THE HEART OF MATTHEW

The Power and Practical Principles of the Kingdom of Heaven

Chapters 5 to 16:20

Edward Miller

as edited by Janet Huhn

"Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household who brings forth out of his treasure the things new and old."
(Matthew 13:52)

My heart goes out to so many Christians because they are scribes of the kingdom of heaven, and study hard, but they aren't scribes who have become disciples of the kingdom of heaven. Study hard, and know the word, but then enter in to know the author, the Living Word. These are kingdom of heaven truths, practical principles that He gave in Matthew, and He says, "I want you to go into that treasury, and I want to give you things new and things old, little by little, until you have the whole treasure."
~ Ed Miller

The title for this book is "The Heart of Matthew" for several reasons. Ed termed this section in Matthew, chapters 5-16:20 , as "the heart of the book". He also points out that in the middle of chapters 8 & 9 on miracles, Matthew shared his heart concerning his own conversion, because redemption is the greatest miracle of all!

I find my heart gloriously entering in, and being touched by many insights gleaned through dear brother Matthew, as our Lord uses them progressively in redeeming my own redeemed soul. May this be so for all who enter into this little treatise through the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit!
~ Janet Huhn

THE HEART OF MATTHEW

THE POWER
& PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Matthew 5 – 16:28

Edward Miller

As edited by Janet Huhn

THE HEART OF MATTHEW
Power and Practical Principles of the Kingdom of Heaven
Published by Janet Huhn
1000 North Schumaker Drive
Salisbury, Md. 21804 USA
Email: janet@biblestudyministries.com
410-543-4577

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB),
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Copyright January 2021 by Janet Huhn

Any part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means to the glory of Christ without permission from the author. However, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or in any means and sold without the written permission of the author.

January 2021 – First Edition

RESOURCES

For Bible Study Ministries information and Ed Miller's messages from 1978 to the present, including audio messages to hear, transcripts and books to read, and/or download (including this one), visit… www.biblestudyministriesinc.com

For up to date audios for his weekly Bible study series..
www.photosbyjanet.com/christian-blog or
www.familyministriesbridgeville.com or

Search for "Ed Miller, Bible Study Ministries" on YouTube….
www.youtube.com (captions available for hearing impaired)

Visit the "Jesus Anchored to Our Soul" Facebook page for up-to-date weekly Bible study series for teachings, devotions, travel schedules, activities and miscellaneous information

Ed and Lillian Miller

"The Lord Delights in You!"

Our Burden

My name is Ed Miller. I, with my dear wife Lillian, have had the privilege of directing this Bible teaching ministry since its beginning in 1975. I will attempt to express the direction of our hearts and teaching by stating our burden of Bible Study Ministries.

It is our burden that every Christian would possess a heart-knowledge of God by the Holy Spirit's progressive unveiling of the Lord Jesus through the fervent study of the Bible. It is only as we behold Him that we are changed into His likeness. The entire Christian life consists in a personal faith-union with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord manifests His reputation on the earth through those who have an intimate relationship with Him.

We have prayerfully sought, since Bible Study Ministries began in 1975, to express this burden in every Bible study we offer, in all of the policies of our ministry, in our overall emphasis and especially in our personal walk before Him. Our spirits rejoice when God's children hunger to grow in "grace and in the knowledge of our Lord

Jesus Christ." We desire to see the Living Word Himself as He is revealed in the written Word! You will find that our Bible studies are devotional in the sense that they are designed to help stimulate heart devotion to our Lord and Savior. We do not study the Bible primarily to know the Bible. We study the Bible so that we might better know the Lord.

You will discover that we endeavor to state the truth of Christ in a non-sectarian way, stressing the common denominator foundations of our precious faith. We emphasize spiritual principles. We trust the Holy Spirit to apply the life principles we have gleaned from the Scriptures. If your heart responds positively to this burden, we pray that we might, in some small way, be able to minister to you through our teaching.

EDITOR'S NOTES

I have endeavored to maintain, for the most part, Ed's original wording from his Matthew messages. It's not word for word, as some shuffling around was necessary to combine the overlapping topics from different messages. Some editing was used to omit redundancy, shorten long sentences or help with grammar. I think Ed's personality, dry sense of humor and interesting terms of speech shine through by endeavoring to stick to how he originally gave it.

I never expected to be so blessed by listening to messages in the gospel of Matthew; eighty two of them that Ed gave in 1982. Through the years I'd heard so many sermons that had been plucked out of their context from Matthew, that I was rather reluctant to revisit something that I thought was going to be "old hat". Well, folks, get ready to have your old hats blown off as Ed unfolds spiritual treasures in Christ Jesus waiting to be discovered in this amazing book: some things old and some things new!

Through the years I've enjoyed listening to Ed expound on the mysteries of the "exchanged life" where Jesus is our very life. I'm so glad the Holy Spirit has had me revisit where the Lord spoke His first words for us on the earth in Matthew's gospel concerning "the kingdom of heaven". Ed often encourages us to keep returning to our earlier teachings. How much more I have seen after dipping again into these inspired teachings taken from the first gospel in the New Testament—the first of the four gospels! It's been such a blessing to experience the Lord's unveiling in "seed" form, a foretaste, of the "exchanged life"

Rather than putting all Ed's eighty two Matthew messages into one big volume, I opted to begin by publishing an introduction book from his messages from the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7, which is entitled "Mount Sinai of the New Testament". Because the Sermon on the Mount is a part of the section covered in this present book, I've included a little excerpt from "Mt. Sinai of the New Testament".

You can order a free copy of "Mt. Sinai of the New Testament" from us, or visit his website, www.biblestudyministriesinc.com to read and/or download the online PDF. Also, all eighty two original messages he gave in Matthew are transcribed, along with the audio recordings, and are available for download there, as well.

Matthew is a foundational book and everything in the Bible that follows is built upon it. You won't find anything in the rest of the New Testament that's not mentioned in Matthew in seed form. Scholars tell us there was about four hundred years between Malachi in the Old Testament and Matthew in the New Testament. Theologians call it "four hundred silent years" because God didn't speak during those years. Jesus did many miracles during His first year of ministry but never spoke a message. Then all of a sudden He came forward and gave His "inaugural address" in the Sermon on the Mount.

I truly believe Jesus' message in the book of Matthew declaring the 180 degree difference between living a "kingdom of heaven" life and a "kingdom of earth" life are most urgently needed in our present evil world, where we are being tested by so many worldly pressures and so much confusion. May these teachings be a roadmap for living in the world, but not of it!

The title for this book is "The Heart of Matthew" for several reasons. Ed termed this section in Matthew, chapters 5-16:20 , as "the heart of the book". He also points out that in the middle of chapters 8 & 9 on miracles, Matthew shared his heart concerning his own conversion, because redemption is the greatest miracle of all!

I find my heart gloriously entering in and being touched by many insights gleaned through our dear brother Matthew, as the Lord uses them progressively in redeeming my own redeemed soul. May this be so for all in their own heart who enter into this little treatise through the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit!

~ Janet Huhn

CONTENTS

Resources……...……. 3
Our Burden…….. 5
Editor's Notes…….……. 7

SECTION I:

MATTHEW OUTLINES

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
(JESUS SAYS SOMETHING CHAPTERS 5-7)

1. MATTHEW

   Outline & theme for whole book of Matthew……....23
   Outline for "The Heart of Matthew", Ch. 5-16:20…….25

2. SERMON ON THE MOUNT CHAPTERS 5-7
   JESUS SAYS SOMETHING
   Excerpt from "Mt. Sinai of the New Testament"……...27

SECTION II
(JESUS DOES SOMETHING CHAPTERS 8-10)

MIRACLES

1. MIRACLE CHAPTERS 8 & 9 OVERVIEW

   Full mention of miracles……..…37
   Mighty works, wonders and signs……..38
   Every miracle points to a spiritual principle……...…43

2. MIRACLE OF THE HEALING OF THE LEPER

Christ is approachable, curing the incurable……..…….....49
The proof of cleansing is that you will be clean……...…..52

3. A WORD ABOUT MODERN HEALING MOVEMENT

Stress the spiritual reality and not the physical……..……55

4. THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

The goal is not physical healing,
but knowing Jesus as King over disease……...……61
A cry for help in weakness, helplessness,
and an openness to worship is great faith……65

5. THE HEALING OF PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

Before I can minister to Him, He must minister to me;
from natural weakness to supernatural strength……69
The first three miracles are progressive; cleansing,
then faith, and then ministry……..…73

6. THE UNNAMED SCRIBE AND DISCIPLE

Following the Lord……..…75

The Unnamed Scribe

Rest is in following Jesus and not this physical world……...76

The Unnamed Disciple

Following Jesus separates us from dead things of the world..79

7. CALMING OF THE GREAT STORM

Strong faith is letting Jesus sleep…….81
We aren't exempt from the storm……85
Failure won't anger Jesus: He'll probably calm the sea…..…85

.

8. DEMON POSSESSION AS A WHOLE

Preparation for the doctrine of demon possession……87
Demons are real……..….88
Demon power is limited……..….90
Demons also illustrate spiritual truth……..….91
Jesus is triumphant over every demon……..…...94

9. CASTING OUT THE GADARENE DEMONS

Comments……...95
Jesus sets you free from Satan, death and bondage……..…..97
Every victory is a present foretaste of final victory……..…..99
Going after Jesus is the only goal—nothing else……..100
Jesus never forces Himself on you……..…..103

10. HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC

Background…….…..107
Double miracle #1: Your sins are forgiven…….…..108
Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit……...….112
Which is easier to do; spiritual or physical miracle?.....114
Double miracle #2: Physical healing of his body……..116
Spiritual miracle is for us, physical miracle is for others…..116

11. A BREAK BETWEEN THE MIRACLES

Overview……...…119

Conversion of Matthew

The greatest miracle……..120

Conversation with the Pharisees

Jesus came to heal the sin-sick…….….124

Question from the disciples of John the Baptist

We become new wineskins to hold new wine…….….129

12. MIRACLE WITHIN A MIRACLE:
HEALING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER
HEALING OF WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE

Outline……...…...136
Redemptive miracles #7 & 8 together……..….136
God has no emergencies……..….140
We don't need a definite word from God……..…...143
We can trust His perfect timing……144
If we need a word, He will give it…….144
Putting out a fleece……145

13. HEALING OF WOMAN WITH THE HEMORRHAGE II
HEALING OF JAIRUS DAUGHTER II

Healing of the woman with the hemorrhage II:
Faith touches the Lord and not just the garment……..…149

Healing of Jairus' Daughter II:
Jesus is King over death, and Lord of life……155
What is meant by sleep…….155

14. HEALING OF THE TWO BLIND MEN
HEALING OF DUMB MAN DEMON POSSESSED

We need to be open and say "yes" to His Lordship……..157
Our only testimony is a healed heart on display……159
We will walk a path of rejection……....161

15. THE HARVEST IS PLENTY BUT THE WORKERS FEW

How chapter 10 relates to chapters 8 & 9

Often the ones who pray for laborers become laborers…….163
The Lord does miracles today through human instruments..164

The reason why the true laborers are few……..165
God has given true workers authority…….…..168
True workers trust His sovereignty……170
True workers trust His sufficiency for "emergencies"……..173

16. JESUS SENDS OUT WORKERS—CHARACTERISTICS

A true worker spiritually discerns the will and revelations of God, as well as the world into which he is sent……..…177
A true worker doesn't defend himself……...…180
A true worker is willing to die to self.……183

17. MORE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE WORKERS

Dangers of trying to die to self.…….……..…191
A true worker wants only the Lord: hates everything else....197
A true worker faithfully and privately lives, and is just themselves……...……199

SECTION III
(PEOPLE RESPOND TO JESUS CH. 10-12)
RESPONSES

1. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS & THE RESPONSE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

General observations

Christ can't be separated from what He says and does..…...205
Outward response not always index of inward response..…206
Wherever Jesus was there was riot or revival……..….208

Response of John the Baptist:

Struggling faith versus unbelief…….209
Jesus is very tender with struggling faith……..213

We need not air our doubts before the world……213
Struggling faith needs the revelation of Christ in scripture....215
When confused about His ways, you can still trust Him……217
The law of multiple fulfillment in scripture…….….218

2. THE RESPONSE OF THIS GENERATION &
THE RESPONSE OF THE CITIES

The response of this generation:

General Observations……...….221
Expect our generation to be dissatisfied with message…….222
Expect to be abused & maligned because of our message…224
God has different ministries for all of us……224

The response of the cities:

God measures sin by the light already given…….228
God gives more light to those living up to light……... 229
The more praiseworthy a ministry, the more blame
worthy the people……..……..230

3. THE RESPONSE OF THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF

"Easy Yoke" applies to believer & unbeliever alike…….231
Only way to know Jesus is through revelation……..…233
Rest available to all who are open to revelation of Jesus..…237
Study the truth of God in fully developed form: epistles…..238
Rest means fellowship with God……...…239
Rest means continual praise & worship to the Lord……..241
Rest says yes to everything that pleases God……....242

4. THE FIRST RESPONSE OF THE PHARISEES

Context – The Sabbath…….….245
Man is lord of the Sabbath…….252
Get the principles underneath the Bible facts……..….253
Sabbath rest is ministering unto Him…….255

