-44). Peter had unwittingly taken on the role of the Adversary and not a disciple. A disciple

is to follow the Master, not lead Him. Especially, Peter was not to lead Jesus away from His mission.

The reason Jesus gives for His harsh rebuke is: *"You are an offense to Me."* The word *"offense"* is from the Greek *skandalon* meaning "stumbling block". Peter has gone from a little stone to a big stumbling block. Peter was out of place. Rocks that cause one to stumble along the path must be moved. Peter was exactly right one minute and went terribly wrong the next.

Jesus accuses him of thinking like a carnal-minded man. Previously, his confession was not revealed by men but by God. Now his rebuke is based on thinking after the priorities of man and not of God. Most men want to escape suffering and death.

Peter would later come to understand the plans of God for Christ. He told the Sanhedrin that Jesus Christ *"is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:11,12).

Sometimes the greatest test of discipleship is when God's plans simply do not mesh with our plans. Peter needed to realize that Christianity without a cross is worthless. If Christ did not raise the third day all faith is vain. Jesus died to save us from our sins, and there is no salvation apart from Him.

Conditions & Compensations of Discipleship, 16:24-28

Jesus had just commanded Peter to get behind Him. Believe it or not the same Greek word *opiso* is used for *"behind"* in verse twenty-three and *"follow"* here in verse twenty-four. In other words, the proper place for Peter a disciple is to be behind Jesus following Him. Not in His face rebuking and trying to lead Him. And a true follower is reminded here that he must also take up a cross just like his Master.

■ **Conditions of Discipleship**

Not just anyone is prepared to be a disciple. Desire alone is insufficient. However, anyone can be a disciple of Christ. Most would be willing to follow Him if they were able to set the terms or conditions of being a disciple. There are those who are willing to follow Him if they get something out of it in the here and now, such as, with the health/wealth gospel. It has nothing to do with saying the sinner's prayer or signing a pledge card. They must consider whether they have the desire to meet the following three qualifications or conditions. Note that these conditions are listed elsewhere in the Gospels. Apparently, Jesus had to constantly remind His would-be disciples that following Him came with a price. If they were unwilling to pay the price of discipleship, they could not be His disciple. There is no such thing as a no-cost or low-cost discipleship. He does not even offer a lay away plan for discipleship in forty-eight easily payments with zero interest.

The first condition Jesus gives for a would-be follower is: *"let him deny himself"*. Jesus is not requiring they have a lack of self-esteem or abuse themselves by means of severe privations of food, clothing and shelter. It is the denial of self not things.

The word used for *"deny"* is the emphatic verb *aparneomai*, meaning to deny utterly, '...This verb is reserved to convey only the most conclusive denial. To deny oneself with this depth of denial is to live without a single thread of self-centered thought, devoted exclusively to Jesus' (Weber 256). It is the term used when Peter denied knowing Jesus. The promotion of self-interest and self-glory is replaced by seeking only the will of the King and the things of His Kingdom. When you become a disciple of Jesus an absolute rejection of self-satisfying plans, self-willed determinations, trusting in one's own sufficiencies, and hoping in one's self-righteousness is a must. A follower's former life means nothing, a life with Jesus is everything.

Next Jesus demands of a true follower to *"take up his cross."* If Jesus could not avoid denying self and going to the cross, those who are actually following Him cannot do so either. During the life time of Jesus and His disciples tens of thousands would lose their lives on crosses all over Palestine. It was the death of lingering doom. It was a humiliating form of torture. And to carry the cross-beam of the cross was like being asked to carry your noose to your own hanging. Jesus does not demand martyrdom for discipleship, but He does require us to be willing to nail self to the cross of denial every day we follow Him (Luke 9:23).

Just what does this metaphorical cross look like. Many will claim the cross they have to bear is anything from a drunk husband or nagging wife to high or low blood pressure or having to pay high property taxes. Taking up a cross is the willingness to do whatever Jesus requires even to the point of literally being crucified on a literal cross.

“And follow Me” is the third and final requirement of being a disciple of the Lord. “Discipleship is not simply a door to be entered but a path to be followed” (Boice 315).

■ **Compensation of Discipleship**

Jesus encourages and promotes their desires toward discipleship by pointing out the benefits. Is following Jesus really worth all the trouble? For those willing to sit down and consider the cost involved, they will quickly discover that it is not only the deal of a life time and is the deal of eternity. He gives his disciples three reasons to pay the price of discipleship.

First, Jesus says, *“for whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”* (16:25). This is a paradoxical statement also found several times in the Gospels. It is truly a fool who losses what must be saved for that which he cannot save, but will inevitably lose.

The next motivation to be a true disciples is in the form of two rhetorical questions to consider: *“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”* (16:26a). The answer is obviously “none”. The next question for a would-be follower’s consideration is *“or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (16:26b). The answer is: “Nothing!” If a man sins his soul is separated from God. In the ultimate hyperbole a man who owns the whole world could not exchange it for saving his soul for one single sin.

The term *“exchange”* is the financial word used for transactions. Paying a price to receive a specific item of desire. This life is an investment. It is either an investment of life in this world or an investment in the live to come. Is following Jesus a wise investment of the limited time and a resources of this life? That all depends on how much one values their soul. Man possesses a body, money and things. But the soul is the man. What criteria can be utilized to determine the value of one’s soul compared to the whole world? First, this world is temporary. One day it will all be burned up and completely pass away. However, the soul is eternal. God loves the people or souls in this world enough to send His Son to die for all the souls of this world. He does not love the planet earth to sacrifice even one soul for it. God could create many worlds just like the one. However, you are unique. There is only one you. No two souls are identical.

Sadly, many exchange their soul for a whole lot less than the whole world. Some will give up their soul and eternity for a few more dollars at work, a temporary love affair or just a little bowl of soul. Remember, you only live once therefore invest wisely in the life to come. Better to take up a cross in this short life so you can wear a crown of life throughout eternity.

The final consideration of the disciple is dealing with the future rewards. God will send the Son of Man in glory with His angels *“and then He will reward each according to his works”* (16:27b). Each faithful servant will follow Jesus to the end of life and receive an ample recompense. This can give hope to all who would sacrifice their life of a few years on earth for an eternity with God. The time of reward is judgment day at the end of time. *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels”* (16:27a). Paul write, *“for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10; also see Rev. 21:12). So whether you chose be follower of Jesus or not there will be a day of reckoning.

■ **Expectation of Discipleship**

Jesus draws their attention to something else of great importance with His oft used attention getting term *“assuredly”*. What He wants them to know is that if they the King about to set up His Kingdom their hope in seeing this great event will take place in their lifetime. *“I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”* (16:28). Some would die before the coming of the Kingdom. Judas would commit suicide. Jesus would give Himself up on the cross to die, be resurrected, ascend to the Father in Heaven, and sit on the throne of

David taking possession of the Kingdom and beginning His reign as King.

Other than in their life time, when will this be? Mark adds "...they see the kingdom of God present with power"(Mark 9:1). Just before His resurrection Jesus "commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father...you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now ...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:4b,8). Ten days later in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost the apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. This is when the Kingdom was established. After the day of Pentecost, all references to God's kingdom are in the present tense (Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9).

If as some claim, the kingdom is yet in the future, than there are some mighty old apostles living somewhere in the world today.

The time of the Kingdom is said by others to be the Transfiguration. However...

Mount of Transfiguration, 17:1-13

The Transfiguration took place in about a week from Jesus' discussion with the Twelve about discipleship. Although Matthew and Mark agree it was "after six days" (17:1a). Luke says "some eight days after" (Luke 9:28). About eight days is equivalent to after six days or a week later. There is no contradiction between the Gospel writers. Matthew and Mark only include complete days in their estimation of the time, whereas Luke also includes partial days. Either way you count the time, it was about "six or eight days" later.

Why did Jesus just take "Peter, James and John?" They were the first three of four called by Jesus. They head all four lists of the disciples. Three times Jesus would take this inner circle of disciples with Him on special occasions. This is one and the other two are at the home of Jairus (Luke 8:51) and garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion (see Matt. 26:37). All three have to do with death. Whatever the reason for these particular disciples, Jesus needed two or three reliable witnesses to this event, He in His wisdom chose them.

Jesus led these three "up on a high mountain." Tradition says this was Mount Tabor. But this cannot be true for it was not that high of a mountain and also according to Josephus it had a military installation on top during the time of Jesus. Mount Hermon was 9232 feet high and oft snow covered on top. This may be all the reason why Peter suggested building tents for sheltering the three. However there is a third possibility. The four thousand foot high Mount Meron which lies between Mt. Hermon and the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus at some point in the night while He was praying (Luke 9:28-29) "was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light" (17:2). Notice this did not only change the appearance of His body but also His clothing. The divine glory of Jesus was shining through His body and His garments. Jesus Christ laid aside His glory when He came to earth (John 17:5). The Greek term for "transfigured" gives us our English word "metamorphosis." Just as a caterpillar weaves a cocoon around itself and then from within this cocoon changes into a butterfly, so disciples are to be transfigured by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:1-2).

Why did Moses and Elijah appear and not Abraham, David, Isaiah, etc. First, Moses had prophesied, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deut. 18:15). Furthermore, Moses was synonymous with the Law. He represents here the Law.

Also "Elijah appeared to them." Elijah was a representation of the prophets. He and Enoch are the only two who did to see death but were taken by God. Elijah did not see death but departed in a fiery chariot taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11).

Both Moses and Elijah had mountain top experiences with God. Moses saw the burning bush and later received the Law on Mount Sinai. Elijah had a great victory on Mount Carmel over the prophets of Baal and later was commissioned by God on Mount Sinai (1 Kings 18,19).

Moses and Elijah were "talking with Him." About what? They "spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The term for "decease" is from a Greek term from

which exodus is derived. Peter used the word "exodus" in describing his own impending death (2 Peter 1:15) which reminded him of the Transfiguration where Moses and Elijah meet Jesus to discuss His forthcoming exodus. Three times in the ministry of Jesus He receives comfort from beyond. First, after His temptation, and later in the Garden of Gethsemane. Thrice God speaks from heaven. This is also one of these times.

The appearance of these two confirmed that there is life after death and death does not remove a man's identity of consciousness.

Some people have something to say, and some have to say something. Peter was not one to keep silent. He said, *"Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"* (17:4). This is one of those occasions where the thoughtless, overly eager, and impetuous response of Peter causes Him to speak before his brain has been fully engaged. He said it *"not knowing what he said"* (Luke 9:33).

The event took place at night and Peter spoke only after he was fully awake. In the garden He had a hard time staying awake. As he said this Moses and Elijah were in the process of departing (Luke 9:33). Perhaps, he was hoping they would stay, if a tent was provided for them.

Just how these three disciples were able to recognize Elijah who had been dead for 800 years and Moses for 1500 we are not told. Perhaps it was a miraculous recognition or from their conversations with Jesus.

"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them" (17:5a). God often appears to mankind as a cloud. About sixty times in the Old Testament the Shekinah cloud of God's glory is mentioned. Some of the more well-known occurrences are when the Egyptian army was pursuing the Israelites to the Red Sea (Ex. 14:19,20). It came when Moses received the Law (Ex. 19:16-20). It appeared at the dedication of both the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34,35) and the Temple (1 Kings 8:10).

God by declaring *"This is My beloved Son"* equates Jesus with Himself as God. Although no one else seem to approve of Jesus' as the Messiah the Father was *"well pleased"* with Jesus. This proclamation for heaven is the same as at Jesus' baptism except, God commands *"hear him!"*

"Do not hear Moses; do not hear Elijah, etc." They have left. There is not need for the Law and the Prophets to be heard by the disciples. They have need of listening and following only Jesus. The tense of the verb means they must keep on listening to Jesus.

"When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid" (17:6). This would have been a frightening experience for anyone. Whenever man had come face to face with the divine as in the glory of Jesus or the supernatural as in seeing the dead among the living or an angel man had responded with fear. The awesomeness and holiness of the divine should result in holy terror.

The transfiguration would later have a great impact upon Peter. *"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain"* (2 Peter 1:16-18). Peter uses this event to explain why we all need to have a faith in the veracity and dependability of the inspiration of scripture.