God's grace enables man to do what He commands……..…256
Sabbath has been changed to the Sunday Lord's Day……257
The Lord's Day is for anything consistent with rest…….258

5. RESPONSE OF GOD THE FATHER AND
SECOND RESPONSE OF THE PHARISEES

Response of God the Father:

Context……..…261
God's gentleness will never bruise or break us…….……264

Second Response of the Pharisees:

The unpardonable sin…….269
Every other sin against the Holy Spirit is forgivable…..…..272

6. CONTINUATION OF
SECOND RESPONSE OF THE PHARISEES

Two stories of the demon possession…….275
As believers we can expect to be misrepresented……..……279
Don't argue with sinner – use absolutes……....280
We'll be judged by words spoken & thoughts of the heart ..282
The only sign He'll give to this wicked generation
is a resurrection life…….284
No excuses for not seeking His will, walking in
His way, or neglecting His words……286
Don't settle for unreality – being swept out while still
being empty and unoccupied……..….287
Jesus' warning about unreality are for believers
and unbelievers alike……..….289

7. RESPONSE OF THE FAMILY

Did Jesus have literal brothers and sisters?.....291
Why did Jesus' family come to speak to Him?.....293
What is a mother, a sister and a brother? ……..……297

A wonderful union relationship is available to us
when our hearts are set on God's will……...298
A wonderful union relationship is available to Him
when our hearts are set on God's will……...……299

SECTION IV
(JESUS SAYS SOMETHING CH. 13–14:12)

THE PARABLES
THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

1. INTRO TO THE PARABLES
PARABLE OF THE SOWER
(MORE APTLY NAMED—THE PARABLE OF THE SOIL)

Introduction to parables

Introduction: about parables in general……..…303

Parable of the Sower (Soil)

General observations of Parable of the Sower (Soil)……..…309
The Wayside soil……...…314
The Rocky soil……..….315
The thorny soil……..316
The good soil……317
Don't be discouraged if three quarters of people reject it….319
Don't blame the sower of the seed for non-reception……319
Praise God for being a liberal sower……..…320
The condition of the soils are not permanently fixed……320
The evidence of good soil is fruit……..320

2. THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES
(MORE APTLY NAMED: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER)

Summary and theme……..323
God is only One who does planting in His kingdom……327
Only God can separate the tares from the wheat……..….328
There are many harvests on the way to the harvest……334
Leave the tares alone to grow until day of harvest…….335
Every plant God did not plant will be rooted out,
both for the saved and the unsaved……..335

3. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED &
THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

Parable of the mustard seed:

Background ……..….337
Don't be discouraged by small beginnings……..…….….341
Life in Him guarantees growth……..…343

Parable of the leaven:

Background……..….344
The leaven, the grace, comes from outside ourselves……346
First changes of leavened life are deep and invisible…….349
Trust God and know someday we'll all be leavened
and completely transformed……..…350

4. THE PARABLE OF THE TREASURE HIDDEN IN A FIELD
THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE
THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET
THE PARABLE OF THE SCRIBE BECOMING A DISCIPLE

The parable of the treasure hidden in a field:

Christ is the Treasure…….353
Keep your eye on the treasure (Jesus) and not the field
(human instrument)……..355

There's no struggle in surrender when we value an intimate relationship with Jesus……..……..358

The pearl of great price:

Our worth is based on what Christ was willing to pay for us……....360

The parable of the dragnet

The Lord is the Evangelist, and He's patient for the Scribe to become a disciple……..…..362

The parable of the Scribe becoming a disciple

We don't only need to study, but we also need to enter into those truths……..…..364

5. JESUS' RESPONSE IN THE SYNOGOGUE & THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Jesus' Response in the synagogue:

Just be ordinary—God will put the extra in the ordinary…...367
Don't try to defend power of God in your life……..….372
If there is unbelief, just minister to the few who are open....374

Beheading of John the Baptist

The path of the King is the path of the King's servants…....375
The unsaved are under the law of God……..378
The Christian's relationship to the law and conscience—don't listen……..……379
Don't make rash vows……...382
The heathen give unwilling testimony…….….383

SECTION V

(JESUS SAYS & DOES SOMETHING THE PEOPLE RESPOND CH. 14:13-16:20)

JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES

1. SIX STORIES
   Overview……...387
   Union life: God will do things in union with us and our resources……392
   Words mean little if the heart is wrong……..…396
   We need a large view of the Lord Jesus……....398

2. THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND & WALKING ON THE STORMY SEA

   Feeding of the five thousand:

   Background……...……404
   God hasn't called us to do miracles—just be our surrendered self…….....…410

   Walking on the stormy sea:

   Know that Jesus is Lord of your life……..……414

3. THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES TEST JESUS

   Background……..…….420
   All that is essential life is from above, is spiritual and from within……....423

4. THE FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN & THE FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND

Great faith is not a humble view of yourself…….……436
Great faith is not determination and perseverance…….438
Great faith is not unselfish intercession for someone else…..441
Great faith is having a large view of Jesus……....441
Intercession/missionary vision comes from a revelation
of a full Christ……...444
1st contrast between disciples and the woman—
the loaf and the crumbs…….....445
2nd contrast between disciples and the woman—
the physical and the spiritual……...…….445

5. PETER'S REVELATION OF CHRIST
Some co-called "problems" with this passage……..450
It's God's church and He builds it on "rock" men……452
A "rock" man knows Jesus is God……..…..453
A "rock" knows who Jesus is by revelation from heaven….454
A "rock" man is a blessed man……..459
What a "rock" man binds on earth, has already been
bound in heaven…….……...….461
A "rock" man dies in order to live; is being set free…….…462

POEM: "A Hearing Heart"……..467

Section I

Matthew Outlines
(The power for the kingdom
Chapters 5-16:20)

The Sermon on the Mount
(Jesus says something
Chapters 5-7)

1

MATTHEW

Matthew 10:24&25, *"A disciple is not above his teacher nor a slave above his master. It is enough that the disciple be as his teacher, and the slave be as his master."*

Outline and theme for book of Matthew

The theme of the Book of Matthew is illustrated by three arrows; the arrow pointing downward, the arrow pointing upward, and the arrow pointing forward. The arrow pointing downward illustrates the path of human rejection. As you go through the gospel of Matthew, the rejection deepens. In every page and every stage in the life of the Lord Jesus He was increasingly rejected, and lived a rejected life outside the camp, and it came to a climax when they put Him on a cross.

The arrow pointing upward toward God and heaven illustrates that as Jesus was rejected by men, He was increasingly approved of by God; divine acceptance and approval; a pleasure to God's heart. Every now and then God would break the silence, and give audible approval, *"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."* Jesus had His heart set on this. That was His food, His meat, His drink, His bread, and His milk; to do the will of His Father. He lived for this. Because of that, we have the arrow pointing forward toward the world, summarized in the word "missions"; world redemption, soul winning, evangelism.

I suggest that Matthew 10:24&25 are good key verses, *"A disciple is not above his teacher nor a slave above his master. It is enough that the disciple be as his teacher, and the slave be as his master."* This is the path He took. Don't think for a lonely moment that you can ever take a different path. That's why God gives this in Matthew, because He is laying down a foundation for the whole New Testament. That's the path of the Christian life and nothing else is. That's the path of the King and that's the path of the King's servant. The foundation upon which the whole New Testament is built is this— that the way the Lord brought salvation to the world was by having His heart set only on His Father God, on the pleasure of God, and that He was rejected by men.

Let me suggest, according to our great theme—downward toward the cross, upward toward the Lord, and forward toward missions—an outline that may help. There are four big sections that seem to follow those great movements. The first is Matthew chapters 1-4 which we're going to call "the preparation for the kingdom".

Then Matthew 5 all the way through chapter 16:20, which is the heart of the book, we're going to call "the power of the kingdom". This section begins with the Sermon on the Mount, takes you into all of His miracles, then to some of the parables that he spoke, and ends with the great confession of Peter when he learned, *"It isn't by flesh and blood but by My Father in heaven who reveals it"*. The power is supernatural.

Then chapter 16:21 through chapter 25 begins with the transfiguration, with the glory of Christ on the mountain, and it ends with the great Olivet discourse and the prophecy of the glory of Christ down the road. We're going to call this section "the nature of the kingdom"; it's spiritual in nature. It is not a physical life lived on the level of earth.

And then at the end of the book, chapters 26-28, starts with the conspiracy against Christ, and takes you right through to his final victory. It's the story of the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. I believe this is the results of the kingdom; the fruit, the end toward which it's all moving, the paradox of world evangelism!

It's unreal how paradoxical this section is, that there should be fruit out of death, life out of death, that there should be glory through the cross! Evangelism talks about people accepting Christ, and isn't it paradoxical

to realize that in order for us to accept Christ in reality that we've got to walk the path of rejection? Exactly so! And I believe this is at least one great breakdown for the book of Matthew—the preparation of the kingdom, the supernatural power for the kingdom, and the spiritual nature of the kingdom, which results in world evangelism.

One of things God's people seem to have missed through the years is the very first lesson God teaches us in the book of Matthew; the way to bring redemption to the earth. There are so many different methods of soul winning, and so many different methods of bringing redemption to fallen men; clever programs and gimmicks, all trying to strong arm the unwilling, and many zealous efforts to saturate the sinner with literature, dragging them to special meetings and all that kind of thing.

The path of the King is the path of the King's servants. You get a people whose hearts are set on, "I just want to please God; that's going to be my milk from now on, and that will be my water and my bread and my meat—I just want to know Him and please Him, enjoy Him, satisfy Him, and bring pleasure to His great heart," you'll be rejected, and you'll be outside the camp. But this will put the fragrance of Christ in your life, and He will be on such tremendous display, that through your death you will bring salvation to the world. That is how God has planned soul winning and evangelism. It cuts across the grain of so much of the shallow thinking that goes on among God's people. This is the path of the King, and this is the path of the King's servant. This is the great message of the book of Matthew.

Outline for the "Heart of Matthew" chapters 5-16:20 – The power of the kingdom

You'll notice that this is the section we will be discussing in this present book—Matthew 5-16:20, and the power for such a life. Let me break that down a little more. In Matthew 5-16:20 the Spirit of God calls attention to three things twice—so that's six things. But it's not six things. It's only three things. But He does it in such a way that He tells you once, and then He says, "Have you seen that? Let's look again." Then He shows you the same three things again.

In Matthew 5-7 Jesus says something. In chapters 8&9 Jesus does something. Then in chapters 10-12 the people respond to what Jesus said and did. In chapter 13 Jesus says something. In chapter 14 Jesus does something. Chapter 15-16:20, the people respond again to what Jesus has said and done. Let me nail it down more. Matthew 5-7 begins the section illustrating the power for living in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said something, and that is the great Sermon on the Mount, which described the difference between living in the kingdom of heaven, and living in the kingdom of earth. (These chapters have been edited and condensed in the published book entitled "Mt. Sinai of the New Testament – The Sermon on the Mount", available also for free download in PDF from www.biblestudyministriesinc.com).

In chapters 8&9 Jesus does something and those are your great miracle chapters; five miracles in chapter 8 and five miracles in chapter 9. In chapters 10 and 12 you have the responses. In chapter 13 Jesus says something, and that's the great chapter on the parables of the Lord Jesus. Then in chapter 14 you have more miracles; multiplying loaves and calming stormy seas. Then toward the end the people respond, and we see all the different responses to what Jesus said and did.

2

SERMON ON THE MOUNT
(Jesus says something)
Matthew chapters 5-7

Excerpt taken from chapter 1 of

"Mt. Sinai of the New Testament"

We need to find His theme and message of the Sermon. Matthew 5:2, *"And opening His mouth He began to teach them."* They waited about four thousand years for Him to open His mouth. What did He say? His time had arrived, and He stood up to give His inaugural address. What is His burden and passion? What does the Lord Jesus want to say as He introduces His great year of public acceptance? Did He have a theme? I believe we can't catch the awe and the wonder of these chapters unless we are illumined to the theme of the Sermon on the Mount; the main thing that He wanted to get across. I believe it can be expressed in the four words, "the kingdom of heaven".

Glance at these verses, chapter 5:3, *"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven;"* chapter 5:10, *"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven;"* chapter 5:19, *"Least in the kingdom of heaven;"* chapter 5:20, *"Shall not enter the kingdom of heaven;"* chapter 5:19, *"Great in the kingdom of heaven;"* chapter 6:10, *"Thy kingdom come;"* chapter 6:13, *"Thine is the kingdom;"* chapter 6:33, *"Seek first the kingdom.."* And He ends the Sermon in

chapter 7:21, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."* The whole Sermon on the Mount just seemed to revolve around that expression, *"The kingdom of heaven"*. What did He mean? If you don't know that, then you've lost the whole message.

I believe in every sense this was His inaugural address, and He was introducing the main burden on His heart. After He preached this Sermon He never got off the subject. Everything that He did tied into that. Every parable He gave was a kingdom of heaven parable. Every miracle He did was to shed light on the kingdom of heaven. The rest of His ministry had to do with the kingdom of heaven. It's so easy just to come and read, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." What is it?

Matthew 7:28, *"The multitudes were amazed at His teaching."* Something caused them to be awestruck. G. Campbell Morgan in his book "The Teaching of Christ" gives a good suggestion on how to avoid confusion as you look at the kingdom of heaven. There are three aspects to the kingdom of heaven. One is the rule of God. Sometimes when you are studying the kingdom of heaven it's talking about God ruling, the rule of God, the kingdom of God. Sometimes it talks about the realm over which He rules. It's still the kingdom of heaven, but the emphasis is different. He's talking about that over which He rules. And sometimes He talks about the results or the out workings of His rulership; what your life will look like if He is ruling. Don't get confused because one time He's talking about fruit, and another time He's talking about Christians, and another time He's talking about God. He's talking about the kingdom of heaven.

In order to catch the wonder of the kingdom of heaven, let me give its counterpart. It's something you're familiar with if you are human. You won't understand the kingdom of heaven if you don't realize that it's used in opposition to the kingdom of earth. On the kingdom of earth there are physical laws; laws of seed time, laws of harvest, laws of gravity, laws of evaporation, and laws of life and death. In those days they didn't have the technology and science, but they still understood the laws of earth; the sun rose and set, the tides came in and went out, the birds migrated, and animals and insects fed upon each other. The kingdom of earth is material, physical, corporal and temporal.

The kingdom of earth also touches the political kingdom and governments. From the time man was expelled from the Garden of Eden to the present day, man interprets the world he lives in by the world by which he lives. It's all physical, and that's all you know; what you can see, taste, feel and what you can hear. It's all human. It consists of people and things. You can get your hands on them. There are smart people, and there are dumb people, there are short people and there are tall people, there are rich people, and there are poor people, there are rulers, and there are slaves. The kingdom of earth is built on wealth, power and influence. It's established by popularity and fame. It gives high positions to men of wisdom and high esteem, and embraces things that pass away; fading pleasures, ambitions, and dreams. The kingdom of earth has parliaments, governments, ships, weapons and armies. You can see it. It has color, weight, mass, legislation, courts, prisons and human judges. It has rules and human programs that rule human people. That's the kingdom of earth.

Unfortunately, that's all they knew; the kingdom of earth. So, when they went into the synagogue and temple, they took with them the kingdom of earth. And the whole religious world was operating on the principles of the kingdom of earth. They had important rulers, important priests and important people who were trained in human institutions, and who sat in high places. They governed by human rules, and had power over people. They had their own laws and regulations and their own rules. Everything was regulated, even their kitchens, social lives and industries. Physical temples were made of silver, glass, wood, gold and jewels. The kingdom of earth was over nature and politics and, unfortunately, they brought it into the church. They knew no other kingdom.

You aren't going to understand this Sermon, chapters 5 through 7, unless you understand them in their most elevated Messianic hopes; that those listening never advanced beyond the kingdom of earth. They thought, "Someday a physical king will come, and a physical king will have physical charisma, and he will gather together a physical army with physical weapons. He'll overthrow the physical kingdoms of the earth, and will set up a physical kingdom on the earth, and we'll all be

happy. All the nations of the earth will pour their physical wealth into this physical kingdom and we'll be filled with physical gold, silver, oil and uranium." That's the kind of Messiah they were looking for. They had suffered under the Roman yoke. They knew what it was when Egypt, Assyria and Babylon were overthrown, and they expected Christ would come and overthrow Rome, as well. That's the only kingdom they knew. They lived it, breathed it, ate it, drank it and slept it.

Jesus was about to explode a new concept in their hearing. Forty seven times in the gospel of Matthew He mentions it, thirteen times in the gospel of Mark and thirty one times in Luke and five times in the gospel of John. All of His parables and all of His miracles had to do with it. He said, "I'm going to tell you something that you don't know. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. You have been operating on the kingdom of earth. You saw it in nature and in politics. You brought it into the temple, into the synagogue and into the church. There is another kingdom that you know nothing about. I'm going to preach about a spiritual kingdom; a kingdom of heaven."

In order to get a good look at this kingdom, let me take one bypass. To study anything in the Bible, look at the terminal points; how does it start and how does it end? When is the first time the kingdom ever came off the lips of Christ? What is the first mention of the kingdom? The answer is it was to Nicodemus in John 3:3 *"Except a man is born again He can't enter into the kingdom."* The last use of the kingdom of heaven is His words in John 18:36 to Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But My kingdom is not of this world and not from hence."*

Jesus taught that His kingdom had nothing to do with the kingdom of earth. The material forces would never bring in His kingdom. The earth's methods, policies and programs could never bring in His kingdom. The earth's laws and legislations could never work in His kingdom. His kingdom does not depend upon the kingdom of earth. It's the kingdom of heaven. His kingdom will never be realized by the wisdom and the programs of men, the policies of men, or the armies of men. It's an amazing concept and one that, for the most part, two

thousand years later, the church hasn't learned yet. Much of the church is operating on the principles of the kingdom of earth.

When Jesus spoke that Sermon, Rome was the kingdom of earth. It was a physical kingdom. Jesus said that there is another kingdom that you can't see inside that kingdom. It's within the limits of that kingdom, and it's submitting to that kingdom, but it's not of that kingdom, and it's called "the kingdom of heaven". Look at Matthew 6:10, *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* It's easy to understand the kingdom of heaven in heaven. It's just hard to understand the kingdom of heaven on earth. It's easy to understand the kingdom of heaven in heaven because they live and operate by principles that are worked out in the presence of the Living God. Up there is nothing that the moth can eat, and rust and canker can decay. There's nothing that can be touched by the principle of death. Up there it's easy to understand the kingdom of heaven.

We know so little of that wonderful region where the unfallen angels are, and where the spirits of just men made perfect are. Who are the inhabitants of heaven? The triune God is up there; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The cherubim are up there. Ezekiel 1:14, *"The living beings run to and fro like bolts of lightning."* Revelations 4:8, *"Day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, the One who is and is to come…"* The seraphim are there, whatever they are. Isaiah 6:2&3, *"And the seraphim stood above Him each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered His feet, and with the other two he flew. And one called out to the other saying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.'"* The holy angels are there, whoever they are; guardian angels and ministering angels and powers and principalities. Revelations 7:11, *"And I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and they fell on their faces before the throne. And they worshipped God saying, 'Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and forever.'"* The redeemed saints, spirits of just men made perfect are in heaven. Revelations 5:9, *"They sang a new song, 'Worthy art Thou, Thou who*

was slain and did purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nations, and has made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God.'"

How is God's will done in heaven? Boy, they are having a good time up there with God's will. They are having a ball. They don't struggle like we do. They don't have to work at it like us. I tell you, the spirits of just men made perfect are enjoying the will of God. The angels are darting back and forth like lightning, the cherubim are on their faces, and the seraphim have their faces covered with their wings, and are singing in the presence of God, and are rejoicing. This is the will of God. This is the kingdom of heaven in heaven. But Matthew 6:10 says, *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth the same way it's being done in heaven."* That's the Sermon on the Mount.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus announced, for the first time with this kind of manifestation, that the kingdom of heaven in heaven is now the kingdom of heaven on earth, and that the very principles by which the inhabitants of heaven delight to carry out the will of God, are now available to men and women on the earth. Boy, this was a message of good news and grace if ever there was a sermon of grace. It's not fully developed yet. God leaves that for the epistles to open up. But it's all suggested in seed form as He begins to open up the truth of the kingdom of heaven on the earth. It's now available for anybody who wants it; the very principles, the very maxims, the very ways we can obey God. It's exactly the same way they do in heaven.

The theme of the Sermon on the Mount is the kingdom of heaven, and it has nothing, zip, zilch, zero, to do with the kingdom of earth. It doesn't use the same methods or the same policies or the same programs. It's based on different principles. Anyone who has studied it has been, at one time or another, arrested by the super high standards in this sermon. Jesus lays a tremendous emphasis on the Old Testament law. One commentator called it "The Ten Commandments raised to the nth degree". Matthew 5:17&18, *"Do not think I came to abolish the law or the prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. Truly I say to you, until heaven or earth shall pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law until all is accomplished."*

(Editor's note: Ed Miller's full message on the Sermon on the Mount is available from the publisher in the paperback, "Mt. Sinai of the New Testament" or for download at www.biblestudyministriesinc.com)

Section II

(Jesus does something Chapters 8-10)

The Miracles

1

MIRACLE CHAPTERS 8 & 9 OVERVIEW

Full mention of miracles

Matthew chapters 8 & 9 are the full mention of miracles in the Bible. By that statement I do not mean that there are more miracles there than anywhere else in the Bible, or that there are greater miracles there than anywhere in the Bible. That can't be so because the virgin birth is not in there, and the death of Christ is not in there, and the resurrection of Christ is not in there. What I mean is that the Holy Spirit has intentionally selected from the wide range of miracles of Christ, ten selected miracles in order to tell a story. Each of those miracles are part of a great design. They not only tell a story, but are also in their progressive order to tell that story.

All the questions you could ever ask about miracles, I believe, are found in principle form in these two great chapters on miracles. There are ten great miracles in these chapters—plus. Look at Matthew 8:16, for example, *"When evening had come they brought to Him many who were demon possessed and He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were ill."* The Bible doesn't say how many but I know from the character of God that He wouldn't use the word "many" in a meaningless way, as if it were a few. I don't know how many, but it's many; maybe a dozen, a score, maybe a hundred, or maybe a thousand. I don't know how many.

Matthew 9:35, says the same thing, *"And Jesus was going about in all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness."* When you get verses like that, chapter 8:16 and chapter 9:35, and then a clown like me gets up here and says, "There are ten miracles in these two chapters," you might say, "Wait a minute. There's more than ten; many were healed, all kinds of sickness and all kinds of diseases. There was no number to the miracles that Jesus did. But the Holy Spirit out of that majority and great mass of miracles chooses ten and says, "Now, out of all those miracles He did I want you to take a look at this, and this, and this," and He selects ten out of un-numbered miracles in order to tell a great story, which we'll look at.

The five miracles in chapter 8 are these; the cleansing of the leper, the healing of the Centurion's servant, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, the calming of the stormy seas, and the healing of the two demoniacs. The five miracles in chapter 9 are the healing of the paralytic, the raising from the dead of Jairus' daughter, the healing of a woman with an issue of blood, the healing of the two blind men, and the healing of the dumb man. Those ten miracles were intentionally selected by the Holy Spirit to tell a story.

If you look at those miracles as a whole, you'll see that the power of God is revealed over every possible realm. He does miracles over nature, over disease, over demons, and over death. That's all there is. That's everything, and nothing is left out; all the eggs in one basket. That's what I mean that it's the full mention of miracles. He ransacks the whole creation to show His mighty power over every realm.

Mighty works, wonders and signs

In order to understand Matthew 8 & 9 let me back off for a moment, and get a little broader look, and then we'll come back to the chapter. Have you ever stopped to think, "What is a miracle?" That sounds easy to answer, but I guarantee you that it's not. Here are some of the definitions I read in my commentaries. "A miracle is God's immediate working." Here's another one, "A miracle is an act beyond human power." Another says, "A miracle is something that transcends human experience." Here's what Webster's Dictionary says, "A miracle is an event that apparently contradicts known scientific laws."

The reason it's not easy to nail down is because it's so closely identified with what we call "the laws of nature". There are laws in God's universe; the law of gravity, the law of time and space, light travelling by laws, sound travelling by laws, and heat is the result of atomic laws and principles. There are forces, and there are forces within forces, and there are laws of motion, and laws of magnetism, and laws of electricity. The whole universe operates on the basis of laws. All of the laws are beyond men, and cannot be created by men, and cannot be done by men; man can't govern them, and man cannot create life. How does a miracle differ from the laws of nature?

Let me give an example. If I had a pot of dirt, and I held it before you, and inside that pot of dirt there was a seed, and within thirty seconds that thing began to grow, and it bore leaves, buds, and blossoms, and pretty soon it bore fruit that you could pick and eat, would that be a miracle? Isn't that what happens all the time all around us? Just because it's spread out into seasons and years, isn't that what God does all the time? He takes a seed, and it begins to grow, and it begins to have leaves, and begins to have buds, and blossoms, and then fruit, but we don't look at an apple orchard and say, "What a miracle!" Should we? Is that a miracle? What's the difference between the laws of nature and miracles? All the laws of nature seem to fit those definitions of what people say are miracles. It's something that man can't do, and something only God can do. That seems to be the laws of nature, and yet we know there is a difference between Jesus' miracles, and the miracle that we're living in this universe.

When Jesus multiplied the loaves, what did it really do except knock out all the gradual steps? He knocked out the plowing and the planting and the reaping and the harvesting and the kneading and the cooking; He just had the bread. He just took out the individual steps. Many of the miracles are like that. They just sort of speed up or multiply some of those laws that are already present. In Moses' day they were familiar with swarms of flies. They had that all the time. They were familiar with swarms of locusts. They knew what attacked their cattle. They saw frogs all around. But all of a sudden the locusts became a miracle, and the flies became a miracle, and the frogs became a miracle, and the pestilence on the cattle became a miracle, yet it was something they saw all the time.

I'm sure in the history of mankind there have been many fish with a coin lodged in its gill. I think many times they see that silver thing, and they grab it, and it gets lodged in their gill. What made that a miracle? Many, many times lions and bears have come out of the woods, and have slain individuals, but sometimes it's a miracle. What makes it a miracle? Many times there are storms out of season, and earthquakes and famines that hit the land, but sometimes we say that it's a miracle, and other times we say that it's the laws of nature. What is the difference? Is there a difference?