John also seems to refer to the Transfiguration when in wrote, *"and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

While they prostrated in fear, Jesus came over and touched them saying, *"Arise, and do not be afraid."* This was not a rebuke for their reaction, but an encouragement to move on now that it is over. *"When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only"* (17:8). Jesus was alone, and Jesus alone is all they needed from this point. Only Jesus could lead the way and save (John 14:6)

The trip down the mountain served Jesus as a time to issue a command, *"tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead"* (17:9). The masses and perhaps even the other disciples were not ready to this message. They still held to the view that the king and his coming kingdom must

be of a carnal nature. This even would only serve to further discourage and confuse them. However, after the resurrection the pieces of the puzzle would start to come together. Jesus came to gain a victory over death not the Romans.

This celestial scene was profoundly confusing to Peter and the others. Elijah was to come first and “*restore all things.*” How can this be? He just came and went. The Jewish belief at the time was based on Malachi 4:5,6. Elijah “*will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.*” This is not the restoration of all things, but it does relate to the ministry of John who came preaching repentance and preparation for the way of the Lord.

John, when asked if he was Elijah, said, “*I am not*” (John 1:21). Jesus had already told the disciples that John “*is Elijah who is to come*” (11:14). Now He declares “*Elijah has come already. But I say to you that and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished*” (17:12a). The Jews allowed John to be imprisoned by Herod and later killed. So they should not look for Elijah in the future. His time had already come and gone in the life of John. Finally, “*the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist*” (17:13). The question about the identity of Elijah and John has been put to rest among the Twelve.

Jesus takes this moment to reinforce the fact that His exodus through the cross was required as part of the plan. It is the one thing they now would look to in the future.

Failures to Cast Out the Unclean Spirit, 17:14-21

For the chosen three (Peter, James and John) the trip up and down the mountain was a faith building exercise. For the nine left below their failure to cast out a demon-possessed boy is an opportunity for them to increase their faith. The three disciples’ comprehension is followed by the nine disciples’ being confounded. They had been given authority to cast out evil spirits earlier (Matt. 10:1,8). They had enough power and enough faith to be successful before now (Mark 6:13).

The case brought to the nine disciples by a father was particularly a difficult and dangerous one. His son’s life was on the line since childhood. This particular demon caused the boy to have “seizures” and is called “*epileptic.*” In some translations it has “lunatic” which is literally “moonstruck”. There was an ancient belief that during the moon the mental state of certain individuals was negatively impacted. He demon took over control of the boy’s body and tried to harm him by casting him into a fire to burn or to drown him in water. He would fall down an foam at the mouth, grinding his teeth.

Jesus refers to the nine as “*O faithless and perverse generation.*” The term “perverse” means crooked, bent out of shape, twisted, etc. They are lumped in with the rest of the unbelieving generation making up the crowd and including the scribes. At this point Jesus finds little difference between the nine disciples and the rest of the Jews of that day. Jesus demonstrated His emotions of frustration and sorrow at the faithlessness of them. “*How long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?*” He was about to leave for Jerusalem and the cross and these disciples are far from ready. How long is it going to take? Were all His miracles and wonders and parables a big waste of time?

The father brought his only son pleading for God’s only Son for help after the failure of the disciples. At Jesus ordered the boy is brought to Him and the demon commanded to leave and never to return. The demon makes one last attempt to harm the boy as it obeys the command of Jesus.

Jesus explains their failure. “*Because of your unbelief.*” The term unbelief is the same as “*little faith*” (6:30;8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Luke12:28). The complaint Jesus had with them was not the quantity of their faith but the quality. After all, the source of the power for casting out demons is God not their faith. “It is important to observe here that it is not the ‘amount’ of faith which brings the impossible within reach, but the power of God, which is available to even the ‘smallest’ faith” (France, R.T., The Gospel According to Matthew, TNTC (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1985), 266).

Scriptural faith involves three aspects: 1) the object of faith; 2) the complying in full obedience; and trusting with total commitment. Believing in God and just doing His will falls short of full-grown faith. One must trust that if he does what God requires of him, God will be pleased and reward that faith.

Their failure was not due to the absence of Jesus. Jesus was not with them when they went out

two by two and cast out demons. They failed to rely on God's power instead of their actions.

The mustard seed represented the great growth potential of the kingdom in the parables (Matt. 13:). Here it represents the potential for the growth of great faith. Jesus uses a common hyperbole to represent His point. He said, *"if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."* The mountain He is referencing is most likely the one He and the three disciples had just descended. If Mount Herman is suggested it shows a great miracle. However, if this is a hyperbole, it stands for a faith that can overcome any obstacle. Keep in mind the *"nothing will be impossible"* does not mean anything outside the will of God. It would still be impossible for them to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). Nor does it mean one today can work a miracle just as long as he possesses enough faith.

They apparently had overestimated their abilities and underestimated God's power and their need to patiently depend upon Him. Concerning this demon Jesus claimed, *"this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting"* (17:21). Remember, *"the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* (James 5:16).

Raphael Sanzio began a painting of Christ's transfiguration. When he died in 1520 at the age of thirty-seven. The painting was not finished, but Raphael had completed enough for us to understand it. He showed Jesus on the mountain with Peter, James and John. Everything is bathed with light. But in the same painting at the bottom. Raphael shows the other nine disciples trying to cast a demon out of the boy and failing miserably. It is a way of saying that mountain top experiences coexist with valleys and only by the power of the Son of God can we have victories in our lives.

Questions:

1. Was the cross an option in Jesus' mission? Explain.
2. Why did Peter rebuke Jesus?
3. What is the meaning of Jesus' rebuke of Peter: *"Get behind Me, Satan"*?
4. Was the temptation to avoid the suffering associated with the cross was a real trial for Jesus? Explain.
5. List the three conditions of discipleship.
6. To what extent is a disciple to deny self?
7. To what is carrying one's cross equivalent?

8. What three reasons did Jesus give for paying the price for discipleship?
9. What criteria can be utilized to determine the value of one's soul compared to the whole world?
10. Which apostle would not witness the coming of the Kingdom of God?
11. Using Mark 9:1 and Act 1:4,8; 2:1-4 explain when the Kingdom began.
12. What happened to Jesus' body and clothing during the transfiguration?
13. Who appeared with Jesus? Why?
14. What did God tell Peter and the others?
15. Why would Peter mention the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-18?
16. Why did the disciple ask about the coming of Elijah? What did Jesus say?
17. Why was the demon-possession of the boy dangerous and difficult?
18. How did Jesus react to the nine disciples' failure to cast out the demon?
19. Why did the disciples fail?

20. What can a little faith do?

Application & Discussion:

1. Explain why Christianity with the cross is worthless.

2. How did Peter know who Moses and Elijah were? Will we recognize others after death?

Homework: Examine your personal failures in discipleship and make adjustments to better follow the King.

Lessons from Little Ones

Matthew 17:22 - 18:20

Often in the bible God will use the little things of this world to teach great lessons. For the second time Jesus predicts His coming suffering, death and resurrection. They are like children who are slow to learn. They need constant reminders. Even another reminder about greatness in the Kingdom. To be greatest in the kingdom demands they first become like a little child. They are not to despise any of God's little ones. If a little sheep is lost a shepherd knowing its value seeks it. So does God seek the lost. So they should seek the lost brother. The church is even authorized to use discipline to bring the lost little one home.

Second Prediction of Jesus' Death and Resurrection, 17:22-23

When Jesus and His disciples departed from the area around Caesarea Philippi *"they passed through Galilee"* (Mark 9:30a). They would end up in Capernaum (17:24). But along the way they stopped and this gave Jesus another opportunity to prepare His disciples for the great events surrounding His death.

The first time Jesus mentioned this Peter rebuked Him and was rebuked in return (16:22). This time the disciples were silent. Did the disciples truly understand it this time? *"But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him"* (Mark 9:32). And *"they were afraid to ask Him about this saying"* (Luke 9:45). They did understand and believe Jesus to the extent they *"were filled with grief"*.

This second prediction is pretty much the same as before except Jesus has added *"Son of Man"* to identify Himself with the Messiah. Jesus outlines in chronological order precisely what they should expect in the near future. First, He was to be *"betrayed"* by his fellow man which would be fulfilled in Judas working with the Jewish leadership, who in turn collaborated with Herod and the Romans. Second, they would have him killed. that is, murdered upon the cross. And finally, the resurrection on the third day. Jesus does give them a ray of hope in that He predicts His resurrection. However, many of the Jews believed in a general resurrection, such as Martha concerning her dead brother Lazarus (John 11:24). They based this belief on Daniel 12:2.

This would not be the last time Jesus predicts His death. The disciples were known to be slow to comprehend and still needed to strengthen and grow their "little faith." These reminders scattered throughout the final days of Jesus' instructions to them would need to be repeated.

Peter and Jesus Pay the Temple Taxes, 17:23-27

The next miracle seems out of place. It is unique in that it is the only miracle involving money. Finding a coin in a fish to pay the temple tax is only recorded by Matthew, a publican. However, he would not have collected this tax as it was a poll tax for the Temple. The fact that this took place in Capernaum is noteworthy due to the proximity of the Sea of Galilee where fish could be caught by Peter in a short period of time.

Just why did these tax collectors for the Temple come to Peter. Perhaps Jesus was staying in his home and they knew Peter.

The tax is literally "two drachma." This is the amount to be paid for the Temple Tax in Greek valuation. It was the amount to be collected from every Israelite man over twenty according to the Law of Moses in Exodus 30:13-16 and 38:25-26. It was to be used for the maintenance and operation of the Tabernacle and later the Temple. This was reduced under Nehemiah to a third shekel (Neh. 10:32).

Jesus refusing to pay would cause Him to appear to others as a lawbreaker transgressing the Law of Moses.

Peter answered them in the affirmative. How did he know if Jesus paid this tax. Perhaps he was being a bit impulsive in his quick answer to defend the Master. Or knew this to be a fact from his past experience with Jesus.

When Peter *“had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, ‘What do you think, Simon?’”* Jesus demonstrates here His omniscience. Know what Peter is about to ask, He uses this moment to teach Peter using the Socratic method of teaching by asking questions.

Jesus asked Peter, *“from whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?”* (17:25). Peter would have been able to answer *“from strangers”* based on common knowledge of the day. The King’s children obviously would be exempt from taxation. So, *“the sons are free”* from paying an taxes.

The argument Jesus was making was based on this same logic. Jesus was greater than the Temple (12:6). The Temple was God’s House. God is the King. Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, Jesus should be exempt from the Temple tax. So Jesus was free from the obligation of paying the Temple tax.

Jesus was at liberty not to pay the Temple tax. *“Nevertheless, lest we offend them”* He told Peter to pay the taxes. Jesus did not come to become an unnecessary offence to the Jews. There were times they would be offended. But Jesus did not want to appear even to break one of the Laws of Moses. He had no qualms about breaking the traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus did not actually touch the money or pay it directly. He did not have to pay it, but paid it to fulfill the requirements of the law of Moses. Previously, it was noted that Jesus had no need of the Baptism of John. He asked to be baptized to *“fulfill all righteousness”* (3:13). Jesus, out of charity and benefit of those watching His every move, paid the tax.

Sacrificing one’s rights for the benefits of others is a virtuous decision the New Testament would encourage among all Kingdom citizens. Christians should not use their right to do something at the expense of hindering the reception of the Gospel. We need to strive to maintain peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18). It is necessary to refrain from being a stumbling block among brethren. It is important in maintaining a congenial relationship with one another.

Peter was given instruction on how to pay the taxes and where to get the payment. Jesus said, *“go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth.”* Did Jesus just create the coin in the mouth of the fish? Or did Jesus out of His divine omniscience know that Peter was going to catch a fish which had previously swallowed a coin. A coin that would have been the perfect amount to pay both their taxes. It is not unusual to find a wedding ring or even a coin in the mouth of a fish. But to know when and where and how much is truly a miracle.

What Peter found was a coin called a *statera* which is worth four drachma which in turn is the value of a half shekel. The two drachma was the same value as the a half shekel required for paying one man’s Temple tax. There was no such thing as a half shekel coin or a double drachma. This would have been the perfect amount to pay both Peter’s annual Temple tax as well as Jesus’. Apparently, the other eleven would have to come up with their own money to pay taxes. Jesus performed several miracles for Peter’s benefit. He healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–34), helped Peter to catch fish (Luke 5:1–11), enabled him to walk on the water (Matt. 14:22–33), healed Malchus’ ear (Matt. 26:47–56), and delivered Peter from prison (Acts 12:1ff).