When a normal working of God becomes, as the Egyptians called it in Exodus 8:19, *"The finger of God,"* what makes the difference? If I were going to write a book, and believe me I'm not going to write this one, entitled "Exceptions to the laws of English grammar," I know what my first chapter would be about. I'd have to give you the laws of English grammar in order to show you what the exceptions were. You wouldn't understand the exceptions if you didn't first have the law. A miracle is the exception of the laws of nature, and you really can't understand the exceptions of the laws of nature until you get a little bit into the laws of nature, and what they are.

Let me say a word about the laws of nature. We've lost an awful lot when somebody named it "mother nature". I read this statement. Is it true? I'm quoting, "In a miracle God works immediately. In nature He leaves it to His laws." Is that accurate? It is not accurate and it is not true. That is a dead, mechanical view of God. It's a false view of God that pictures Him as a great clock maker, that He made this great universe, and set in it all of these wheels, springs and gears, and that in the beginning of time just sort of wound up this universe, and then walked away, so that now it's running by itself, as if God is just waiting for the clock to run out.

The Bible teaching is that God did not make this universe as a clock with all of the laws to govern it, and then walked away to let it run itself out. God is active every moment. John 5:17, *"My Father worketh hitherto and I work."* Hebrews 1:3, *"He upholdeth all things by the word of His power."* Colossians 1:17, *"He is before all things and in Him all things consist and hold together."* Do not think of the laws of nature apart from God? They don't exist apart from God. Laws are for man's benefit. We observe God at work, and we didn't know what to

call it. He did so many things at the same time that we said, "Now, there's a law. We can count on it, and depend upon it, and make our forecasts because of it." If I drop this piece of chalk once, twice, three, one hundred and fifty times, how many times would I have to drop it before I came to the conclusion, "That thing will always fall down and will never fall up?" If I drop it a million times it will always fall down.

Now watch. Is it a law that pulling it down is gravity, as the scientists say? Or is it a living God deciding every time I drop it, He's going to let it go down instead of up? It's not a law of gravity. It's a law of faithfulness. God always does it that way. From our point of view it's a law. From His side it's His will, and His pleasure. It's because God wills it, and He wills it so consistently that we call it a law. It will always happen because God is so faithful and so consistent. He didn't will it once in the beginning of time, and then say, "From now on it's gravity. It will always be that way." No, He didn't do that. But every time anything in all the universe of God falls down, whether it's a leaf on a tree or the chalk, God wills it at that moment to fall down, and God is always, present tense, willing it. You might say, "That's the law of gravity, la, la, la." I say that's a miracle.

If this doesn't increase your vision of God, something's wrong with your heart eyes. I'm spending a lot of time here in order to show you that you may see God everywhere, and in everything all around you all the time. What we call the laws of nature is just God in action, God moving, and God alive. It's a miracle world. It's His consistent testimony to the world of His power and Godhead. What we call laws are God's universal voice to all men. Listen to Psalm 19:1-4, *"The heavens are declaring the glory of God, and their expanses declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech; night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor either words, where their voice is not heard, yet their line is going out throughout all the earth, and their utterance to the end of the world."* God said that the whole universe is His voice declaring in every language at the same time the glory of God. So, in one sense, all the world is a miracle. In a sense it's only what God can do, and man can't do.

There must be a difference between chapter 9 & 10 of Matthew. What is the difference? The Holy Spirit of God decided when He wrote the truth of miracles, He would use three Greek words to tell you what

miracles are. He put all three together in one verse in Acts 2:22, *"Men of Israel, listen to these words; Jesus, the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst..."* The word "miracles" is sometimes translated "mighty works" or "the wonderful works of God". In the gospel of John he just took that word and said, *"These are the mighty works of God."* Miracles are works, wonders and signs. Mighty works calls attention to the fact that they come from God, and that no man can do them, and they aren't from the earth. There is no such thing as a miracle to God. To Him it's natural. It's the fruit of His being. To us it's a miracle. That's the fruit of His being, and is His character. It's as natural for Him to do miracles as it is for us not to do miracles. The real wonder would be if He didn't do miracles. .

And they are called wonders, because after He does those mighty things that we call miracles, it produces in us an effect of astonishment, *"They were filled with wonder and were filled with awe and were filled with astonishment. They marveled*." It was what was produced in man because of the mighty works that He did. Then the response was, "Wow, what a God! I never saw anything like this." When God does a mighty work, whether He does it independently, or by agents, or whether He uses instruments, and it produces wonder in those who are there to observe it, He doesn't contradict His natural law. He transcends and neutralizes it, but He doesn't contradict it. God is pleased that fire should burn. It's His pleasure. That's why fire burns, not because there is a law. It's because God wants it to. "Right, Shadrach?" And Shadrach says, "No, I remember a day when fire didn't burn." Why? What happened to the law? Nothing happened to the law. It was God's plan for that fire to burn, and in that case it was His pleasure that it wouldn't burn. That was a miracle when God said it wouldn't burn. He didn't cancel the law. He just introduced a higher law; a law of His own pleasure, His will and His own desire.

I lift my arm up in the air. I didn't cancel out the law of gravity. I just introduced a higher law; the law of my own will and my own pleasure; the law of my strength. When an airplane takes off there is a new law involved; the law of aerodynamics. Gravity is overpowered by a new law. Water is a liquid, and anything heavier than the same body of water is going to sink. Right, Peter? "No, I remember a day when I walked on the top of water like it was pavement." How come? There's

no law about water. There is just God's pleasure about water, and He does it so consistently that we call it a law, but one day He says, "It's not My pleasure this time," and Peter walked on top of the water.

When God works in such a way that He suspends His law, and neutralizes His natural laws in order to bring in a higher law, we call that a miracle. When It's God's pleasure, and axe heads can float, and a donkey can talk, and a man can live in fish's belly, and a body can come out of the grave, new, different, changed and immortal, and a disease can be stopped in its tracks, and the wind and the waves salute, and say "yes", and click their heels to obey, it's because it's the pleasure of God. All of this, of course, causes wonders, and it causes man to fall on his face and say, *"Depart from me. I'm a sinful man, oh Lord."* It causes awe inspiring worship in our heart.

Then there is the third word. It's called a sign. This is the word that brings us back to Matthew 8 & 9, and we'll get into the meat of what the chapters are all about. A sign is something that looks beyond itself. The goal of miracles is not miracles. Jesus never healed a blind man in order that a blind man could see. He never healed a deaf man in order that a deaf man could hear. He never healed a crippled man in order that a crippled man might walk. Healing was not the goal of His healing. Healing a blind man was a sign. Healing a deaf man was a sign. Cleansing a leper was a sign. Raising the dead was a sign. Healing a paralytic was a sign. Walking on water, calming a sea, and multiplying loaves and fish were signs and pledges, and they look to something else. They don't look to themselves. They go beyond; it's more than proof, and more than a credential of His power.

Every miracle points to a spiritual principle

1 Corinthians chapter 10 mentions some of the miracles of the Old Testament and then says, *"These are given as types* (examples) *for us*." I like to say that every miracle of Christ, without a single exception, are redemptive miracles. Every miracle of Christ was a miracle of mercy. How about the cursing of the fig tree? Even that was a miracle of mercy. We won't get into that now but it was. Every miracle pictured His salvation, and pictured His redemption, and told a story of His love and mercy, and His grace and salvation. Every miracle did that, and had spiritual significance. They all had redemption as the goal.

One time in history, and we're reading about it now, in order to write eternal principles in the Bible, God did something physically. He did something, literally, once in order to lay down a spiritual principle. Then that which He did physically passed away, and the principle remains. We have the principle today. Tremendous confusion has come to the body of Christ because they have tried to retain the pictures. God did it once in order to show the spiritual principle; then He wrote it in His Bible, and we have the spiritual principle. The facts have passed away.

This is the difference between God's universal voice in nature and His specific voice in redemption. A miracle is that mighty work that God does to create wonder in our hearts, which has redemption as its goal. That's a miracle; that shows you the story of salvation. In nature God has one sense, "I am the Lord thy God." That's what nature says. Anybody who studies nature can see the eternal power and divinity and glory of God. He said, "I love you; I want to save you, and cleanse you, and lift you, and redeem you, and I want to draw you unto Myself, and I want to bring you into fellowship." So, it's not surprising to read about a leper being cleansed— not healed. The leper was not healed. Leprosy is a disease, and needs to be healed. Leprosy is a disease alright, but it's a picture, and so it's cleansed, as sin is cleansed. It's not surprising to see Jesus go up to the paralytic and say, *"Take courage, my son, thy sins are forgiven."* "What do you mean? That isn't my problem. My problem is my legs." Jesus said, "No, your problem is your sin." He's dealing spiritually.

After Jesus healed the blind man in John 9, there was a physical blind man, physical eyes and physical healing, He said, *"For judgment I've come into the world; that those who see not might see, and those who see might see not."* It was a spiritual thing. It was done physically to illustrate the spiritual. The Pharisees got the point, and came to Him and said, *"Are we blind, also?"* And Jesus said, *"If you were blind, then you would have no sins. But you say that you aren't blind, therefore your sin remains."* It's spiritual. Sure, it's physical, but it wasn't physical. It pointed beyond that. Miracles are signs, and they are pictures and object lessons. They are illustrations and pledges that point to something greater, and never unto themselves, but they always point to the spiritual counterpart. Jesus healed the blind, that we might know forever that He heals spiritual blindness. Jesus healed the deaf

in order that all the world would forever know that we can hear the voice of the Son of God in our souls. Jesus raised up cripples in order to teach us spiritually how to walk before God, and to walk before men. Jesus raised the dead out of an earthly grave in order to show us the quickening power of the Spirit in our own lives. Whether He was multiplying loaves, or calming storms, or casting out demons, or commanding disease, or robbing death, the grave of its sting, it was always redemptive. It was always to tell the story of salvation, and it was always an illustration.

What is true in fully developed form in Matthew 8 & 9 is also true of all the Old Testament miracles. There you have it in picture form, and here you have it in fully developed form, but it's the same thing. All of God's interventions of nature when they embrace these three things are redemptive miracles. In Matthew 9 where He does so many miracles, He's pictured as eating with sinners; publicans and sinners. They come to Him and say, *"Why is your master eating with sinners*?" Do you remember His answer? Matthew 9:12, *"It's not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are not healed who need a physician."* What is He saying? In a chapter where He is doing all of this healing, and why is He eating with sinners? His answer was, "Sinners are ill. Sinners are sick. That's why I'm eating with sinners, because I'm talking about a spiritual thing; spiritual sickness and spiritual illness." He was their doctor and physician.

It's so wonderful to view these miracles as God intended them, as mighty works of God which points to, and pictures His great salvation. Leprosy points to the death of sin, the defilement of sin, and it's corruption and loathsomeness; palsy to the feebleness of sin; blindness to the ignorance of sin; demons to the enmity of sin; deafness to the inability to hear God's voice and the inability to take in; dumbness to the inability to give out; the withered hand to the inability to work; paralysis to the inability to walk; the woman who was bent over with her infirmity, showing how sin crushes and bows you down, brings you low, and brings a burden; the woman with the issue of blood shows the advanced stage of sin, the fever and restlessness of sin; and the raising them out of the dead shows that God gives life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. It's all a mighty parable and a mighty picture.

In all of the miracles Jesus dealt differently with each one. It's so instructive. Some people suffered much, and some suffered little, and some were a burden to themselves, and some were a burden to others. Some were in danger, and some were not. Some were so anxious to be helped by God, and others could care less, and their loved ones and friends were the ones who were anxious, and they came to Jesus looking for help. There were miracles done unto men, and unto women, and unto children. Why? It was because He was telling a marvelous story, and telling it in language that we could understand, and giving us illustrations, object lessons and word pictures that we could have before our eyes, so that we could see in the physical what His heart was always intending in the spiritual.

These are marvelous chapters that we are going to get into. But I want you to see that God has given these things as works and wonders and signs; as pictures and object lessons. In the whole scan of these miracles, by a touch or by a word or combination of those things, He brings life, health, freedom and victory, and it's all a picture. That's a miracle as I understand it. It's a work of God creating wonder in man's heart which pictures redemption. If it doesn't do that, then it's the other kind of miracle; the kind of miracle that is around us all the time; God working in nature.

It's not surprising when I read chapter 8 & 9, five miracles in chapter 8 and five miracles in chapter 9, to come to Matthew 9:9, right in the middle of the miracles, *"As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting in a tax office and He said to him, 'Follow Me,' and he arose and followed Him."* Isn't that a strange place to introduce your testimony, right in the middle of the two chapters on miracles? He said, "Now a word about my personal testimony and how I got saved." That's not strange. I'll tell you why he told about his conversion here. It's because it was the greatest miracle of all. The miracles were picturing something, and as he, inspired by God, began to tell about these miracles, right in the middle of it he says, "And then he saved me." Then he went on and told some more miracles. It's a spiritual thing and it illustrates what God will do in conversion.

Let me encourage you to live in the reality of spirituals and to be very cautious about going after physicals. When I say that the physical has passed away and the spiritual remains, I'm not suggesting that He

cannot heal now. I don't know whether He will or He won't. I've heard some wonderful testimonies saying that God indeed does heal today, and that God does many marvelous miracles today. I'm not going to dispute that, and I'm not going to hold those testimonies in suspicion. I'm not going to judge the great healing movement that is sweeping through our land. But this I will do. I'll lay down the foundation. I know what the foundation is. How you build on that is between your Spirit controlled conscience and God. I know this, that the emphasis of God is always spiritual. It's not our natural eyes and ears but our spiritual eyes and ears that are important. It matters little if I can walk with my physical legs, but it matters a whole lot if I can walk with spiritual legs.

There are a lot of people who miss the spiritual. I'm not saying to throw the physical out, but I'm saying to make sure you have a foundation, and that you see beyond the physical; God heals physical things to illustrate spiritual realities. Don't miss the spiritual, and get short changed with just the physical miracle. The physical miracle is so nothing, compared to what He is picturing in the Spirit. Once again, as I've already suggested, the goal is not the miracles of God. The goal is always the God of miracles; it's always Himself, and it's always the One who performs. I read this statement by Bishop Richard Trench, "All the parables of Christ are miracles of teaching, and all the miracles of Christ are parables of action." I think that is good. All the miracles of Christ are parables of action. He did it in order to tell a story. The value of these miracles lies beyond themselves.

2

THE MIRACLE OF THE HEALING OF THE LEPER

Matthew 8:1, *And when He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him and, behold, a leper came to Him, and bowed down to Him saying, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' Reaching out His hand He touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed, and Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one, and go show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses prescribed for a testimony to them.'"*

Christ is approachable, curing the incurable

Let me share two things from this particular passage. First let me show you the symbolic reality which is illustrated by this miracle, and then let me show you the greatness of Christ which is revealed by this miracle. What is illustrated by the cleansing of the leper? I'm not the first to discover that leprosy is a wonderful picture of sin. Just pick up any commentary anywhere, and they've all seen that same thing. Consistently throughout the scripture leprosy is pictured as sin. Luke tells the same story as Matthew. Luke was a doctor, and because he was a physician we read with real interest Luke 5:12, *"This man was full of leprosy."* That's the doctor's view; not a spot here and there, but the disease had spread itself over his whole body. This man was a leper in its advanced stages from head to foot. What is that a picture of? Someone might say, "The rottenness of sin because the skin used to rot

off the body." Someone might say, "The loathsomeness of sin because a leper was repulsive to look at, and there was also a stench that went along with the infection on the leper; the pollution of sin, the hopelessness of sin, or the fact that the leper had to cry, 'Unclean, unclean,' and was segregated from all of society. Maybe it showed the separation of sin. Because it dealt with the nervous system, maybe it was the insensibility of sin." All those parallels are on the surface. What does God say leprosy is a picture of?

I like to express it in these words—the death of sin. It's not surprising that this miracle comes first among the miracles that the Holy Spirit selects. God gave two complete chapters in the Old Testament on the leper; Leviticus 13 & 14. Leprosy was the disease of diseases. Because of its insidious beginnings, and because of its slow process, and because of its destructive power, and because of its ultimate ruin, it became God's picture for the symbol of death. All the laws of the leper are identical to the laws concerning a dead body. There's no difference. The leper was ceremoniously unclean, and was a living death. The process of decay that takes place in the body after it's put in the ground had already begun on the leper while he was alive.

Remember Moses' sister, Miriam, had leprosy. When Aaron prayed for Miriam, he prayed, *"Let her not be as one that is dead."* A leper was a living parable of death. They were to have the mourner's garments, have their head bare, and they were to hold up to their lips the mourner's rag to cover their lips. As a picture of death they were to be separated from all society; total seclusion from everything, as one would be corrupted if he had touched a dead body. One would be corrupted if he touched a leper. It wasn't that the disease was contagious. It was hereditary, but it wasn't contagious. They were like a dead person, and you couldn't touch them because you would be filthy. They were a picture of death. It's not possible to enter into the leper's plight, to feel what he felt, and put yourself in his shoes. He carried before God's people, before the eyes of all, the symbol of death. Even the word "leper" brought terror to the heart of the Jew. That's the picture; death and separation. What revelation of Christ is given in Matthew 8:1-4? I like to word it this way; Christ is the approachable One. He cured the incurable, and He touched the untouchable.

I love to relate this story to its context. Jesus had just finished the Sermon on the Mount. More lofty and profound standards had never been written anywhere than the Sermon on the Mount. Picture, as I read these verses beginning in Matthew 7:28. *"The result was that when Jesus finished these words, the multitude were amazed at His teaching. He was teaching them as One having authority, and not as the scribes. And when He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him and, behold, a leper came to Him, and bowed down to Him saying, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean,' and stretching out His hand He touched Him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.'"* What a contrast; the Lord Jesus coming down from that mountain, incarnate purity! He had just presented the holy standard, *"Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll not enter in." "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."* He gave that tremendous sermon on incarnate purity, and the first thing He meets is incarnate pollution. He meets a leper. What a contrast; life face to face with death! The Lord Jesus is face to face with a leper! What a revelation of the Lord as the approachable One!

Sometimes, as you'll see in the next miracle, He showed His greatness by doing miracles from a distance. This time He did His miracle not from a distance. If I were Christ I would have done this one from a distance, from afar. I wonder how long it was, on the level of earth, since anyone had touched that leper. It said he was full of leprosy. That means he had it many years. What a word! Matthew 8:3, *"And stretching out His hand He touched Him*." I tell you, that touches my heart. Matthew 8:2, *"If you are willing,"* and chapter 8:3, *"I am willing."* Those two verses together reveals His eternal attitude about moral leprosy, *"I am willing."* He is always willing; He's able and willing to deliver. He's infinitely willing and infinitely able. There is no deficiency in His ability, and there is no deficiency in His willingness. With man you've got a problem with his ability and willingness to do it, but not with Jesus. There are no forbidding walls around His palace. He waves not from a distant balcony. There is no sin to keep you from King Jesus. He's approachable; He touched the leper free. I'm glad He's approachable.

Sometimes we get the idea that we've got to overcome God's reluctance by our faith, and we've got to wrestle God to be willing. It's not so. We don't have a reluctant Savior; *"I am willing."* It's always

His will to cleanse the leper. There is never an exception to that. It would be wrong for a homosexual to pray, "Lord, I don't know if it's your will for me to be cleansed from homosexuality." It's always His will to cleanse a leper. "Lord, I don't know if it's Your will to deliver me from gossip, or from lust, or from passion, or pride, or anger, or covetousness, or from bitterness, or an unforgiving spirit, or from alcohol, or a grumbling heart, or being critical." It's always His will to deliver you from leprosy, "I am willing."

No leper ever needs to be afraid that He is going to turn him away. He touched the leper. I praise God for that verse. He touched the leper, and He touched me, and He touched you, and He always says, *"I am willing; be cleansed."* If God would only open our eyes to the infinite willingness of the Lord Jesus to deliver us from leprosy in all of its forms, and in all of its stages! What that means practically is that the burden of responsibility is always on you and me, and not on God. If you don't receive cleansing, it's because you don't want it, and not because He is not willing to give it. Isn't that wonderful to know, that it's always your fault?

The proof of cleansing is that you will be clean

Matthew 8:4, *"Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one but go show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses prescribed for a testimony to them.'"*

What was Jesus intending to teach by this? Jesus was referring to Leviticus 14 when He said to show yourself to the priest. That passage had not been used for over fifteen hundred years. I would have loved to have seen the expression on that priest's face when this leper showed up at his door. Knock, knock, knock, "I've come to submit to the test of the leper." "Say what?" "I've come to submit to the test of the leper that Moses commanded in the Old Testament." "Moses? Where did he say that? What chapter? Just a minute. Brother priest, come here a minute. We've got somebody at the door, and he says that he is a cleansed leper, and he wants to submit to the test that Moses mentioned in the Old Testament. Did you ever read that? Do you remember using that? Excuse me, Mr. Cleansed Leper, I've got to call the high priest. Hi there high priest. We've got this guy at the door, and he says that he's a cleansed leper." In all the history of mankind, even though God

inspired two chapters in the Bible, Leviticus 13 & 14, in all the history of mankind they were never used until that day! There was never the need to have the test of leprosy cleansed. Miriam got leprosy before the law came into existence, and when Naaman was cleansed he was a Syrian, and it didn't apply to him. So, there was never an occasion to use those two chapters. What a test it was; great day!

If you read chapter 14 they went over that man with a fine tooth comb and a magnifying glass. They had to examine in his mouth, examine between his toes, shave all the hair off his body, and examine all of the hairs. He went through the mill. Jesus said, "You go and do that for a test." He's cleansed; he's clean. They shaved him, looked in his mouth, looked in his eyes, looked in his ears, looked between his toes, and they shaved his legs; unbelievable. Why did Jesus tell him to go through that? What is He illustrating? Why did He say in verse 4, *"See that you tell no one."?* If I were the Lord Jesus I would do the opposite. I would say, "There's a law in the Old Testament and you don't have to go through that. That's a lot of legalism. Instead, you go out and share what I've just done. Go out and tell everyone." But He did the opposite and said not tell to anyone—just go show yourself as a testimony, and submit to the law of testing.

What is He doing? He's laying down a fundamental principle that ties into the great message of Matthew. Let me summarize it in these words; the testimony, the evidence of cleansing (this is profound, now) is a clean life. Is that so deep? What is the proof that I've been cleansed? I'm clean. That's the proof I've been cleansed; I'm clean. In other words, Jesus was saying, "Your life will be a testimony." It's not what you say with your mouth. Go and show yourself clean, and that will become a testimony. May I suggest to my fellow cleansed lepers that you and I are under a tremendous scrutiny every day, and that we are being examined to the nth degree? The sinners are out there looking in your hair, and in your mouth, and between your toes. That is your testimony. It matters very little if you present four spiritual laws to them, and it matters very little if you can give them a picture of a bridge, and it matters very little if you can present to them a Roman Road, if you aren't clean and holy, and you aren't pure. The real testimony is a clean life. Every day in one way or another we are being examined, and Jesus said, "You don't have to say a word. Just be clean and be pure, and that will become a testimony and a witness. They are

looking for leprosy; impatience, temper, dishonesty, slipshoddiness, laziness, slothfulness, improper words, and a critical spirit. They are looking for leprosy.

We testify, not when we shove a gospel tract in someone's face, but when we present ourselves for the test of the leper, for the test of cleansing. It's all a wonderful picture. The cleansing of the leper is a great work of God, and into the eternal ages our eyes will be wide, and our mouths will be opened wide in amazement, and we'll say, "Wonder of wonders; He touched me and He cleansed me." It's all a picture of what He wants to do spiritually. Show yourself clean. Every miracle in these two chapters takes us forward; by looking at the ten miracles, we have one grand view of our redemption—a completed picture.

3

A WORD ABOUT THE MODERN HEALING MOVEMENT

Matthew 8:16-17, *"And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.'"*

Stress the spiritual reality and not the physical

Before we pick up in Matthew 8:5-13 and the healing of the centurion's servant, let me ask you to turn to Matthew 8:16-17 and let me say a word about the modern healing movement. What I'd like to present to you is what I believe is the foundation of the healing movement. We need to trust the Lord together as we go through this. I'm convinced that our attitude on this subject is far more important than our doctrine and the conclusion we arrive at after we study it together. In one extreme we have cold dogmatism which says that if you don't believe in healing and trusting God to make you well, and that you can't rebuke Satan on disease, then you are filled with unbelief, and are not letting God work. They say that someone who does not believe that God heals today has a negative influence on all those around them, and they tie God's hands, so He can't work in their midst. Those who interpret it this way say you are a limiter of God and filled with ugly unbelief if you don't have the faith to be healed.

On the other extreme there are those with a smug critical spirit who say the healers are just frauds and charlatans, and that everyone who gets involved with them are ignorant, immature and uninstructed. Both attitudes have greatly hurt the people of God. Both attitudes have also injured the heart of Christ, splitting the people of God into what they call "camps". There's the healing camp and the non-healing camp. There is a difference between being dividing and being divisive. If you don't agree with something it is not wrong to separate from it. That's division and that's Bible. The church has prospered through division. If you don't like something, separate from it.

But divisiveness is another thing. Divisiveness includes division, but it has something very powerful associated with it, and that's an attitude with personal attacks on the character and the spirit of others. It's a judgmental and critical spirit of others. You can divide in love but you can never be divisive in love. Divisiveness is really full of hate. It is a proud, censorious spirit that exalts one by knocking down another. I call attention to this because God's people are being burned, even as I share this with you now, by both extremes.

Someone might say, "But the healing movement has caused great harm to the people of God. People are being swept away by emotions and by feelings, and they are too subjective; people who have nowhere else to turn, grasping for a straw and some hope, getting swept away." That might be true but the other side is also true. The attack on the healing movement has also caused great harm to the cause of Christ, and among the people of God. Let me try to lay before you the reason and foundation behind the healing movement. Then, I trust the Spirit of God will quicken us through understanding, and create in us a God-honoring spirit and attitude as we come in contact with this great movement that is sweeping through the church of Christ.