Also, consider this fact, one drachma was equal to a Roman denarius. A day laborer received a denarius for his work at the end of the day. It took two days of labor to pay the annual Temple tax. But Jesus did not have any money, except what as in the common treasury. Imagine the one greater than the Temple and the one to whom worship ascends from the Temple had to pay it from a lost or created coin.

This is the only recorded miracle of Jesus where it was a direct benefit for Him.

After the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD the Jews had no reason to collect this tax. So the Romans in order to further humiliate the rebellious Jews, collected the Temple tax to support the temple

dedicated to Jupiter in Rome.

Who Is the Greatest? 18:1-4

Chapter eighteen begins Jesus' fourth discussion in the Gospel of Matthew. The time frame for this discussion takes place around the same time as the previous events mentioned in chapter seventeen. Additional information about this is found in (Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-49).

On the road to Peter's home in Capernaum they were arguing with each other about who would be greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus asked them what they had been discussing on the road, they were silent. Perhaps too embarrassed to admit their petty squabble. They did go ahead and ask their question, "*Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*" (18:1).

The special trip up the Mount of Transfiguration of Peter, James and John and Jesus paying Peter's taxes may have sparked this argument. Jesus had just mentioned to Peter about king's and the special treatment to their family. Jesus had just said He was going to be killed. They were very sorrowful. That sorrow did not last long. If Jesus was going to die soon, shouldn't He (the King) set up His kingdom. After all, an earthly kingdom will need a living king and others with positions of power and authority.

Instead of directly answering the questions "*Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them*" (18:2). The Greek for "*little child*" is *paidion* used to refer to an infant up to a child of seven years of age. They were asking Jesus to pick the "greater" from among them and He to their surprise picks a child. Notice Jesus did not point to Peter and support him as the preeminent leader.

In an indirect way Jesus explains they were asking the wrong question. "*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted.*" The command "*assuredly, I say to you*" tells them to listen up I have a truth you need to grasp. The Greek word *strepho* is translated "converted" here in verse three. It requires the action of turning around in heading in the right direction. The disciples were going in the wrong direction with this question. The means of turning them around is the objective lesson sitting in Jesus' lap and not a direct intervention by Deity upon their hearts. Conversion comes by preaching the Gospel. The question they should have been asking is: "are we even in the Kingdom?"

Not only are they required to turn their thinking around, they also must "*become as little children.*" Children are innocent. To be like one is to be pure and innocent. Children are not born totally depraved as taught by Calvinism. Children are not born with sin inherited from their parents or Adam (Ezek. 18:20).

If they fail to convert and be like innocent children, they "*will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" The term "*heaven*" stands for God, so this refers to the "kingdom of God." When entering God kingdom look up over the entrance, it says in bold letters "No grown-ups permitted past this point." To their surprise the disciples who assumed they were already in the kingdom find out they are not and will not unless they meet the conditions set forth here by Jesus. The kingdom was not established at this point. Their question is premature. Their time has the kingdom starting before Jesus death. After all, all kingdoms of men start before the king dies and not afterward.

The phrase "*enter the kingdom*" speaks of perennial salvation. Nicodemus was told he must be born again of water before he could enter the kingdom.

The emphatic negative indicates that unless this conversion takes place they will NEVER enter the kingdom.

One more condition must be met in all this: Childlike humility must replace their pride. Jesus sums up the lesson: "*Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*" (18:4). The disciples are not to take on all the characteristics of a child. After all, we are not to be childish but childlike in innocence and humility. The littleness of a child is the standard for greatness in the Kingdom. Truly, another paradoxical statement by Jesus. Children do not care about social status. So the Twelve need to be humble enough to lose their prideful preoccupation with position, place, preeminence and prestige in the Kingdom.

Children are not always humble in the sense of being selfless and not demanding their toys and their way. However, they are dependant upon their parents and submit to them. They are naturally

dependent and trusting. Jesus came and *“humbled Himself”* even to the point of the cross (Phil. 2:8). True disciples must also be humble in following Him. Children are so willing to know and follow the God the Father and Creator. They have to be taught to be atheist.

This would not be the last time the disciples argued over rank in the kingdom. When the mother of James and John sought positions for her sons, the other ten would become agree (20:20-21). And this was even the issue of contention among them at the Last Supper (Luke 22:24).

Jesus Warns of Offenses, 18:5-9

Continuing the idea of citizens of God’s kingdom becoming like little children, Jesus warns us not to underestimate the value of them. *“Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me”* (18:5). The term *“receives”* is from *dechomai*, which means to deliberately and readily take something or someone to oneself” (MacArthur 103). To receive them is to receive Jesus. Whether He is speaking of small children or those spiritual children of His family reception is commanded. In fact, it is both. Small children are saved in already part of God’s realm and rule. But mostly Jesus is speaking of men and women *“who believe in”* Him.

Those who become great tend not to be very receptive of those they consider of less value. They also are more apt to take advantage of them or treat them carelessly. So Jesus warns, *“whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”* (18:6).

Again, who is Jesus talking about. This time it has to be those who are old enough to choose to sin. However, adults, and in particular parents, can be stumbling blocks to toddlers by their deeds, and words, and bad examples.

History is replete with examples of men who became such stumbling blocks. Aaron led the children of Israel into calf worship. King Jeroboam led the ten tribes of Israel into calf worship. Balaam taught King Balak how to use prostitutes to cause Israel to sin (Rev. 2:14). Those spouses who divorce without the cause of adultery set a stumbling block before their spouse (Matt. 5:31f; 19:9). Even eating bacon in front of a weak brother who had been a Jew or Muslim could result in causing another to stumble (Rom. 14; 1 Cor.8).

While it is true that those who are tripped up by others and chose to follow others into sin are responsible for their own souls, the offenders are held accountable for their part. *“Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”* (18:7). A pronouncement of *“woe”* is a grave warning of Judgment. It is not the opposite of giddy up, that is, whoa. However, it is a warning to stop ones’ wicked behavior, before they are faced with divine judgment. Offences will come. All disciple will be a bad example in word or deed sometime in their lives. However, it is serious to cause one to sin and lose their soul.

How serious is it to cause someone to stumble into sin over our example? Imagine having a millstone hung about your neck and trying to swim to safety or just even tread water. Drowning in the depths would be a sure thing. Romans practiced this very form of execution. The term for *“millstone”* is literally the stone of the donkey. This was not the small millstone used to grind grain at the hands of a mere human. This stone was so large, it required a strong beast of burden to move it.

When dealing with the sin of sexual lust in Matthew 5:27-30 Jesus also used the hyperbole of self-mutilation. Prevention of lust and offenses is radical. When a limb such as a hand or foot or an eye became infected in the past, amputation was required to save the life. Better to lose a limb than the whole body die. If dealing with cancer or gangrene radical surgery to save our fleshly bodies may be required. How much more radical must we be to remove the offensive deeds and words and thoughts from our lives to save our souls and that of others?

So be a stepping-stone, not a stumbling block. Or else God will adorn you with a millstone. Life is too short and eternity too long to risk your soul or that of a brother. Hell is to be avoided at all cost. Even giving up an eye, foot or hand, though not literal cutting off, may be required. A wicked behavior or a bad habit or personal liberty may need to be amputated from one’s life.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep, 18:10-14

Jesus uses this same parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:3-7. In a different setting, He teaches a somewhat different lesson. He is arguing with the Pharisees about His role in saving the lost sinner and the rejoicing in heaven over their salvation. Here Jesus is speaking of believers who go astray and are sought for in hopes of restoration.

■ God Values the Little Ones

As if the disciples needed any more of a warning to be careful in their treatment and attitude toward fellow believers who may be weak, Jesus warns *“take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones”* (18:10a). To *“despise”* means to show contempt for or to think little of the little ones or denigrate as worthless or look down one's nose at someone considered beneath you, because they are considered morally, religiously, socially, etc. inferior.

They can do this in many ways. First, by being a stumbling block, failing to seek them when they are lost or being unwilling to forgive them of their trespasses. God's children are not to suffer from child abuse at the hands of their fellow brethren.

■ God's Angels Serve Little Ones

As a demonstration of God placing great value on the little ones Jesus says *“for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven”* (18:10b). Many have appealed to Matthew 18:10 as a proof text for guardian angels. This single passage has become the foundation for the idea that every little child has been assigned a guardian angel. Yet, the plural *“angels”* favors corporate rather than individual care. It would imply that each of *“the little ones”* does not have his own angel, but angels. The idea that many angels watch after us seems to have some support in Scripture (2 Ki. 6:17; Lk. 16:22; Ps. 91:9-12). Michael the archangel is seen as the protector of the Jews in Daniel. 12:1.

Some reject this idea. First, little ones is not referencing children, but those humble believers in Christ. The Word of God never uses the term *“guardian”* in connection with angels. However, there are many occasions in the Bible where they are doing just that, guarding people from danger. Others argue that angels are servants of God and not of man. However, Hebrew 1:14 asks, *“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”* The idea of them seeing God's face is being in His presence and ready to serve at His bidding (2 Sam. 14:24; 1 Kings 10:8). Perhaps many are opposed to the concept of angels being active among mankind today because the false doctrines of angel mania has become so destructive to the truth.

The real issue that needs to be answered has to do with the current activity of angels. Are angels still active in the affairs of this world today? True, the visible activity of angels has come to an end, because their mediating work is done (Heb. 1:1,2). God's Spirit speaks directly through the Word, not heavenly messengers. Since angels have served mankind throughout the Bible record, there is no reason to believe their service has ended. After all, they rejoice over the one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7) But there is no evidence in Scripture that an angel is assigned to each soul to guide them in life choices.

■ God Saves the Little Ones

“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost” (18:11) is the very purpose for God sending His Son. God loves the lost that much. To devalue the sinner is to devalue the gift of God.

■ God Cares for Each Little One

The phrase *“What do you think?”* introduces something new for a disciple to contemplate. The problem to contemplate is *“if a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray.”* Jesus points out that one out of a hundred sheep is important. A good shepherd would notice or know if one was missing (John 10:3;14-15).

■ God Seeks the Lost Little One

It is the normal course of action for the shepherd to *“leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying”* (18:12). Sheep are known to be feebleminded in their nature. They have no sense of direction. They wander off. They are absolutely defenseless, have no biologically built in

defenses like teeth or the spray of a skunk. Sheep cannot quickly run away and have no camouflage, etc. They do not have a sense of direction like a dog or cat in finding their way home. They eat and eat till there is no pasture left, just dirt. Then they starve. The shepherd does not condemn the stupid animal to its fate. He seeks after it.

■ **God Rejoices Over the Recovered Little Ones**

Notice the conditional *“if he should find it.”* Sheep are not always found or found alive. There are many dangers, harsh elements, and predators. But if the lost is found and restore, *“he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray”* (18:13b). No one is happier in all the universe than God when the lost repent and return.

This does not belittle the value of the ninety-nine sheep who did not go astray. Imagine a parent with ten children and one of them wanders off and is lost. First, the parent would secure the other nine and then run off and search until the lost child was found. The emotional relief would focus on the one child that was in danger and now has been found and restore to the safety of home. No one would for a moment think that the mother or father did not have any joy in the other nine or favored the one that became lost over the others.

■ **God Will to Save All Little Ones**

Jesus concludes, *“even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish”* (18:14). God cannot force the lost sinner to come home. However, God’s desires all men to be saved. *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet. 3:9). The motivation is found in the idea of them perishing and being lost forever in Hell.

If God thinks so highly of the lost believer how much should we do to help restore them.

Dealing with a Brother When He Sins, 18:15-18

▶ **Step One: Recognize Sin in a Brother**

Jesus moves on from focusing on how to treat and value a lost little one to the procedures to be taken in seek to retrieve a lost brother. *“Moreover if your brother sins against you”* (18:15a). This is any brother who sins, it involves any type of sin, and requires action on the part of any brother who knows of the sin committed. Sin matters. If your brother sins do not overlook and tolerate it. Instead, investigate and encourage repentance. To avoid bitterness swelling up in the heart of the offended, as soon as an offense is recognized it needs to be addressed.

▶ **Step Two: Go**

“Go” is in the Greek present tense (imperative mood), implying a gentle, patient series of confrontations” (Blomberg 291). Brethren who are spiritual need to go to the sinner in a spirit of meekness and gentleness and seek to restore a brother or sister (Gal. 6:1). Do not go to prove a point or get revenge or through someone out of the church. Go to gain a brother back from sin and into “one another” fellowship.