Look again at Mathew 8:16-17, *"And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill, in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.'"* I want you to notice that Matthew quotes Isaiah the prophet, and prefaces it with the words *"in order that…"* He healed all who were ill, in order that. In order that what? In order to fulfill prophesy. What was that

prophesy? Matthew quotes Isaiah 53:4, *"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrow He carried away,"* or as Matthew paraphrases, *"And carried away our diseases."*

What is Isaiah 53 about? Not everyone would answer the same thing. They say it's about a suffering Messiah, or that it's about the cross, or that it's about the death of the Lord Jesus. It prophesied about His death upon the cross. *"He was despised and forsaken of men. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and He was pierced through for our iniquities, and bruised for our transgressions. It pleased God to bruise Him, like a lamb led to slaughter."* I don't think any Bible student would have trouble telling you what Isaiah 53 is about. Matthew is not the only one who quoted Isaiah 53:4.

The Apostle Peter also quoted it in 1 Peter 2:24, and he had another interpretation. *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross…. By His wounds you were healed."* Here is the problem. We know Jesus died for sin. And those who receive His atonement are spiritually healed by His stripes. That is clear. But look at Matthew 8:17, and instead of the verse "he bore our sins", it says *"He carried away our diseases."* It looks like Matthew is saying, "Christ not only died for your sin, but He also died for your disease, the result of sin." They say that Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would die for sickness as well as sin.

The whole healing movement is based on this verse. They call the doctrine, "Healing in the Atonement." They say that Christ died for sin, and Christ died for sickness. Here is their reasoning. Since Christ died for sin, you can claim forgiveness by faith. If you don't claim forgiveness it's not God's fault; it's your fault. God has made every provision in the cross for you to be forgiven; claim it and it's yours, because forgiveness is in the atonement, and is part of the benefit of the cross. Just so, they say that Christ died for sickness and disease, and you can claim healing and deliverance from sickness by faith. If you don't have it, it's not God's fault, because Christ died that you might be healthy, strong and whole. In the same way you claimed forgiveness, you can claim deliverance from your sickness. They say that if you don't trust God for healing that you've got unbelief.

I want you to at least understand where they are coming from, and why they are so dogmatic on healing. It's because they believe it's in the

atonement. We ought not to be too critical of those whose hearts are set on claiming all the benefits of the cross, and believe that healing is one of those blessings. I do not believe that healing is in the atonement. I believe that healing is based on the atonement, as every blessing of life is based on the atonement. Every good thing we have on earth is because of the death of Christ. I have my children because of the atonement; I have my ministry because of the atonement; I have my wife because of the atonement; I have many friends all over the world because of the atonement. But those things are not in the atonement.

Then what did Matthew mean by quoting Isaiah 53:4? I believe He meant that physical healing pictured spiritual healing. Jesus did physical things to illustrate spiritual things. The picture represents the reality. Isaiah 53:4 speaks about the reality. The earthly ministry of Christ before He died was shown in pictures, and fulfilled in picture form; when He died He fulfilled it in fact. It's not a sin to be sick, although some sickness is sin related, and caused by sin. Jesus did not die for sickness. He died for sin. By His stipes we are healed from all forms of sin. How did He picture all forms of sin? It was by picturing all forms of disease! I believe we are to understand the spiritual side of the physical ministry of Christ, and believe that we can have deliverance from all kinds of sin.

Can Jesus heal today? Of course! He can do anything He wants to do! He is God. We are in bad trouble when we begin to limit God, and say that God can't. Does Jesus physically heal disease today? He may. There are plenty of people who say He does. Plenty of reputable people who have no reason to deceive have given testimonies that He often heals today. We need to be careful of saying that it's all psychological, or that it's a fake, or that it's of Satan. These may be occasions when He raises up some sick child of His for redemptive purposes.

Must Jesus heal physical diseases today? Has He obligated Himself by the cross? Did He die for cancer and for multiple sclerosis and kidney disease and the common cold? I say that He died for sin. He died to bring spiritual health. Physical health is only a picture of spiritual health. You may have the reality of spiritual health without the picture. God's heart has always been on the spiritual, though. One time and for all time He went about healing physical disease, for our physical eyes

to behold, so that He might forever record His heart for the spiritual health of Christians.

You may disagree and that's alright; we can still fellowship in love around Christ. For those who still hold the picture, you have a special danger. That is that you may have hold of the picture, and be missing the principle of the spiritual healing, the real healing. Psalm 41:4, *"Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee*." Jeremiah 3:22, *"I will heal your backslidings."* Hebrew 12:12-13, *"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak, and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."* Psalm 147:3, *He healeth the broken hearted."* Psalm 42:11, *"God is the health of my countenance."* Proverbs 16:24, *"Pleasant words are healing to the bones."*

Whatever position you take, whether that healing is in the atonement, or that it's based on the atonement, don't miss the spiritual truth. It would be a shame to have God give you new eyes, and then be blind toward Him, and a shame to throw away your crutches, and then never learn to walk before God. It would be the height of tragedy to come back from the grave victorious over worms and corruption, and be cold and dead toward God. Don't miss the soul by attention to the body. I see God's people so split over healing, and so unloving toward each other. It grieves my spirit. Stress the foundations, stress the principles, and stress the spiritual realities. If someone wants to embrace both the picture and the reality, let them. That doesn't mean that you have to. Just claim the principle.

4

HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

Matthew 8:5-13, *"And when He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, entreating Him and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain.' And He said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' But the centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, "Go!" and he goes, and to another "Come!" and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this!" and he does it.' Now when Jesus heard this He marveled, and said to those who were following, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. And I say to you that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' And Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way; let it be done to you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed that very hour."*

The goal is not physical healing, but knowing Jesus as King over disease.

Let me give a little background that will put the facts of this story in your mind's eye. Don't confuse this with the redemptive miracle in John 4:46-54, the healing of the nobleman's son. The place is different. One was in Capernaum, and the other was in Cana. The

request is different. The one was for a servant, and the other was for a son. The people are different. One was a Roman centurion and the other was a Jewish nobleman. Even the sickness was different. One was paralysis and the other was a fever. The purpose of the two accounts is different, as well. The centurion is an example of a healthy faith, and the nobleman was an example of weak faith.

The centurion in our story is one of seven centurions we meet in the New Testament record. This was a man of tremendous character. The record of this story is also in Luke 7:2-10. From Luke's account we find that this man did not come himself, but came through his servants. They delivered his request and message. There are things recorded of him as a man that puts him head and shoulders above other Roman centurions who were ruffians. The servants told Jesus in Luke 7:4&5, *"He is worthy for you to grant this to him for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue."* I don't know what would move a Roman centurion to build a synagogue for Jews, but in the eyes of men he was worthy.

In Luke 7:2 we also learn that he loved his sick slave. In those days people owned people as a man owns a piece of furniture. Slaves were roughly treated by Romans, and when they were sick they were disposed of. But this Roman had a different kind of heart. He loved his slave. We also can peek into his character by looking at his own opinion of himself. Matthew 8:8, *"Lord, I am not qualified for you to come under my roof...."* It's the same word the servants used of him, "He is worthy"—"I'm not worthy." And on top of all of this, the Jews gave a glowing opinion of the man. Matthew 8:10, *"I have not found such a great faith with anyone in Israel."*

As I have said, this is a redemptive miracle. What story is Jesus intending to teach by the healing of the centurion's servant? What is the spiritual counterpart to this marvelous story? Let me ask and answer two questions about this record. One is about his view of God, and the other is about his faith. The first question is, "What great revelation of Christ is illustrated through the facts of this story?" Let me give the answer, and then illustrate it from the record.

The revelation I see here is of Christ as the King over disease. There is a large emphasis here on the "word of authority". To get at the heart

of this you must understand what the centurion meant by Matthew 8:9, *"For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes and to another one, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."* What did he mean by pointing out that he was under authority and in authority?

He had a servant lying on a bed at home who was paralyzed and suffering in great pain. Commentators tell us this was an extreme form of palsy, a disease of the brain. On the level of earth it was a hopeless case. In verse 8:8 he says, *"Just say the word, and my servant will be healed."* That shows his wonderful view of Jesus as King over disease. Let me paraphrase it to get it home to your heart. The centurion said, "I know what authority is. I am familiar with Roman authority. I know about cohorts and legions, and I know about officers and captains. I am a centurion. I have one hundred soldiers under my command. I tell them to come, and they come. I tell them to go, and they go. Whatever I tell them to do they do, for I am in authority. I rule and command, and am over them. I didn't get to be a centurion by rebellion. I am also under authority. If my commanding officer says to me to go, I go, and if he says to come or stay, I come or stay. I understand authority, lordship, power, jurisdiction and government. Lord, I recognize in You authority, the ability to command. I have servants who must obey me, but I cannot command disease, but I see authority in you. I know disease is your servant. You are Lord over disease. You are King over disease." Matthew 8:8, *"Just say the word, and my servant will be healed."* This is wonderful. The centurion was master over servants; Jesus was master over disease. Jesus commands disease as a master commands a slave, "Go," and he goes.

Before I apply this spiritually, let me give a physical application of it. The goal is not physical healing, but knowing Jesus as King over disease. Sometimes knowing Jesus as King over disease means removal of the disease. Sometimes knowing Jesus as King over disease means going through the disease. I have a book in my library written by Fanny Crosby which was published in 1903. She was blinded at 6 weeks of age. She writes, "It may have been a blunder on the physician's part, but it was not a mistake of God's. I verily believe it was His intention that I should live my days in physical darkness, so as to be better prepared to sing His praises, and incite others to do so." And then she adds, "I could not have written thousands of hymns if I

had been hindered by the distractions of seeing all the interesting and beautiful objects that would have been presented to my notice."

On the first page of her book she writes, "I have heard that this physician never ceased expressing regret at the occurrence, and that it was one of the sorrows of his life. But if I could meet him now I would say, "Thank you, thank you," over and over again, "for making me blind. For it was through your agency that I came about." Fanny Jane Crosby lived to be ninety five years of age. She authored over six thousand hymns: "Sure in the Arms of Jesus", "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross", "Tell Me the Story of Jesus", "Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim it", "Blessed Assurance". In ninety five years of life she never knew healing. But why could she write the hymns "Praise Him, Praise Him" or "To God Be the Glory" or "All the Way my Savior Leads Me"? It was because, though she never knew healing, she knew Jesus as King over disease.

Listen to her song, "All the way my Savior leads me. What have I to ask beside?" Really? Even when the drunk doctor put acid instead of medicine in your eyes??? Was He leading you then? ALL THE WAY! "Can I doubt His tender mercies, who through life has been my guide? Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell. For I know what ere befalls me, Jesus doeth all things well!!" Fanny Crosby knew Jesus as King over disease. Don't miss the blessing by going after healing as the goal. Knowing Jesus is the goal.

Paul went after healing when he sought deliverance from his thorn in the flesh. Instead he was turned to Christ, 2 Corinthians 12:9, *"My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness."* When you read testimonies like John Bunyan's and Alan Redpath's, and they tell you of God's blessing through disease, you realize there is something bigger, higher, and better than healing. The centurion recognized it as knowing Jesus as authority, as Lord, over disease. He can say, "Come," and it comes. He can say, "Go," and it will go. He is the One who said in Deuteronomy 32:39, *"See now that I, I am He, and there is no God besides Me. It is I who put to death and gives life. I have wounded, and it is I who heals. There is no one who can deliver from My hand. Indeed, I lift up my hand to heaven and say, 'As I live forever.'"* We need to catch the revelation of Christ in Matthew 8:5-13.

There will always be 2 Timothy 4:20, *"Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick."* Paul raised Eutychus to life. Paul healed a cripple at Lystra. He was mightily used for healing, but he left Trophimus sick at Miletum. It was not God's will for Trophimus to be healed.

A cry for help in weakness, helplessness, and openness to worship is great faith

Matthew 8:10, *"Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.'"*

But there is another emphasis in this story. In fact, this seems to be the main point; the physical thing by which Jesus intends to illustrate by His redemptive story. I'm talking about the centurion's faith. What made Jesus marvel? When you first read this you say, "In what sense can Jesus marvel? How can Jesus wonder?" As Augustine writes, "Can Jesus be surprised about faith He Himself created?" No, He was not marveling with an element of surprise or un-expectation. He knew this man had this faith. But He marveled in the sense of taking extreme pleasure, and He called attention to notice it publicly. The fact is that He made an example of it, and contrasted it with the whole nation of Israel. Commentators point out that the two times Jesus marveled at great faith it was gentile faith. In Matthew 8:10 He marveled at the centurion's faith. In Matthew 15:28 He marveled at the Syrophoenician woman's faith. Jesus ends this section with Matthew 8:13, *"Let it be done to you as you have believed."*

I don't believe I'm overemphasizing faith when Jesus Himself made such a big deal out of it in this context in Matthew 8:10-13. Usually when a passage such as this is dealt with, you get sermons on "What is great faith?", and then observations are pulled from the text, such as that he was seeking Christ, and that he was self-deprecating, and he was humble, and counted it a presumption to have Christ even under his roof. He had a high view of the authority of Christ. All of that is true and good, and should be emphasized. But sometimes it puts it out of reach of the normal Christian. We say, "I want to believe like that centurion, but I don't know if I'm humble, and if I'm truly seeking, and if I'm presumptuous, and if I have faith in His authority. If He said to

me in Matthew 8:13, *"Let it be done to you as you have believed,"* I would be in grave trouble. I'd feel sorry for my slave if His good health depended on me—as I have believed.

We don't want to become faith centered, but we do want to catch the spirit of what Jesus was calling attention to. Let me try to nail down the heart and core of faith as it is being exalted here. Bear with me as I illustrate this. What is this "greatness of faith"? What kind of faith is it that lays hold of the authority of Jesus? When does Christ put Himself in the power of our faith? Let me state it in one word, and then illustrate it several ways. Faith is openness. Openness is what lets the life of Jesus flow. Unbelief is closed-ness. That is why the unbelieving life is a barren life. It is closed to life.

Faith is not just creed. I may know all about a person (facts), and yet his nature will be shut tight against me. Faith is not feeling. I may love and trust a person on the surface, so specifically, that he can do nothing for me. Faith is not simple obedience. I may follow meticulously a man's footsteps, and be in no more real communion with him than his dog! Faith is more profound than that. It is openness. It is complete openness to the higher life of God. Faith is like a channel between your life and His life. To have that channel closed is unbelief. To have that channel opened wide is great faith, health and life. It is not artificial, nor is it difficult. It is no effort for God's life to flow.

Take the illustration of an oak tree. Think of the thousands of leaves it has. The oak tree is not burdened by a hundred leaves, or one thousand leaves, or ten thousand leaves. The great heart of the oak tree beats, and wherever there is openness, the common life flows. My heart sends blood and life to my arms and my legs. But it also sends blood and life to my fingertips. My mother has a tremendous cholesterol build-up in her veins. She can hardly walk because of the pain. Her veins are closed with blockages. Faith is being open. There are no blockages, no walls, and no negatives. All is, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

The centurion didn't have something special called faith, as if it were a rare item to find and possess. He came humbly in weakness and in helplessness. He recognized Jesus as King over disease. He was open. Jesus could not resist his openness; He marvels and calls attention to it.

He is thrilled by it, delighting to plow in that open channel. Don't make a problem out of faith. Weakness always overpowers strength.

If a child walked into a factory, and said to the laborers there, "Quit work now, and give me some time," they would say, "Go away, child, you are bothering me." If the child said, "I want you to cancel your bowling this evening, and miss your supper, and invest your time and a great deal of your money," they would laugh and say, "Who does this child think they are?" But let that little child be in trouble, or let that little child wander out into the woods, and be in danger of exposure or disease, or let that child be lost, then that child has mastered the strong, busy men. They would all rally and get out of work early. They'd miss their supper, and cancel their social engagements, and hire help and great equipment, and tirelessly search for the little child.

What was it that moved the city to help? It was helplessness, and weakness, and nothingness, and it was the cry for help. It was openness. That's faith. That's what is so great about the centurion's faith. It just recognized the authority of Christ and was open to His Lordship. It cried, "Help!" Jesus cannot work where there is no openness. He longs to find openness, and He thrills when He sees it. This, I believe, is what He longed to illustrate in the redemptive miracle of the healing of the centurion's servant; Christ is the King over disease, and great Faith is openness to the worship of Christ.

5

THE HEALING OF PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

Matthew 8:14&15, *"After Jesus had come to Peter's home He saw his mother-in-law sick in bed with a fever, and He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she arose, and began to wait on Him."*

Before I can minister to Him, He must minister to me: From natural weakness to supernatural strength.

Let me give a little background of this passage. It's short; only two verses in Matthew. God the Spirit was pleased to give us a record of this miracle in three places. It's in Matthew 8:14-17, in Mark 1:29-31 and also in Luke 4:38&39. In Mark1:29-31 we learn that it was not just Peter, Jesus and Peter's mother-in-law in the house. It says that James and John were there, too. I read this statement by Charles Spurgeon, and I'm quoting, "Whenever you see Peter, James and John present with the Lord, you may look for special wonders." It's true. It was Peter, James and John who were near Christ in His agony at Gethsemane. When Jesus raised the child from the dead, it was Peter, James and John who were allowed to go into the inner chamber. In this story Peter, James and John are there, and Jesus does a wonder.

In Luke we find the expression "high fever" or "great fever". I don't know how high the fever was, but I think it's instructive that the doctor

tells us that it was a great fever. In other words, God told us that in Luke, and Luke was a physician, that it was a high fever, and I don't think he is meaninglessly throwing words around. Because Dr. Luke records "great fever", we can assume that she was really burning up. Luke also adds another detail that we don't have in the Matthew account. In Matthew Jesus just touched her, and the fever left. But Luke adds this, *"Standing over her he rebuked the fever."* The word "rebuked" is very interesting. It's the same word that He uses when He casts out demons, and when he calmed the stormy sea. Literally it means "be muzzled". He muzzled the fever. Jesus not only touched it, but He also spoke, and the fever was gone.

What revelation of Christ is presented in this miracle? Let me say it in terms of the facts, give it as a principle, and then try to illustrate it. In terms of the facts, Christ is the one who touches me, and rebukes my fever. Those are the facts. According to the principle, it can be stated in these words, "Christ is the one who enables me to minister to Him." Peter's mother-in-law was weakened to the place where she couldn't minister unto the Lord. She could not serve Him. She had a fever, and could only lay in bed. She had no strength, no power, and she was weak. I think the fact that the Spirit of God used the word "fever" here is a wonderful illustration. Nothing saps away your strength like a fever saps away your strength. It makes you weak, sluggish and tired. You ache, and if the fever is high enough, you go out of your mind.

When a person has a fever, it takes time after their strength is recovered to recuperate, and come back to full strength. You don't just jump out of bed, and start going back to work, and doing your daily labors. There is a convalescing period. On one side we have natural weakness, and on the other side we have natural strength. On the level of earth when you have a fever, that is natural weakness. The doctor will say, "Alright, your fever is gone, but I want you to stay in bed for a while until your strength returns. Take it easy, and go slow at it. Don't try to do too much at once, because it's going to take time to get from natural weakness to where you have your natural strength back again." When you read this story you don't see convalescing, or a period of time between the fever and the time she ministered unto the Lord. Matthew 8:15, *"She arose and began to wait on Him."* In Mark and Luke you have three "immediately s". It says that immediately they came to the house, and immediately they spoke to Him about her, and

she immediately arose, and began to minister unto them. Those are not just meaningless facts. They have great principles of life.

I'll come back to this truth in a moment, that Christ is the one who enables me immediately to serve Him. Let me show you a great principle of life here. This fevered woman illustrates the truth of Christian service, and you'll see how it ties in with redemptive miracles 1 & 2 in a moment. The fevered woman illustrates the fevered Christian, and illustrates the fevered church. How much God's people can learn from Peter's mother-in-law in this record! On the level of earth, in the illustration, a fever is a picture of natural weakness, and when you recover gradually you go back to your natural strength; from natural weakness to natural strength. That's in the reality. In the story you don't have that. Peter's mother-in-law was brought from natural weakness to supernatural strength. She didn't go back to her natural strength. God had done a miracle, and she wasn't ministering in her own strength. She was ministering in the strength that was received as a gift from the healing touch and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

An awful lot of Christian service is nothing more than fever, and nothing more than running from natural weakness to natural strength, and back to natural weakness and natural strength; back and forth. You get a zeal, and you work your head off, and then you get all pooped out, and you just give it all up, and go back to bed. Then you get another revival, and you get enthused again, and you are back to natural strength. You rest a while, you recover, and you are back into the action on the front line. Then you weary yourself, and come back to natural weakness. Much of the Christian life, and what man calls Christian service is nothing more than a bunch of starts and stops. The church has a fever. I don't know how high it is. Many have died from fever.

The message of Christian service and ministering unto Him is in this story of healing Peter's mother-in-law. That's why so many people need revivals to keep them going. We get so psyched up at a conference, or we get our battery charged at a retreat or special meeting, and after we're all charged up we come back with great enthusiasm, "We're going to do a great work for the Lord, and we're going to win our generation for the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll serve Him, and we'll do wonders for Him. We begin now, and we run hard." But then, because there is little or no response, for one reason or another we get

cold and lethargic, and pretty soon we stop plowing, and stop pushing, and we stop knocking at doors, and we stop attending the meetings, and we stop having the zeal we once had. We collapse. Of course, that puts you on a nice guilt trip. Then you say, "Oh, something has gone wrong, and I've gotten cold feet for the Lord, and I need another revival or another retreat. I need fire in the old boiler. I need to be quickened again, so I might do things for the Lord." Along comes another heart stirring message, radio program, book, or a tract that you read, and you are back out of bed again on the front lines, running hard, until you get the fever again. That's the church today.

An awful lot of Christian activity is nothing more than an outlet for restlessness, an outlet for fever. It's spiritual malaria; one foot in ice water, and one foot in boiling water; fever/chill, fever/chill. We go great guns, and then we do nothing. The church is constantly running from natural weakness to natural strength, and back to natural weakness to natural strength; back and forth, and back and forth. That kind of Christian service has no miracle in it, and there's no power of God in it. When it's all done we wonder what has really been accomplished, or if it's been just a big waste of time. The message of verses 14 & 15 is not how to go from natural weakness to natural strength, but how to go from natural weakness to supernatural strength, so that you can minister unto the Lord. I like to word it this way and say, "Before I can minister to Him, He must minister to me." Before you can minister to Him, He must minister unto you. We need to be healed from our natural weakness and our fever before we can lift one little finger to minister unto Him.

The strength that the Lord gives is never sapped by activity. It's a perpetual strength and supply, and goes on and on. The real starting point of service and ministry to Him is not training at Bible school or seminary. Nor is it some mountaintop experience at a Bible conference, retreat, or something like that. It's not some special gift we have. It's amazing how simple this is, and yet how many thousands upon thousands miss it. The starting point is letting Christ minister to you. That's the starting point of service. Christ is the enabler. It doesn't start with man. It starts with God. Unless He ministers to us, you'll never minister to Him.

The first three miracles are progressive; cleansing, then faith, and then ministry

Let me show you how the first three redemptive miracles are progressive. In other words, the Spirit of God put these together deliberately in order that He might tell us a story. I think if we got the Holy Spirit's emphasis on each of these miracles we could summarize them with these single words. The first miracle of the leper can be summarized with the word "cleansing". The miracle of the healing of the centurion's servant, the emphasis there is faith. And now the emphasis of this miracle is service/ministry. I don't believe it's an accident that the Spirit of God puts it in that order; cleansing, faith and service, because I think that's God's order, and that's what He intends. If we're going to minister to Him, it's not by getting involved in great programs, and it's not by enthusiastic zeal and new resolutions to work harder in behalf of God; not at all!. It's by coming to the place where we recognize our natural weakness, and then have a touch of God where God imparts His own life to us; supernatural strength. When we have that, then we'll arise immediately, and begin to minister unto Him. Real service is always ministry to the heart of Christ; ministry unto Him. I'm certain that volumes more could be said about this, but that's my understanding of the principle of redemptive miracle #3.

6

THE UNNAMED SCRIBE AND DISCIPLE

Following the Lord

It's clear that the clincher of this section is Matthew 8:18, redemptive miracle #4, the stilling of the stormy sea, but He doesn't begin with the storm. He prefaces it with two other stories; one about a scribe who said, *"Teacher, I'll follow you wherever you go,"* and another by an unnamed disciple who said, *"First permit me to go and bury my father."* Jesus said, *"Follow Me, and let the dead bury the dead."* Then afterwards we see how He deals with those two men. Then He comes back, and gives us miracles. Once again, the more we study the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the more you are going to see that not only is every book providentially arranged by God in its right order, but every story in every book is providentially arranged in the order in which we have it in our Bibles. There is a progress here, and God is telling us a story.

Let me suggest a little outline of how I'd like to develop this. First I'd like to show you how these three parts fit together, and how it clinches in the story of the stormy sea. Then I'd like to show you the great characteristics of faith, and the great principles of life that are illustrated. Then, naturally, we want to look at the revelation of Christ that is given in this redemptive miracle.

What ties these three stories together making them one story rather than three? I like to point out a word that recurs throughout, which is really a key to this section. Matthew 8:19, *"I will follow You."* The word is "follow". Matthew 8:22, *"Follow Me."* Matthew 8:23, *"His disciples*

followed Him." Jesus gives us in picture, in story, in object lesson form what it means to follow the Lord. I don't know any other expression that has been more abused among the people of God, and more used in a surface way than the expression, "I'm going to follow the Lord." When you are finished with this section you'll have characteristics of what it means to follow the Lord, and you'll also have an objective test to apply to your own heart and life to answer the question, "Am I really a follower of the Lord?" It's easy to say, "I'm going to follow the Lord." God gives us an objective test. He loves us too much to let us go on in unreality, so He'll test us to see if we're truly followers.

There are some pretty squirrely ideas about following the Lord. I received a telephone call about a month ago, and a man told me, "I just put a man in the hospital. I did it for Jesus. I had a chain around my neck with a cross on it, and we got to discussing about the Lord, and he got mad at me, and pulled that chain off my neck. So, I beat him to a pulp. He's in the hospital now. I was fighting for the Lord, fighting for Jesus. I'm following the Lord." He was excited about it.

Numbers 14:24, God said of Caleb, *"My servant Caleb has a different spirit within him. He has followed Me fully."* Wouldn't you want the Lord to say that about you? Boy, I would! "My servant Ed Miller has a different spirit in him. He has followed Me fully." This passage teaches us how to follow Him fully. It sheds a flood of light on it. Let's look at these illustrations, and get principles for following the Lord.