▶ **Step Three: Privately Show Sin**

Everyone has the ability and responsibility to go to another. When he goes he must *“tell him his fault between you and him alone”* (18:15b). *“Tell”* is from *elencho* meaning to bringing to light or expose. It is possible that he does not even realize what he has done. It could be a sin of ignorance (Num. 15:22) or a secret fault (Ps. 19:12). It is also possible that there is a complete misunderstanding of the situation or proper application of God’s Word and no sin has been committed. Keep the private matter between the two, private. This step would go a long way to preventing embarrassment by the sinner hindering his repentance.

This steps does not involve those who are in public error via teaching false doctrines and practicing immorality. Jesus did not rebuke in private those scribes and Pharisees teaching error. He publically rebuked Peter more than once and also Martha. He rebuked Herod and others publically without them being in His presence. Those who publically criticize those who publically rebuke those who sin in public are being hypocritical. A Christian can be sinned against either directly and indirectly.

They can suffer offences in a personal way or in public.

▶ **Step Four: Gain or Loss**

There are two possible outcomes to steps one through three. First, *“if he hears you, you have gained your brother”* (18:15c). The brother’s physical ability to hear is not in question but his willingness to listen and properly respond with a penitent heart is the goal. The motive is always to *“save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins”* (see James 5:19-20). The second possibility: *“But if he will not hear”* (18:15d). *“If”* goes back to the possibility that the lost sheep is not recovered. The motivation for addressing sin in another is to save and restore and not to kick someone out of the church. To “gain” or win your brother is the term from commerce indicating the idea of profit or loss. If you work hard to save and protect and recover your money, how much more a brother’s soul?

▶ **Step Five: Witnesses**

If nothing has worked to restore the brother he does not give up but asks for help from others. *“Take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established”* (18:16). In the Law of Moses two or three witnesses were needed in capital cases to help assure justice (Mum. 35:30). It also seems to involve any accusation of violating the Law (Deut. 1(15; 17:6). This same requirement is called for in different situations in the New Testament (John 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19).

These witnesses do not have to be witnesses to the sin. But they are to witness how the brother reacts to being accused of sin. Perhaps they note there is no sin but a misunderstanding or the accusing brother is the real sinner.

▶ **Step Four: Gain or Loss**

The rule of procedure is still focused on the goal: restore the lost brother. However, he can still refuse to listen to the brother and witnesses.

▶ **Step Five: Church Discipline**

When the brother continues in sin, *“tell it to the church”* (18:17b). Although the church will not exist until the day of Pentecost, its has been prepared for since eternity. The whole context of this discourse of Jesus to the disciples was to prepare them for their future which involved the future church. This is done by the first brother and witnesses telling publically what they know to the church. Church here refers to all the local believers who are assembled together and can listen to the grievance. The New Testament uses *“church”* in this manner (1 Cor. 11;18, 14:34,35). Paul suggests this to the church at Corinth in dealing with the sinful brother: *“when you are gathered together”* (1 Cor. 5:4).

Imagine a child who has run away from home. One person may start the search and when they cannot bring the child back, they enlist the aid of a few more. If that does not restore the child to the home the whole community is called in as a search party.

▶ **Step Six: Gain or Loss**

The purpose of involving the congregation is that the sinner might *“be ashamed”* (2 Th. 3:17) *“that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”* (1 Cor. 5:5). Yet again there is no guarantee this will work. *“But if he refuses even to hear the church”* (18:17). This is not the end of the church’s efforts. They do not give up on their brother. Perhaps one more final step can motivate him to repent.

▶ **Step Seven: Disassociation**

The final step in this process is: *“let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”* Today, being socially ostracized is not much of a punishment to those in local churches where members never associate with each other in the first place. For discipline to be more effective congregations need to create a closer sense of community between members.

The Jews would not associate with Gentiles who are more than likely pagan. And certainly not have social dealing with a traitor like the publicans. Jesus is not agreeing with this attitude. After all, He had the publican Matthew among the Twelve and was known as a friend to publicans. He also healed Gentiles and marveled at their faith. Jesus was simply illustrating the type of treatment to be given believers who refused to repent. This does not mean the sinner’s soul is completely excommunicated. Paul commanded, *“do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother”* (2 Thess. 3:15).

While Christians keep from associating with the erring brother, they continue to keep calling him back home in repentance.

Authority for Church Discipline, 18:18-20

Jesus draws their attention to something that is also of unusual importance saying, *“Assuredly, I say to you”* (18:18a). He is now going to focus on another related aspect of church discipline. By what authority does a church have a right to discipline a member? The authority is delegated from God in Heaven. There is no authority higher than the local church on earth to serve as an “ecclesiastical court” in dealing with discipline.

Repeating a previous promise given to Peter (16:19), Jesus now applies it to the church: *“whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”* (18:18b). As noted before, the Roman Catholic church twists this passage into authority for Peter as first Pope and all his successors to rule as head of the church. In this context this promise is given to all believers not just Peter. In effect Jesus is saying the “whatever you will bind at anytime in the future has already been bound by God in Heaven and whatever will loose at anytime in the future has already been loosed by God in Heaven.” The Greek grammar supports this reading. This is a promise of divine recognition of obedient behavior by the church to carry out discipline of a impenitent member and not ratification of a new church law. Jesus is not giving the apostles or the church any legislative powers to create laws on earth and God will just automatically accept them in Heaven.

The church does have authority to discipline or receive back a brother depending on the sinners willingness to repent. This is not an inherent authority to forgiving sins which is a claim made by Catholicism. The church has delegated authority already from heaven to initiate discipline in the future. Peter and the apostles had been given the authority to take the keys of the kingdom and open them for the Jews and Gentiles to be saved and added to the church. Here the church has been given the authority to shut the door on the unrepentant brother and to open it again when he comes to repentance.

A second support of the church’s right and responsibility to discipline its members is given by Jesus. *“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven”* (18:19). The term “agree” comes from the Greek *sumphonea* form which we get the English term symphony. This is used to refer to various instruments coming together to create a harmonized sound. The term “anything” is *pragma* in the Greek and “is a term frequently limited to judicial matters. Here Jesus reiterates the actions of Christian discipline, following God’s guidelines, have his endorsement.” (Blomberg 281).

This verse has also been abused to teach the idea that the prayer of two or three is more effective than the prayer of one righteous man. First, God has promised to hear and answer the prayers of the righteous (John 14:13; 1 John 5:14). Provided that we do not ask amiss (James 4:3). Furthermore, the number of men agreeing in prayer does not effect the power of prayer or grant an answer or empower God to perform. *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5:16).

The third reassurance to the church’s duty to discipline is given in verse twenty: *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”* The mention of “two” relates to the need for two or three witnesses as required in verse 16. Coffman wrote “in the name of Christ means, by his commandment, by the authority of his will and teaching, in obedience to his specific commandments.” Only God can be present anywhere and everywhere. Jesus is clearly making a claim to be Deity by having divine omnipresence. Christ is present when we worship, however this passage is dealing with the authority behind the practice of church discipline and not worship services. Christ has promised to be with the church when it pursued this process according to the rules God has made already in heaven.

Again, this verse has been distorted by those who have ripped it from its context and made to define what a local church is and when it exist. Some will argue that as long as two Christians are gathered together they represent a congregation whether it be on a boat fishing or on a golf course. They also claim that such a gathering can partake of the Lord’s Supper communing with the Lord who is present.

Questions:

1. In Jesus' second prediction of His death and resurrection what details did He add?
2. How did the disciples respond to this?
3. What is the Temple tax? How was it used?
4. How much was the Temple tax? Why did Jesus have Peter use the coin to pay both their taxes?
5. What is unique and amazing about this miracle?
6. Why didn't Jesus have to pay this tax?
7. Why did He pay the tax?
8. Why did Jesus call a little child to Him?
9. What is the question they asked? What question should they have asked?
10. What if the Twelve fail to become like little children?
11. What childlike quality does Jesus require of them?
12. Did this finally settle the argument among the disciples as to who is greatest in the Kingdom?
13. Who are the *"little ones"* in verses five and six?
14. What would be a better punishment for those who cause a little one to stumble?
15. Does 18:10 support the teaching of guardian angels for children? Explain.

16. How much does a shepherd care about one sheep out of a hundred gone missing? How does this relate to God's care for the lost soul?
17. Does the shepherd's rejoicing over the one lost sheep devalue the other ninety-nine? Explain.
18. List the steps in the effort to recover a brother in sin.
19. Why is it so important to keep a private matter between brethren private at first?
20. How is the church to be involved?
21. What does the final step involve?
22. List in our own words the authority God has delegated to the church to take discipline on a impenitent member?

Application & Discussion:

1. Since a Christian is a child of God, should they be required to pay taxes or exempt from giving in support of God's House since he is a member of the household of God? Explain. (See Matt. 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14; 1 Cor. 16:1-3).
2. Give examples of how we can be stumbling blocks to the faith others today.

Homework: Seek out a lost "little one" and restore them to the fold.

Unmerciful Servant & Unmerciful Divorce

Matthew 18:21 - 19:9

Previously Jesus warned the warring disciples who were arguing about being greater in the coming Kingdom. They needed to not offend the “little ones” of the kingdom (18:7-10). They were required understand the every lost soul have great value to God (18:10-14). Every brother is responsible for seeking the loss soul of a sinning brother and the church had a responsibility and authority to discipline those who refuse to repent. Peter picks on up the ultimate goal of forgiveness and asks Jesus, “*Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?*” (18:21). How often is a brother to pursue a sinner and go through the steps mentioned in verses fifteen through seventeen? Jesus focuses not the quantity of forgiving but the quality of having mercy. In the Parable of the unmerciful servant he demonstrates by way of contrast the merciful forgiveness of God. Next, Jesus contrast the desire of the Pharisees to promote divorce for just any reasons by mercifully showing that God made marriage lifelong relationship only to be end by divorce for cause of adultery.

Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, 18:21-35

◆ **Mercy Is a Quality, Not a Quantity**

The Jewish religious leadership and scholars had long debated this issue of the number of times one was to be forgiven. Rabbinical tradition said three times (based erroneously on Job 33:29,30 and Amos 1:3-2:6. Rabbi Jose Ben Hanina said, "He that begs forgiveness from his neighbor must not do so more than three times". Rabbi Jose ben Jehuda said, "The fourth time they do not forgive." Ben Sira bids a man admonish an offending neighbor twice, but is silent as to any further forgiveness (Ecclus. 19:13-17).

Peter realized that Jesus often disagreed with the traditions of the Jews. If they taught three and others among them claimed four, he would add them together and suggest to Jesus seven times. Perhaps he was influenced by Jesus' statement recorded in Luke 17:3,4 that one should forgive his brother seven times a day, if the brother repented. His answer is statistical, not spiritual.

Jesus qualifies mercy instead of quantifying mercy. Seven times seventy is 490. This count is daily. No matter how bad I have been my wife has never had to forgive me this many times in the day. Jesus uses hyperbole to teach that limits are not to be set on forgiveness. Forgiveness is seen as a duty to be performed for others not just a gift to be given with limitations to be stipulated.

◆ **Mercy is Greatly Needed for All Men**

It illustrate His point Jesus makes use of a parable about an unmerciful servant. Only Matthew records this parable. The parable contrasts the mercy of God with man's unmerciful attitude toward others. The parable demonstrates the righteous merciful forgiveness characterized in a true kingdom citizen.

The unmerciful servant owed a enormous amount at ten thousand talents. How he managed to get in this impossible financial bind we are not told. A talent weighed of 1400 ounces or 87 1/2 pounds. A talent of gold at today's prices would be \$25,298,000,000. A talent of silver at today's prices would be \$313,320,000. Whether it be twenty-billion on a third of a billion, this is some serious debt.

Every man's debt of sin before God is even greater. No man can pay the debt of sin on a single sin yet alone pay for all his sins. All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Our sins cannot be estimated or numbered (Job. 22:5). Shakespeare's Macbeth, speaking of his own deep guilt, says that the whole ocean would not suffice to wash the blood from his hands, but would in fact dye the whole sea red.

The servant's only hope was the mercy of the king. His promise was futile. He was absolutely bankrupt, and had no means whatever of meeting the deficit. But his plea touched the heart of the king.

◆ **Mercy of God Is Great Toward Man**

The king in the parable is God or Christ. The king is willing to take a great loss. He is able to afford it. After all, there is no way the man can repay. God does not want to lose a single sinner (2 Pet. 3:9). God is willing to forgive us of all our sins (Is. 1:18; Ps. 103:12; I Jn. 1:9). Notice the need for the servant to have displayed a penitent attitude before mercy was extended.

◆ **Mercy of Often Greatly Lacking from One Man Toward Another**

Whereas the king was willing to forgive and forget the debt, the servant went out and found a fellow servant who only owed him one hundred denarii. One denarius was the wages paid a day laborer. This would have been about a third of a year's wages. Still a sizeable sum. But no where close to what he had owed the king. It was a custom to take a debtor by the throat and force them to court.

The second debtor also pleads for mercy with the same words and same posture. But he will receive mercy. The unmerciful servant expected more out of his fellow servant than he did himself and even more than the king had expect from him. The measure of God's forgiveness should have been the gauge of his forgiveness (Mt. 6:14,15).

This unmerciful servant was "*implacable*" (Rom. 1:31). This means he was "constant in enmity, relentless, not to be pacified or appeased."

◆ **Mercy of God Should Motivate Our Mercy Toward Man**

Man should have mercy because God is merciful. The King warned by the other servants of the unmerciful servant's actions calls for him. He reminds him of the royal mercy given him. "*I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on our fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?*" (18:32-33).

Looking at the cross of Christ should be enough motivation by all men to show compassion to another who seek mercy from us. The word forgive actually come from the English "forth-give". God and the Son gave it all.

◆ **Mercy Received Is Predicated upon Showing Mercy toward Man**

Failure to show pity placed the unmerciful servant back into the same situation that he had previously avoided and in the same situation was the one who owed him a debt. Debtors' prisons existed for many centuries. The debtors lost everything. They were incarcerated until they repaid all the remaining debt. In this case, the unmerciful servant was going to be imprisoned forever.

This passage has been abused by some to teach the idea of purgatory. This is the place where sinners go after death to "burn-off" their remaining debt of sin against God. However, after death comes judgment. The dead will go either to paradise or a place of torment separated by a great expanse that cannot be crossed (Luke 15; Heb. 9:27). This twisting of Jesus' words would imply there is another way to have one's sins repaid, that is, paying for them by way of suffering. This view is not compatible with the rest of Biblical teaching.

Notice the unmerciful servant was not given over to the tormentors for his debt, but for his failure to show the mercy the King had previous shown him. How sad that many Christians will experience the joy of God's mercy only to lose their soul because they cannot forgive another.

Furthermore, Jesus had previously taught the unmercifulness inhibits ability to pray for mercy, (6:9-15' also see Eph. 4:32; Js. 2:13.). Our salvation from sin depends upon God's willingness to forgive us and our willingness to forgive. A man once said to John Wesley, "I never forgive!" Wesley responded, "then I hope, sir, that you never sin."

Transition, 19:1,2

This is another transition passage ending the previous teaching section on Matthew. "*Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.*"

Divorce for Any Reason, 19:3-9

When divorce becomes common place and acceptable in the world and among the denominations, you can count on the fact that New Testament Christians are going to be strongly influenced. Some will just approve of divorce because it is culturally acceptable and legal. Others will twist the teachings of the New Testament to permit the scandalous disgrace of divorce.

What would Jesus say if He was permitted to answer the question: "Can one divorce for just any reason?" In fact, Jesus was asked this very question by the Pharisees. He gave a very detailed and concise answer in Matthew 19:1-9.

Jesus was passing through the territory of Perea (which means "beyond", i.e. it was the land beyond the Jordan River). While healing the people, He was approached by the Pharisees. They asked Him, *"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"* (19:3). The question was not asked by enquiring minds but for the purpose of testing Him or discrediting Jesus publicly before the people. Perea was the territory ruled by Herod Antipas. The same Herod whom John the Immerser condemned for having an unlawful marriage to his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. As a result of his teaching, John was imprisoned and later beheaded (Matt. 14:3-12). Perhaps, the Pharisees were hoping that Jesus would speak out and meet the same fate as His cousin. At least Jesus would go against the popular beliefs and practices of Jewish society by taking the unpopular and unscriptural view of rabbi Shammai who declared that divorce was never permitted. The Pharisees accepted the teachings of rabbi Hillel who permitted the Jews to divorce for such minor marital grievances as burning the bread or putting too much salt in the food.

Jesus started to answer by pointing out that the Scriptures were clear on this matter: *"Have you not read..."* This would have been an insult to the Pharisees, since they considered themselves experts in the Law of Moses. He was indicating that the Pharisees should have discovered that answer for themselves by reading the Bible.

Instead of referring to a learned rabbi or a command from the Law of Moses, Jesus points to God who designed marriage from the very beginning to be a monogamous and permanent relationship. *"He who made them at the beginning made them male and female"* (19:4). God in His wisdom and perfect creation only made one man and one woman. This not only rules out polygamy, polyandry, homosexuality, etc. but it also rules out divorce. God gave Eve to Adam to be his wife. If that did not work out there was no other woman to choose. God did not make another woman or two on the side just in case Eve put too much starch on his fig leaf. So, Jesus is saying, "No, a man cannot divorce his wife for just any reason because God only made one man and one woman in His perfect creation."

Next, to further answer the question, Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 in verse Matthew 19:5: *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife."* Keep in mind that this was not said for the sake of Adam and Eve so much as for their posterity. After all, they did not have a mother and father, but they were joined by God together in marriage. The term for *"joined"* here carries the idea of being "glued together" or "cemented together as one." Once cemented, they are never meant to come apart. Again, Jesus answers the question posed by the Pharisees: "No! God joined them to one another, so they were never to come apart."

Jesus takes up another argument to support His teaching as verse five continues: *"and the two shall become one flesh?" So then, they are no longer two but one flesh."* The man and the woman are no longer two distinct individuals who can leave and do as they please with whomever they please. Instead, the two are one. "One flesh" may denote the sex act in which a couple will produce a child which is literally the product of two becoming one. Again, Jesus answers, "No! Because two have been made into one and one is not to be divided into two."

In verse six, Jesus concludes His answer for the moment by saying, *"Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."* A husband and wife are like inseparable siamese twins – to separated them would bring destruction. In the marriage two become one. When one of the marriage partners puts the other away unscripturally then one becomes two, and God's arrangement has been disregarded. God made the marriage, man has no right to destroy what God has created. The answer

to the Pharisees' questions is still, "No! Because man does not have the right to separate what God has created."

The Pharisees are not satisfied with Jesus' answer which is based on the creation account in Genesis. They have a ready rebuttal from Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which is alluded to in their argument in verse seven. "*They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?'*" Jesus immediately counters their argument in verse eight, "*Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.*" A quick reading of the text in Deuteronomy will show two distinct facts: 1) This was not a command from Moses but a concession and 2) divorce was not allowed for any reason but for a case of "uncleanness" or "nakedness." Whatever this involved it was not adultery. After all, adulterers were executed (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24). It must have been something just short of adultery, such as allowing another man to see her nakedness or to touch her inappropriately. However, it does not support the idea of Rabbi Hillel and the Pharisees of divorcing a wife for just any reason (like burning the toast). The Pharisees were pitting Moses against Jesus. Jesus is essentially refuting this by implying, "No! Moses did not say, 'Yes, you can divorce for just any reason.' If you want to quote Moses, God's Lawgiver, you must go back to the creation account in Genesis for the answer to your question."

Having quoted Genesis to support His teaching on divorce, Jesus now speaks from His own authority in verse nine: "*And I say to you...*" He now reminds them of His previous teaching on divorce (see Mt. 5:32) as verse nine continues, "*whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.*" Jesus gives the one and only exception for divorce and that is sexual immorality or adultery. A paraphrase of Jesus' answer would read: "No! I say you cannot divorce for just any reason. The only reason for divorce is sexual immorality."

There is one more reason why Jesus forbids divorce for just any reason. If a man divorces his wife for just any reason he causes her to commit adultery when she remarries. Divorce for any reason is not guilt-free option. A mate cannot divorce his or her spouse for just any cause and walk away innocent of any sin. Jesus' qualification "*except for sexual immorality*" only permits the innocent party who remarries to do so without becoming an adulterer or adulteress. So Jesus is giving a final "No! Because divorce for just any old reason causes others to enter adulterous relationships when they remarry and you will be held accountable for your role in these sins."

"*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?*" What did Jesus say? He said, "No...No...No...No...No...NO...NO!!!" For those who still argue that one can divorce for just any reason Jesus would ask, "What part of 'NO!' don't you understand? I told you 'no' seven times! How is it that you can turn around and say 'yes'?"

Still some will argue that you can divorce for any reason so long as you do not remarry. Jesus never said that. The subject of remarriage did not come up until verse nine and was not part of the original question. This argument would have to be proved using other passages because Jesus only gave one exception for divorce. Furthermore, this argument is still saying "yes" after Jesus has already said "no" seven times.

In short, to divorce before your spouse is guilty of fornication is a sin. It is a sin whether or not one or both remarry or remain unmarried or reconcile. All who sin will be held accountable. Therefore, those who have divorced for any reason other than sexual immortality must repent.

Questions:

1. Does Jesus give a literal 490 times a day limit on forgiveness? Explain.
2. How much did the first servant owe in today's gold or silver?

3. How does this man's debt relate to our debt of sin?
4. What was the man's only option?
5. How much to the second servant owe?
6. What did the first servant have down to the second servant?
7. What did the king do to the first servant upon learning of his unmerciful treatment of the second?
8. Does this parable support the doctrine of purgatory? Explain.
9. Divorce was rare in American society in the past. Why is it so common today?
10. Who asked Jesus the question: "Can one divorce for just any reason?" What motivated them to ask this?
11. During Jesus day what were the two common views of divorce?
12. How does the fact that God created humanity as male and female rule our divorce? What else does in rule out?
13. What does the fact that God "joined" Adam and Eve together in marriage say about divorce?
14. How does the joining of two as one in marriage oppose the idea of divorce?
15. Did Moses allow the Jews to divorce for just any reason? Explain.

16. What is the one reason Jesus gave for divorce?
17. What is the final reason Jesus gave for couples not divorcing for just any reason?
18. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 would if someone has already divorce for the wrong reason?
19. How did Jesus' disciples react to His strict teaching on divorce?
20. What of the husband who beats his wife or the wife who is a drug addict who abuses the children? Can we add another reason for divorce? Explain.
21. Why does God hate divorce?
22. How many people are guilty of adultery when a man and a woman divorce without adultery and both marry someone else?

Application & Discussion:

1. How many times does Jesus in effect say “no” to the Pharisees’ question?
2. Can a couple not divorce but indefinitely separate? Is it a sin or acceptable to God? Explain.

Homework: Find a struggling married couple and encourage them to be faithful to their marriage covenant with they made before God.

Acceptance into the Kingdom

Matthew 19:10 - 19:30

To be a part of the Kingdom requires the ability to accept or make room for the kingdom requirements in a disciple's life. Jesus first speaks of those disciples who can accept a life of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. Next, although rejected by the apostles, Jesus accepts the little children whose characteristics all are required to have in the Kingdom. The rich, young ruler comes to Jesus and cannot accept Jesus' answers concerning his soul's deep need. Jesus warns that the rich cannot gain acceptance into the kingdom but by the power of God.

Jesus' Teaching on Celibacy, 19:10-12

The word "case" is translated "cause" in the King James version in verse 19:3. Can a man divorce his wife for just any cause or in any situation? Jesus has said "NO!" Therefore the disciples are overwhelmed. Marriage is permanent and a divorce is not a easy out. Only in the situation or for the cause of adultery can a man divorce his wife. If so, they concluded, "it is better not to marry" (19:10b). The term "better" is not a comparison. Celibacy is not being exulted over marriage. The American Standard Version translates "it is not expedient to marry." In the minds of the disciples a man may be benefitted by making a wiser choice by not getting married than to live the rest of his life in a bad marriage.

Remember the twelve would have been taught that marriage has an easy out: divorce for any reason. "Among the Talmudic writings of the rabbis is the statement, 'A bad wife is like leprosy to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him divorce her and be cured of his leprosy.' Another rabbi wrote, 'if a man has a bad wife, it is a religious duty to divorce her'" (MacArthur 172). Although the Old Testament encourages a man to value a good wife (Prov. 5:18,19; 18:22; 19:14), it does not support the idea of ending a marriage in divorce (which God hates) for the simple reason a man does not think he has a "good" woman.

When Jesus responds with "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given" (19:11), He is not suggesting that a disciple has the right to accept or reject His teachings on this matter. The term "accept" means to make a space or provide a place. This is used in the metaphorical sense of making room in one's heart (John 8:37; 2 Cor.7:2). Not all will have the heart or strength of mind to be able to remain celibate.

Jesus lists three categories of eunuchs who will not marry. First, there are those "who were born thus from their mother's womb" (19:12a). These have not made a choice on their situation any more those born blind or without limbs. Second group involves those "eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men," (19:12b). Ancient kings often had men who served in the royal courts and in protecting their harems to be castrated. Others were made eunuchs in service to pagan gods. Finally, "there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (19:12c). This final group is not hindered from marrying due to some physical malady but by their choice not to marry. The motivation for not marrying is "for the kingdom of heaven's sake." This does not mean some form of self-mutilation.

Paul may have been in this category. "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that" (1 Cor. 7:7). He saw this as a gift but not in the sense of a gift from the Holy Spirit or a gift given by means of prayer. He goes on in this chapter to mention the benefits of those who are able to live the single life. This in no way has Paul

or Jesus commending celibacy as being a superior situation for a Christian over marriage.

This third group of men and women who chose to remain unmarried do so because they would rather not involve a family in the dangerous missionary work they have volunteered to do for the God's kingdom. Or they may not be able to remarry after they have committed adultery against their spouse and have been put away (divorced). Or they have divorced without a scriptural reason and must "*remain unmarried or be reconciled*" (1 Cor. 7:11). Or they are the innocent spouse divorced by an spouse who simply wants out of the marriage. Finally, there may be one who has to end an adulterous marriage (5:32; 14:4).

Although eunuchs may have had limitations placed upon them under the Law of Moses (Deut. 23:1) Christ's kingdom is wide open to them. This is seen in the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion recorded in Acts 8.

Jesus concludes with a challenge "*He who is able to accept it, let him accept it*" (19:12b). This is not to be viewed as a allowance to opt out of this commands. Jesus is saying "take it or leave it, it is up to you." The strict marriage rules in the Kingdom may be too hard from some to take to heart. In the end it is a matter of total commitment to whatever Jesus has taught or total rejection of the Kingdom.

All the more reason Christian should not enter marriage in haste without counting the cost of a life long commitment with only one exception for divorce. But remember remaining single has it risks of temptations and loneliness which can also be just as hard to bear. So choose celibacy or marriage but in doing so choose always to follow Jesus' commandments with regard to which ever you choose.

The Kingdom of Children, 19:13-15

What follows the discussion on celibacy is one of the most endearing stories about Jesus as He is not too busy for "*little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray*" (19:13a).

- **Attitude of the Parents**

In this context parents are coming to Jesus bringing their children. Whereas the general term for children (*paidia*) is use by Matthew, Luke uses *brepheos* meaning babies who had to be carried. This corresponds with Mark 10:13 which says the parents "*brought*" means "to bear" or "carry". It was customary for fathers to bring their some child to a local synagogue to have an elder or rabbi hold the child and pray. Christian parents have an obligation to so care for their children (Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:5).

- **Attitude of the Apostles**

However, "*the disciples rebuked*" these parents. Had the apostles already forgotten Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom and their need for a childlike attitude in regard the nature of the Kingdom (18:1-4)? Was it still a sense of pride causing them to chase away these parents with their children? Jesus had previous held a child while teaching this lesson. Perhaps they were concerned about their over worked Rabbi or their need to help Him in his mission by not being interrupted by this nuisance of praying for little children when He had much bigger issues to contend with. The rebuking was an ongoing action. They kept up rebuking as the parents kept on bringing their children. Jesus' time was being wasted by these inconsiderate parents.

- **Attitude of Jesus**

Whatever their attitude or motive may have been, Jesus becomes angry and sharply scolds them for this (Luke 18:15b). Jesus said, "*Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (19:14).

Jesus shows the proper attitude toward the parents and their children. "*And He laid His hands on them and departed from there*" (19:15). He hugs them or that is He enfolds his arms around them. Next He prays. What this prayer consisted of one can only guess. It does show Jesus elevating the children above the view of the disciples. The Bible teaches children are a blessing (Ps. 127:3-5a) and should be blessed (Luke 9:48). At one time Jesus had been a baby and was a blessing to the world and received blessing by others.

- **Attitude of a Child**

The nature of the kingdom is a key element of the teaching of Jesus. He proclaims here that a child is a good representation of a kingdom citizen. The ideal citizen who enters the kingdom will possess these childlike qualities. Children are submissive, receptive to rebuke, teachable, innocent, dependent and trusting, and as stated before have the humility it takes to be great in the Kingdom of God. A child has nothing which will hinder them in coming to the King, but all men will not come to the kingdom unless they come like a child.

Rich Young Ruler, 19:16-22

Each of the first three Gospels records story of the rich, young ruler. Each one adds details. Luke calls him a “*ruler*” (Luke 18:18). Perhaps he was a ruler of a synagogue. Thus, making him a religious leader. Matthew tells us he had great possessions and was young. Therefore, he is the rich, young ruler.

He seemed to have no ulterior motive and was willing to listen and learn. His question was: “*Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*” (19:16). He was seeking a single act or good deed which would procure him eternal life. There is not one thing to do or his need to focus on limiting the requirements.

The phrase “*eternal life*” is found some fifty times in the New Testament. In Matthew it is found here and in verse 29. It is equivalent to “*kingdom*” in verse twenty-three and “*saved*” in verse twenty-five.

Notice Jesus does not say to him, “There is nothing for you to do. I will do all that needs to be done. Salvation is a gift.” The Law of Moses still required obedience to God’s commandments. God’s part is grace, man’s part is obedient faith.

Jesus does not answer his questions right away, but first deals with the issue of the meaning of “*goodness*”. Jesus answers his question with a question. “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God*” (19:17). “The Good” is a Jewish title for God. Only God is good or perfectly good. If Jesus is good, He is God. God who is Good is the only real source of eternal life.

Jesus was not being insensitive to this great potential for discipleship. He answers the young man: “*But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments*” (19:17b). Salvation is conditional upon respect and obedience of God’s word. Perfect obedience is not possible nor does it merit eternal life. But God has always required many to work out his own salvation by doing the works of God.

The young man responds with “*Which ones?*” Did he think like many of the Jews of the day that some commandments were more important than others? Did he regard some as optional?

Jesus lists six commandments from the Law of Moses. He skips the first five commandments in the Decalogue and mentions only the fifth through the ninth (Ex. 20:12-16), He adds a sixth commandment about loving one’s neighbor from (Lev. 19:18). Jesus is not saying these are more important. They represent a sampling of all the commandments God wants him to obey. Jesus’ listing is not an attempt to sum up all that needs to be done as if eternal life is a matter of checking off a to do list. The commandments represent the will of God revealing to man what He wants the obedient to do.

“*The young man said to Him, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?’*” (19:20). He is not insincere or bragging. Like Cornelius, the young man has been obedient. But he stills feels a deep sense of personal inadequacy. He is not like the Pharisees who felt they need nothing and are righteous.

Jesus spoke the truth in love (Mark 10:21). “*If you want to be perfect*” (19:21a). The term “perfect” is not the concept of sinless perfection but that of completeness or wholeness or full maturity. Jesus wanted him to recognize that something was missing. He was blind to the shortcoming in his life. He must first recognize his sin of covetousness and removing anything in his life that would hinder him for following Jesus.

The first thing this young man must do is “*sell what your have.*” Jesus knew that this man loved material wealth. Possessions were his god. Selling all one’s possessions was never made a universal condition of discipleship. Or was it? “*So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple*” (Luke 14:33). Discipleship requires removal from the heart and life of a man anything that

will hinder total commitment. Although ownership of property was not condemned by Jesus or forbidden to members of His kingdom. Money is not evil. The love of money is the problem (1 Tim. 6:10).

Jesus left off the tenth commandment: *"Thou shalt not covet."* Covetousness had reached such a degree in the young man's heart that if he did not go to this extreme, he would never be a disciple much less have eternal life. Christ knew literally what was best for him.

The next step was to *"give to the poor."* This was not a requirement given to all those seeking eternal life or discipleship. Zacchaeus committed to give only half of his wealth to the poor. Jesus agreed with this (Luke 19:8-9). But with all his wealth and obedience the young man may have overlooked the needs of the poor. The poor were his neighbors too.

The promised reward of doing this is *"you will have treasure in heaven"* (see 6:19-20).

Finally, Jesus tells him to *"come, follow Me."* A great invitation where the yoke is easy and the burden is light (11:29-30). The rich, young ruler was being called to go on the road with an itinerant rabbi in full time discipleship. This would require a major sacrifice and change of life style.

"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (19:22). He came to Jesus with the right respect calling him good *"Teacher"* and bowing down. He came with the right question, the right motive, but he still made the wrong decision. He was not willing to give up the temporal for the eternal. He would go away grieving with great sorrow, not for his spiritual loss but because of his material attachment. He did not have riches, his riches had him. He was not the master of his money, materialism was his master. He was sorry that he could not be rich in both worlds. He realized he would not be able to serve two master. He came to a fork in the road and had to make a decision. He chose the broad way. It did not lead to eternal life (7:13,14). He came seeking eternal life but left without it. How very, very sad indeed.

With God All Things Are Possible, 19:23-30

When the rich, young ruler reject Jesus demands for discipleship, Jesus *"became very sorrowful."* He could offer him no second choice. Either Christ will be ALL or NOTHING at all. So Jesus now turns to His disciples to utilize this disappointing encounter to teach them a lesson about material possessions and position. Too often the rich become self-sufficient to the point of not depending upon God to supply what money cannot buy (Rev. 3:17).

By way of explaining how hard it is for a rich man to have eternal life Jesus says, *"it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* (19:24). It is hard to overlook the humor behind this statement. Jesus brings to their mind a picture of a camel struggling to go through the eye of a needle. The camel was the largest animal known in Palestine and the eye of the needle as the smallest opening. Jesus often used humor to make a lasting memorable point. The Persians had a similar proverbial saying involving an elephant.

Some have argued that Jesus was referring not to a literal needle but to a gate at Jerusalem. First, of all, if this gate did exist at the time of Jesus there were many other gates a camel hauling its burden could easily access. Second, Jesus was describing something impossible. Hence the disciples' response. Mark uses *raphis* coming from the verb *rhapto* meaning "to sew." Showing that Jesus had a literal eye of a needle in mind. Luke uses *belone* which "is the peculiar word for the surgical needle" (Vincent). W. E. Vine apply states, "The idea of applying 'the needle's eye' to small gates seems to be a modern one; there is no ancient trace of it. The Lord's object in the statement is to express human impossibility and there is no need to endeavor to soften the difficulty by taking the needle to mean anything more than the ordinary instrument." Finally, a literal gate with a camel crawling through it on its knees makes the impossible - a possibility. This contradicts the context.

The response of the disciples was *"they were greatly astonished"* (19:25a). They were overwhelmed at this inconceivable claim of Jesus. The Jews viewed the blessings of wealth as proof of God's favor upon an individual. This belief was based upon a misapplication of Deuteronomy 28:1-14. Which was not a promise to an individual Israelite but to them in general as a nation.

The apostles explain why they are so perplexed. If this be the case *"Who then can be saved?"*

(19:25b). If any one should be in the “kingdom” or have “eternal life” or “be saved” it was this young man. What hope did anyone have, even the Twelve? From a mere human standpoint it is impossible whether he has one dollar or a billion. After all, earthly treasure tends to choke out the Word.

Jesus explained that eternal life was not hopeless. Salvation is not a matter of wealth or works but God’s grace. *“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”* (19:26).

This statement is not all inclusive. God is able to accomplish His will (Luke 1:37), but God is not able to lie for that is impossible (Heb. 6:19). It is possible by faith to see God accomplish through His power what would be impossible for us without Him (17:20). However, without faith it is impossible please Him (Heb. 11:6).

Jesus did not say that it was impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, but impossible for those who trust in their riches. Mark’s account adds that Jesus is talking about those who *“trust in riches”*. Having wealth is not a hindrance to the Kingdom. Barnabas was wealthy. But if one puts their trust in wealth they will miss eternal life. Being a camel and carrying your material possessions through the gates of Heaven is impossible. Have you ever seen a hearse towing a u-haul?

Peter, speaking for the Twelve, reminded Jesus they *“have left all and followed”* Him (19:27a) when called by Jesus. Peter, Andrew, James and John left their fishing nets and Matthew his tax table. Therefore it was only logical to ask, *“what shall we have?”* (19:27b).

Jesus does not rebuke Peter and the rest but tells them to listen up to something that is of grave importance.

He speaks of an event coming in their future: *“in the regeneration”* (19:26b). It literally means a new birth or beginning. The term is found in one other passage: *“according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration”* (Tit. 3:5).

A variety of interpretations of the regeneration can be found. One of the most popular views comes from Premillennialists who claim this will happen when the Lord returns again to establish his 1000 year reign in Jerusalem sitting upon the throne of David and with the Twelve ruling over the literal nations of the world. This is a false doctrine not supported by the Bible. However, the regeneration may be referring to the resurrection of Jesus. After all, He was brought back to life. There is also a spiritual resurrection that regenerates a new beginning for all who are baptized (Rom. 6:1-6). Others see this event taking place on the Day of Pentecost when Christ has ascended to His throne in Heaven. The apostles rule or judge the sinners telling what to do and the saved who look to their doctrine to be faithful kingdom citizens (Acts 2:42).

The event mentioned above was to take place *“when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory”* (19:28c). Peter said that Jesus was sitting upon the throne on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:).

Jesus promises the Twelve *“who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (19:28b). These thrones are spiritual and represent their place of authority to judge men on Jesus behalf. They would condemn men of their sin, they would tell them what they must do to be forgiven of their sins and be added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:38,47). The apostles doctrine would then guide them or in matters of kingdom living (Acts 2:42).

Notice Jesus does not give preeminence to Peter, showing the equality of the Twelve.

The promise is given in regard to multiplication on a massive scale. The homes and family one gains as a Christian is *“a hundredfold.”* This promise is contingent upon having sacrificed *“for My name’s sake.”* Spiritual blessings and relationships abound when choosing to follow Christ. Jesus reminds them they are making an investment for their future not just sacrifices their life on earth.

This is not to be taken literally. After all, having a hundred wives and a hundred children (not to mention a hundred in-laws) would not be a blessing.

However, this is not a promise for all disciples to be healthy and wealthy as if this is a formula for getting rich. This is not a passage meant to manipulate God into giving to just because we gave or sacrificed in His name. Instead it may reflect the promise of 6:33: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* How? After Pentecost when some of the disciples had serious needs, many of the others would supply these needy saints with a place to stay and food just as if they were family.

As the discussion with the young man began with a pursuit of eternal life, Jesus now promises the Twelve they will "*inherit eternal life.*"

Questions:

1. What did the disciples say "*it is better not to marry*"?
2. What was the common view about marriage and divorce during the time of Jesus?
3. What are the three categories of eunuch listed by Jesus?
4. What are some reasons why some are celibate for the sake of the kingdom?
5. Why did parents bring little children to Jesus?
6. How did the apostles respond to this?
7. What did Jesus do with the little children?
8. What is the attitude of a child? Why is that a good model for kingdom citizens to emulate?
9. What questions does the young man ask?
10. Who is "*good*"?
11. Which commandments does Jesus suggest to the young man? Which one is ironically left out?
12. What must the young man do to be "*perfect*"? Why?

13. What reward did Jesus promise him?
14. How did the young man respond?
15. Is Jesus talking about a literal camel and eye of a needle or does this refer to a gate in Jerusalem? Explain.
16. Why did this impossibility of a rich man getting into the Kingdom perplexing to the apostles?
17. What is the "*regeneration*"?
18. What reward did Jesus promise the Twelve?
19. What reward did Jesus promise to all those to come to the kingdom?

Application & Discussion:

1. What are some teachings of Jesus which you find hard to accept?
2. Is Matthew 19:15 teaching that children are to be baptized into the Kingdom/church? Explain.

Homework: Consider what things are you willing to accept and/or give up to be a part of the kingdom?

The Road to Reward

Matthew 19:30-20:1-34

The previous chapter concluded with a promise of reward to the disciples. Jesus give the parable of the laborers in the vineyard to show His willingness to reward all workers in the kingdom at His discretion. Jesus reminds them that the road to reward involves His death and resurrection. The mother of James and John seek the reward of the right and left thrones next to Jesus. Jesus can only promise them the reward of the cup and baptism of suffering. Jesus points to reward and greatness that will result from practicing servant leadership with self-sacrificing. Finally, Jesus rewards two blind men with sight while on the road through Jericho to Jerusalem.

“The First Shall Be Last, and the Last, First”

The above paradox of Jesus is found once in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). This paradox is sequel to the incident of the rich young ruler who could not bring himself to sell his property and give the proceeds to the poor. In Aesop’s fable of the Hare and the Tortoise the hare was fast and in first place until the he became overly confident and focused only on the here and now. As the hare napped the tortoise just went from first to last by focusing on the goal.

Being first in this competitive world is important because no one wants to be known as a loser but a winner. According to the world’s standards Jesus was a loser. He was not high-born, had not formal education, own very little, and died ignominiously upon a cross. However, He is now Lord of lords and King of kings.

Following Jesus requires us to be last in order to be first in His Kingdom. The Jewish religious leaders claimed a high position in the coming Messianic Kingdom. However, Jesus said to the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem, *“the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you”* (Mt. 21:28-32).

A parable follows to illustrate this paradox. The parable concludes by restating this paradox. Thus forming an inclusio.

Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, 20:1-16

The background to this parable is found in the previous chapter. Matthew twenty and verse one begins with *“for”* showing that this chapter is connected with the preceding. A rich young ruler came to Jesus wanting to know what he needed to do in order to obtain eternal life. When Jesus told him to sell all and give to the poor he was very disappointed. He left and as far as is known never became a disciple of Jesus and therefore he may have missed out on eternal life (Matt. 19:16-22). Jesus uses this situation to inform the twelve how difficult it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. In fact, without God’s grace it is impossible (Matt. 19:22-26). *“Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?’”* (Matt. 19:27). The rich man gave up nothing and left with nothing. Peter and others gave up everything and wanted to know what they would have in return. What kind of compensation package did Jesus offer for His disciples who gave up all. Like the rich ruler Peter and others have failed to realize that God will repay but it is not based on merit. The regeneration is during the time that Christ in on his throne. This would not take place until the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) when Peter preaches that prophecies is fulfilled and Christ is sitting on the throne of David on the right hand of God. The twelve would indeed give up will at that time be blessed with a commission: *“sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”*, also salvation: *“receive a hundredfold,”* and finally, *“inherit eternal life.”*

Although some have seen a contrast between the Jews and the Gentiles in this parable. The Jews being called first and the Gentiles last. The Gentiles are not mentioned. Neither is this a parable discussing the reward of those who obey the Gospel when they are young versus those who come to Christ at an advanced age. The parable is given to the twelve in response to Peter's question about what they may receive since they have given up so much from the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus uses a very familiar word picture for His parable. Day laborers were very common and an agrarian economy. The grape vineyard represented a large part of Palestine's agricultural produce. No labor organizations existed to assure fair wages. However, day-laborers were paid a denarius a day. All were paid at the end of each day because most families lived day to day. A denarius was about the size of the U.S. dime and worth about seventeen cents. To withhold a day-laborer his pay was cruel and wicked. The man needed that money to feed his family every day. The Law of Moses commanded, "*you shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down*" (Deut. 24:15; Lev. 19:13).

When the grape harvest began there was a great urgency to get the harvest in because ripe grapes cannot wait. The man went five times to the market to hire day-workers. The work days were divided into twelve equal parts and the length of the hour was determined by the length of the day. The last laborers hired were to be paid. In the New Testament it says, "*and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor*" (1 Cor. 3:8). This would mean that those who worked only one hour would expect just a twelfth of a denarius. The conflict results because they instead receive a denarius like every other worker.

The First Workers

The first workers have a Hireling Heart. Peter had left all and wanted to know what he would get in return. Yet the kingdom of Heaven is not like filling out a time card and turning it in. It is not like a business where so much work merits so much money. They were all day-laborers and no one has the rights of seniority. The workers who came the first hour demanded a contract to work for the day for a denarius. This is what they will receive. Those who work only for the pay they will receive do not really understand the nature of God's kingdom which is based on obedience that is greatly rewarded with eternal life which cannot be earned (Eph. 2:8-10). Jesus warned against the hireling spirit when He compared the Good Shepherd with the hireling in John 10.

The first workers have Envyng Eyes. "*A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him*" (Prov. 28:22). The eye is often used to express envy in the heart. David was envied of King Saul: "*Saul eyes David*" (1 Sam. 18:9). They are not just jealous of what the others have, they wish them not to have a full denarius. They needed to mind their own business and not eye what others received from a just and fair master. Peter would later look upon John and asked, "*But Lord, what about this man?*" Jesus said to him, "*If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me*" (John 21:21,22). Again, Jesus tells Peter not to eye another but to focus upon following Him which is just what a disciple is to do. Too many saints are people watchers. They need to please God and keep their eye on the goal - the prize of eternal life.

The first workers have Murmuring Mouths. They have no reason to complain. The landowner was fair. To impugn his character with unjust payment is morally wrong. Greek word *sumphoneo* for "*agreed*" implies a negotiated contract. They agreed to a denarius and received a denarius for a day of work. They murmured not because He was unjust but because he was merciful to the men who needed a day's pay to care for their families' needs. First, they compared themselves to others and next coveted what the others had, and finally they complained to the boss. They are like the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He complained against the mercy of the father because a fatted calf had never been killed for him. He had served the father faithfully for many years. When God rewards His servants for their obedience it is not a matter of merit but of grace. Grace by its very nature is not fair or earned but given in generosity. If the first workers were getting a raw deal it was their own fault. After all, it is the deal they agreed to. They were salaried workers for the day and received the right pay.

The reason for the discrepancy in pay has nothing to do with hourly wages. The landowner's generosity is why all received a denarius. It is not unjust for a man to keep his contract with the first

group and bless those in the last group with grace. Every worker received what he needed. Thus, there is no discrepancy between the justice of God and His grace.

The Last

The Last are Given Grace. Notice if the first group had been paid first they would have never known how generous the landowner was to the last group who worked for just an hour. Day-laborers were poor and lived day to day and hand to mouth. By receiving a minimum payment they were able to provide for their family that day. Grace responds to need with unmerited mercy not to a bill for that which has been earned.

The Last have an Appreciative Attitude. The last groups had not agreement for a denarius for the day's work. They trusted the landowner to be fair. They worked the same as the first group. They were not as blessed to find work at the beginning of the day. Just how appreciative they would be for the grace shown when they are paid a full day's pay. Better to be a grateful worker and a paid grumbler.

Attitude is important when working for the Lord. Remember Jonah who was all just forced to preach to the Ninevites. He obeyed but not out of an attitude of submission. He was later filled with bitter resentment for God's grace to those to whom he preached. Sometimes the attitude of obedience is more important than the amount of time spent obeying. The attitude of the apostles was not always properly adjusted to the true nature of the kingdom they served. They wanted first place. They wanted reward. Judas wanted riches so he stole and betrayed. When comparing the length of our service to God on earth with the length of our eternal reward in Heaven how can anyone have an attitude of gratitude?

The Last are Called and Chosen. Jesus ends His parable with "*so the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen*" (Matt. 20:16). Just before the parable begins, we are warned that the first may become the last. Then just as soon as the parable ends we are assured that the last may become first. Jesus uses this parable to assure the disciples that this paradox is true: the first will indeed be last and the last first. Today, all are called by the same Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), but not all that are called will make it to Heaven. It is up to us to make our "*calling and election sure*" (2 Peter 1:10).

Third Prediction of Jesus Death and Resurrection, 20:17-19

This is the third time Jesus predicts His suffering and resurrection (16:21;17:22,23). He had made several allusions to these events throughout His ministry. Why was this third prediction necessary? 1) They did not fully understand. Perhaps they thought this was not literal. 2) To demonstrate He is about to fulfill major Old Testament prophecies as "*the Son of Man*" (see Isaiah 53:2-8). 3) His ability to foresee the future demonstrates Him to be a true prophet of God. 4) They like all men are prone to forget and needed reminders. 5) The events were close at hand. They needed to be emotionally and spiritually prepared instead shocked by it. 6) To indicate to them this is part of God's plan and He is willing to submit to it. The events about to unfold were not an accident or a result of His failed miscalculations as a Messiah. 7) To further help them overcome the earthly Warrior-Messiah view that most Jews had. They were looking for the Lion of Judah who would go to Jerusalem and overthrow the political leadership and reestablish the kingdom. Instead all they were going to get was the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29). 8) Finally, He needed to add a few more details as He continues to expand this prediction bit by bit for their comprehension.

This reminder was given by Jesus after He "*took the twelve disciples aside on the road.*" They were most likely traveling with a group following Jesus as a crowd to see Him perform miracles for them and others and those "*going up to Jerusalem*" for the feasts. As they traveled toward Jericho, they would have to cross the Jordan River to head toward Jerusalem. Jerusalem was some 2,550 feet above sea level. While Jericho was 1,200 feet below sea level. The trip was a steep ascent covering some fifteen miles.

Jesus is going to explain exactly what they will be able to expect in Jerusalem. There are a dozen points to His prediction: 1) The place for these events will be at "*Jerusalem.*" 2) There He will be

“delivered” 3) “to the chief priests” 4) “and to the scribes.” 5) “They will condemn Him” 6) “to death.” 7) “And deliver Him to the Gentiles” 8) “to mock” 9) “and to scourge” 10) “and to crucify.” 11) “And the third day” 12) “He will rise again.”

Notice the added elements, such as, being taken to the Gentiles. This was fulfilled when they sent Jesus to Pilate. The Romans did not give the Jews the authority to hand down and execute capital punishment (26:66). He also adds the detail of “scourging” and crucifixion.

Two angels will remind the women at the tomb of Jesus’ prediction, and “they remembered his words” (Luke 24:8).

James and John Seek Greatness, 20:20-28

Self-Promotion to Greatness Promotes...

- **Cold-Hearted Desires**

Jesus no sooner finished His third prediction warning and preparing the Twelve for what is to come only to find it fell on deaf ears. All they could think about is the promised thrones (19:28). While Jesus is looking at the place appointed for Him on a cross, they are seeking a place of greatness upon a throne. Jesus spoke about a cross, but they were interested in a crown.

“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’” (20:20,21). By bowing down before Jesus in a stance of worship she was treating Jesus like royalty. James and John were not afraid to use their connections. And doting mothers are all too willing to be enablers. The sons likely shared Jesus’ promise of Twelve thrones with Salome. Like any good mother who wants the best success for her sons, She came to Jesus with a request. Notice Jesus does not speak to the mother but to the sons, knowing they were the ones behind the request. Perhaps this is why Mark’s account only mentions the two brothers (Mark 10:35). Nepotism was alive and well in the first century Palestine. (Just for the record, I am against nepotism, unless it helps out your family and friends). Their mother’s name is Salome based upon a comparison of Matthew 27:56 with Mark 15:40 . She was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25).

- **Selfish Ambition**

Salome asks Jesus, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom” (20:21). To sit on the right hand was to be second in command and the third position in the Kingdom would go to the one sitting on the king’s left. This request represents nothing short of selfish ambition so common among the twelve at this time. Paul warned, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3,4).

- **Ignorance**

James and John were still mistaken about the nature of the Kingdom. Furthermore, Jesus explains that they still had no idea of what was involved in being in a position of leadership under Him. Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (20:22).

Despite Jesus teachings about humility and greatness in His Kingdom, these three are woefully ignorant. Their request does not take into account Jesus’ suffering which He has predicted three times. Drinking from a cup is a figure of speech used in the Old Testament in reference to completely experiencing God’s wrath (Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Is. 51:17). It involves suffering (Jer. 49:12; Ezek. 23:32). The term “baptism” is used as a metaphor for being completely submerged into suffering (Luke 12:50). This “cup” of Jesus bitter sufferings was the subject of His prayer in Gethsemane. This cup and baptism of suffering was so great He asked God three times to remove it. But in the end He continued to submit to the will of the Father.

- **Blind Over-confidence**

Jesus asked if they would be able to drink the cup and be baptized with Him. There ignorantly

and overconfidently claimed, *“We are able.”* (20:22b). These *“Sons of Thunder”* were brash, bold men who wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven upon the disrespectful Samaritan villages (Luke 9:51-56). They may have thought they would be able to fight for Jesus as generals in the establishing of an earthly kingdom. However, James and John would flee right along with the rest of the twelve when Jesus was arrested (Matt. 26:56).

Jesus did promise them this, *“You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with”* (20:23a). They were seeking self-glory but found themselves drinking a cup of suffering and immersed in persecution. James would be the first of the twelve to be martyred, executed by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2). John suffered exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

- **Overreaching Divine Sovereignty**

Jesus reminds them that His Father’s will to which He submits is in control of who and how they are involved in the eternal plan (20:23). The position on Jesus right hand and on his left was *“prepared by the Father”* for the two thieves who hung on the crosses beside Him. One of them joined Jesus later that day in Paradise.

Jesus does not have the authority to delegate these positions. Unlike them He recognizes God plan and will must be humbly submitted to. He will at His ascension claim, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”* (Matt. 28:18).

- **Ugly Competitiveness**

“And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers” (20:24). The ten are not upset with James and John for their ignorance and self-promotion but from their own envious resentment. In fact, according to Luke’s account they were embroiled in their own ugly competitiveness. *“Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest”* (Luke 22:24). They were thinking if James and John are number 1 and number 2, they are going to be placed further down the pyramid of political position.

Positions of True Greatness Involve...

- **Non-Authoritarianism**

Their idea of greatness is misguided. It is more in keep with the definition of greatness among the carnal-minded world. *“Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them’”* (20:25). The Greek word *katakuriuo* translates *“Lord it over.”* It is a domineering and harsh ruling over people. It means to be a dictator or tyrant. Jesus mentions three positions of authority in man’s system: Gentiles ruled by rulers and they in turn by great ones.

By way of contrast Jesus goes on to say, *“yet it shall not be so among you”* (20:26a). Jesus takes this moment to contrast the Gentiles pattern of greatness with the key to greatness in His kingdom. Jesus would later tell Pilate, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36). In the church of Christ there will not be a hierarchical system in the shape of a pyramid with the pope at the top, next cardinals, archbishops, bishops, etc. Nor will there be a clergy/laity system with synods and conferences that is found in denominationalism. Elders are not to lord it over the flock but to be an example and shepherd to the sheep (1 Pet. 5:3). However a Christian by the name of Diotrefes loved to be first and lorded it over others in the church (3 John 9)

- **Serving Others**

Jesus does not condemn the ambition of seeking to improve one’s position. However, He demands they keep it in proper character in keeping with the nature of His kingdom. He give the following paradox: *“but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant”* (20:26). Contrary to the world’s concept of greatness where leaders and masters are greater than servants or slaves, disciples are made great by becoming little even like little children (Lk 9:48). They are exalted by being humble (Mt. 23:12). Jesus demonstrated this paradox in His example of washing the feet of the disciples (Jn. 13:13,14).

Jesus uses parallelism in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven. The term *“great”* is parallel to

"first". And "servant" is the same as "slave." The first term for "servant" is the Greek *diakonos* literally refers to those who waited on tables and is the word translated "deacon" (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). John would later describe himself as a "servant" of Jesus (Revelation 1:1).

John Brodie, former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, and was being used by his football team to hold the ball for the kicker. A sports reporter asked him why a million-dollar player like him should have to hold the ball for field goals and extra points after the touchdown. "Well," said Brodie, "if I didn't, it would fall over."

■ **Servant Leadership**

There is an old English Proverb which reads, "Great and good are seldom the same man." That depends on your definition of greatness. Jesus left Heaven to be born to poor parents in a manger. He had a job as a carpenter and a rag tag set of disciples who were not formally trained. When Jesus says, "*Just as the Son of Man*" (20:28a), He points to His style of servant leadership to be the example of greatness they are to follow. He was born in humility in a manger, he worked at a blue-collar job as a carpenter, and he had a relatively short period of public ministry. He "*did not come to be served, but to serve*" (20:28b).

■ **Self-Sacrifice**

Jesus did not come to earth to have servants waiting upon Him. He had all the angels in Heaven who could serve His every desire. His motives in coming were wholly selfless. And His goal was "*to give His life a ransom for many*" (20:28c). The term "*ransom*" is from the Greek *lutron*. It was the term commonly use for the redemption price of a slave. Found only in Mark 10:45 and in 1 Timothy 2:6: "*who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*"

Christians "*have been bought with a price*" (1 Cor. 6:20). The purchasing price was the blood of Christ. "*Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus served sinners by the sacrifice of Himself.

Did Salome and her sons learn this lesson? When Jesus was crucified, she was standing near the cross (John 19:25, "*his mother's sister*"). James was the first apostle to die and John was the last.

Two Blind Men Healed At Jericho, 20:29-34

Jesus demonstrates the same companionate servant mentality by taking the time to heal two blind men. The crowds may have been in a big hurry for Jesus to make it to Jerusalem, but Jesus was not in so much of a hurry that two beggars' requests could not be honored. They demonstrated their faith in Jesus' ability and willingness to heal as well as their faith that He was the Messiah when they called out twice, "*Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!*"

As Jesus came near, the men learned of it "*cried out.*" When the multitude in their apathy toward them tried to rebuke them into silence "*they cried out all the more.*" The term comes from the Greek *krazo* "used for an sort of screaming or anguished shout. It was used of the ranting of insane people" (MacArthur 249). The crowd did not appreciate them interrupting Jesus with their crazy shouting.

Jesus called them to verbalize their desires. "*They said to Him, 'Lord, that our eyes may be opened'*" (10:33). As was often the case, when Jesus touched their eyes they were healed instantaneously. They would now be silent. And become part of the crowd. But they were "*glorifying God*" as they followed (Luke 18:43).

This event was recorded by all three of the synoptic Gospels. There are two areas of alleged contradiction. First, Matthew records two blind men being healed. Luke mentions only one blind man. Mark mentions only one blind man and give his name as "*Bartimeaus, the son of Timeaus.*" Mark's audience may have known this disciple in the early church. If there are two healed there is certainly one healed. There is no discrepancy here. Just the choice of listing one or two blind men. Second, there is a discrepancy as to the location of these two blind men. Matthew says this occurred when Jesus "*went out of Jericho*" (20:29). Luke says He "*was coming near Jericho*" (Luke 18:35). According to Mark it happened as "*they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho*" (Mark 10:46). During the first century,

there was the old Jericho of the Old Testament and they Roman Jericho. There were two distinct places. Jesus was leaving the one and entering the other.

Questions:

1. What did the rich young ruler ask of Jesus? Why did he not follow Jesus instruction?

2. What did Peter ask of the Lord?

3. T F Jesus told this parable discussing the reward of those who obey the Gospel when they are young versus those who come to Christ at an advanced age.

4. Who were the day-laborers and how were they paid?

5. How was the work day divided?

6. Explain how the workers who came first had the attitude of mere hirelings.

7. Instead of "eyeing" the denarii others received what should the workers in the first group have done?

8. Explain how the landowner was fair to all the workers.

9. How is it that the last group of workers was shown grace?

10. How did the first group of workers have an attitude like that of Judas and Jonah?

11. T F All those who are called will be chosen.

12. Why was a third prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection necessary?

13. What new details are added to this third prediction?
14. Who was Salome? What did she request of Jesus?
15. What cup and baptism is Jesus referring to?
16. Who were on Jesus right and left when He drank the cup of suffering and was baptized into it?
17. How did the other ten disciples react to James and John's request?
18. How are positions in the kingdoms of men different from God's kingdom?
19. What is the paradox of greatness in the Kingdom?
20. Why did Jesus come to earth from Heaven?
21. How did the blind men react to Jesus and how did the crowd react to the blind men?
22. Is there any contradictions between the three Synoptic Gospel accounts of the healing of the blind? Explain.

Application & Discussion:

1. How do some Christians represent a similar attitude to that of the first group of workers?
2. Is it wrong to want to be rewarded by God? Explain.

Homework: Practice servant leadership as a way to greatness and great rewards in the Kingdom.

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