THE UNNAMED SCRIBE

Matthew 8:20, *"The foxes have holes, the birds in the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*

Rest is only found in Jesus, and not this physical world

First is Matthew 8:18-20, and an unnamed scribe. I'm not going to take the time to do what many commentators do, to speculate and read in between the lines about this particular man, and his attitude, and what he was thinking. We can't read in between the lines. God didn't tell

us in between the lines, and it won't help us to guess. Was this man sincere? Did he really mean it? Was he impulsive? Was he unthinking? Was he moving on the spur of the moment because he was emotionally charged by observing miracles with physical eyes, and all that kind of thing? How did he respond after this? We don't know. God hasn't told us. And it won't really help us to guess. What we need is what He has recorded. So, we'll look at what He's given us, in order that we might get the great principles of God. I'm convinced that an awful lot of sidetracking, and going after things that are not recorded will lead us from the principles rather than into them.

We know the answer that Jesus gave; a strange word. Matthew 8:20, *"The foxes have holes, the birds in the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* It's strong language, but I don't think God is rebuking this man. What is the Lord Jesus saying? Why does He point out that the most despicable and insignificant creatures of the earth and the air are richer than He is? I assume because he is a scribe. I don't think it's reading in between the lines that he had a home, and a fair share of this world's goods. Most of the scribes did. What did Jesus mean by that statement? Can you take it literally? These questions are to stimulate your thoughts. He claimed to be following the Lord. I assume that is true of everyone here. We claim to be followers of the Lord. This man said, *"I'll follow you wherever you go,"* and His answer was, *"The foxes have holes, the birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* Is that literally true of anybody here; that you have nowhere to lay your head, and nowhere to sleep and nowhere to go?

Was it literally true of Jesus? Is it accurate in the absolute sense that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head? Did He have to sleep in the woods? The fact is that He had plenty of places to lay His head. It's true that Jesus was a rejected Savior/King, but He was also loved by thousands. I know in this very chapter that we read that the centurion's attitude was, "I'm not fit that You should come under my roof," but if He heard that Jesus had no roof, don't you think he would have opened his home for the Lord Jesus? Think about all the people that He healed and their families. Don't you think they would have given Him a bed? They would have given Him a home. He had friends in Samaria and in Bethany. Fact is that we read that He often went to Bethany, the home of Mary, Lazarus and Martha. He had many friends.

Fact is that He had His own home in Capernaum. Remember when the tiles were ripped off the roof of the house? The Bible says that was His own home in Capernaum. Any of the disciples would have let Him sleep. You see, it's not a literal statement, so it must contain a principle. It can't be taken literally because the facts show otherwise.

He was laying down a great principle of life, a principle that would be applied in every age, and in every generation; a principle that ties into the issue of what it means to follow Him. I think what He was saying here is this, "Do you want to follow Me? I have no place to lay My head," i.e. I have no resting place here. "Do you really want to follow Me?" I don't think He is saying to separate yourself from all physical things, and that if you follow Me, that you aren't allowed a home or a bed or a pillow. That would violate the principle of the incarnation by which He became flesh. Being spiritual doesn't take you far away from the physical. It takes your heart away, so that you aren't resting in those things. It separates you spiritually. It sanctifies, permeates and transfigures the material things.

Here's what He was saying, "Do you want to follow Me? Then understand that there is no rest here and no permanent satisfaction in this world. This world can't give you anything. There's no place to lay your head, and there is nothing here that is going to fulfill, that is going to satisfy, that is going to bring contentment and rest. There is no lasting satisfaction, not in material things, and not in promotion, or in any kind of rank or fame. He is giving the same truth that He gave in the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes, *"Under the sun everything is vanity."* That's all He is saying, "There's no place to lay your head. Don't try to settle here. Do you really want to follow Me? Then you better remember that you can't rest here; not in this world. There's no place to lay your head. If you were a creature not made in the image of God, like an animal or like a bird, then yes you could rest here. But because you are created in the image of God, and you have an immortal spirit, there is no resting here, not in anything physical, material, corporal or temporal. It's all fading away." Things in this world are wonderful, and God fully intended for us to fully enjoy them, but what He is saying is that if you follow Me, you won't rest in those things, and you won't set your heart on them, because when you set your heart on them, then you know what happens with greed, selfishness, anxiety, covetousness, and self-satisfaction, and the list goes on.

Matthew 8:21&22, *"Lord, permit me first to bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.*

Following Jesus separates us from the dead things of the world

Once again, these are strange words coming from the lips of Jesus. It won't help us to speculate whether this man's father had already died, or whether he was just old and about to die. We don't know those things because God hasn't told us. Let's ask the same question that we asked in the first. Is it literally true? I don't think it's possible to be taken literally, because if you take it literally, here's what He is saying, "If you follow Jesus you must never attend the funerals of your loved ones. Instead, let your unsaved friends and relatives bury them." That's what it means literally. Granted, when you truly follow the Lord, I can see where there will be times when His business will literally keep you away from the funerals of some of your loved ones. You'll be engaged in the work of the Lord, and you won't be able to come home. But I don't think that's what He is saying here. I think the key is in verse 22, *"Follow Me and allow the dead to bury their own dead."*

I think He is illustrating spiritual death by physical death. What He is saying is this, "You want to follow Me? Not only will there be no resting place here, and you'll have no place to lay your head, but if you want to follow Me, then that means that you'll be occupied with life, and not with death, and you are going to leave dead things to dead people, and you are going to be occupied with the ministry of life." I think that is the principle that He is laying down. You will be separated from the things of death. He's not saying that you can't perform outward duties, and outward obligations in physical things, and that you don't attend your mother's funeral. He's saying not to seek the living among the dead, and if you are serious about following Me, then you are going to have to leave dead things to dead people, and that you have a new life, and if you are going to follow Me, and then all of your

occupations and identifications are going to be in terms of life. You are going to surrender all relationships to the dead things. There are unlimited applications to that as a principle. Many people who have begun to follow the Lord have had to break relationships with dead friends, dead jobs, dead associations, dead social entertainments, and dead neighbors. I think that's all He is saying, "Break off with dead activities, and now you will be associated with life."

Let me show you the test I really flunked. I flunked the others, too, but this one really got me. It's the climax, the stilling of the stormy sea, where He brings to a consummation, and clarifies all the questions you'll ever have about what it means to follow the Lord. How condescending the Lord Jesus is with everyone who says that they really want to follow Him. He says, "Alright, you want to follow Me?" He begins to walk and they followed Him. Now watch Him, because He is about to do a symbolic act in this redemptive miracle #4. He walked down a hill, and they followed Him. He climbs up a gangplank, and they climb up a gangplank. They followed Him. He gets in a ship, and they get in a ship. They followed Him. He goes down in the hull of the ship, lays down, and goes to sleep. They took to rowing desperately, baling, and other things. Let me picture their response, and then show you how Christ is revealed in this redemptive miracle.

7

CALMING OF THE GREAT STORM

Matthew 8:26, *"Why are you timid, oh men of little faith?"*

Strong faith is letting Jesus sleep

We can read verse 24, "La, la, la, there was a great storm," but when the Bible says it was a great storm, you better believe it was a great storm. Listen to passages from the other gospel records. Mark says, *"A fierce gale of wind and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was filling up."* That is a great storm. Luke adds, *"It was a fierce gale,"* and then he says, *"And they began to be swamped and were in great danger."* And Luke calls them *"surging waves"*. These men were not novices and strangers to the rough seas, but this was more than the usual squall. This was a very unusual storm, and a great storm. Luke says, *"And the storm descended upon the lake."* The lake was surrounded by mountains, and the ravines formed huge funnels which caused the wind to swirl. It was like a hurricane. The temperature changed from the top of the mountain to the lake, and was so great that it caused the surface, which was like glass, to turn into a boiling cauldron in five minutes.

Now look at their response. On the level of earth it was quite commendable. In desperation they ran to Jesus. They came to the end

of themselves, and they saw the futility of trying to survive by baling or whatever method they had, and they ran in desperation to Jesus, and called upon the Lord. The Lord responded, and rose, did a mighty miracle, and delivered them. From another record we see that three people came to Jesus when He was sleeping. The first man said, *"Save us, Lord. We're perishing."* The second man said, *"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"* And the third one said, *"Master, Master, we're perishing."*

I haven't been in a boat on a stormy sea, but I've read about them. Some folks have been in the Navy, and describe it as a terrible thing. I don't know what it would be like in a fishing boat, but there was panic, desperation, fear and anxiety. They were frightened, and they ran to the only one who could ever help them. Once again, let's not read into their motives. I don't know what was going through their minds, but that's the scene, and that's their response. The Lord wakes up from His nap, and does redemptive miracle #4. Verse 24 says that there was a *"great storm"*. Verse 26 says there was a *"great calm"*. The same word is used in the Greek; perfectly calm. The calm was as great as the storm was great. The calm was great and awe inspiring. It must have been something to see, Jesus standing there on the wet and windy deck, and then He reaches His hand in the air, and just says, *"Be muzzled,"* and immediately there was a great calm. No wonder they said in Matthew 8:27, *"They marveled saying, 'What kind of man is this that even the wind and the seas obey Him?"*

This is such a great story, the temptation is to study it by itself out of its context. When you do that you miss a great blessing. We need to tie it into the fact that He is talking about following the Lord. There is an object lesson going on by a symbolic act. The Holy Spirit intentionally recorded it this way. Jesus did it this way because He was going to teach forever the great principles on following the Lord. He went down the hill, and they followed Him. He went up the plank and they followed Him. He went into the ship and they followed Him. He went below and went to sleep, and they did not follow Him.

When you read this story, if you read it in the light of your own life with the Lord, it surprises you that Jesus woke up, and rebuked their faith. I thought they did pretty good, actually. Matthew 8:26, *"Why are you timid, oh men of little faith?"* "I'll tell you why I'm timid. It's

because this boat is about to sink. That's why I'm timid." Mark 4:40 says, *"Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith*?" Jesus said, *"You don't have any faith."* Luke said, *"Where is your faith?"* implying that there is none there at all. I read the story and I say, "Little faith? No faith? Great day! I would have described it as great faith. If someone came to me and said, 'What is great faith?' I would say, 'Well, great faith has three parts. #1 Faith comes to the end of its self, and gives up on all human effort whatsoever, comes to the end of self, and has not one ounce of strength in the flesh. #2 Faith casts itself helplessly on Jesus as the only One who is able to do anything. #3 Faith lays hold of Jesus, and appropriates Him in such a way that He rises up and delivers and moves. That's prevailing faith, and that's great faith. It comes to the end of itself, and it throws itself helplessly on Jesus as He walks us into a great miracle. That's what they did here. They came to the end of themselves, they threw themselves helplessly on Jesus, and they watched Him do great miracles. He said that was no faith. What's wrong with my theology? I thought that would be strong faith, prevailing faith, the kind of faith that moves God to move.

He says, "If you want to follow Me, you better understand faith and it's not that." It's penetrating when you begin to see, under the light of God's Holy Spirit, what it means to follow the Lord. Someone takes a passage like this and says, "You have financial storms, family storms, church storms, and storms on the job, storms in the school, emotional storms, and physical storms. Christ can heal your storms, and He can calm the stormy sea. Just trust Him," as if those disciples were illustrating faith. But they are not illustrating faith, unless you have the negative illustration of it because Jesus said, "No faith." Are you following the Lord? It's so easy to follow Jesus, isn't it? You just look with a heart attitude toward this whole world, "I'll never rest here. There's nothing here that will satisfy my soul, and no place to lay my head. It's easy to associate myself with Life in Him." But you need to hear the clincher. May God burn this in our hearts as we look at it!

I believe the principle can be summarized in these words; if that's weak faith, what is strong faith? Let me describe it in terms of the story, apply it a little and make you squirm, like I had to. I don't want to play with this—strong faith lets Him sleep. Strong faith does not wake God up. Strong faith lets Him sleep. Strong faith weathers the storm—resting and knowing that He is in as much control in His seeming

inactivity as He was in control when He stood up on the deck, raised His hands over the water, and calmed the waves. All the way through they followed Him. So, He says, "You want to know what it is to follow Me? Here's an object lesson. I'm going to walk into the storm and go to sleep. Let's see who follows Me. You want to follow Me?" As a symbolic act, as a redemptive pattern, He walks into the storm and He goes to sleep, not to communicate how you are supposed to be passive, and be unconscious about every circumstance going around. He's not saying that. He's trying to say that He is in as much control while He sleeps as He is when He is awake.

The way we look at faith is usually that we need to see an act of God. We need to see God work, and see God do something. We don't want a do-nothing God. May I suggest it's the weak who need to see an act of God?! The strong know that He is in control. He doesn't need to deliver in order to prove that. Do you know the song that says, "No water shall swallow the ship where lies the Master of ocean and earth and sky." He's in control. In the storms of our lives He is in control as much as if He calmed those storms. He longs that people would just rest, and follow Him right down the hall, into the bed in room #3. Just trust in the Lord, and rest in the Lord. Waking Him up to come to your rescue is not a sign of faith. It's a sign of no faith; weak faith.

Try to catch the impact of this, because thousands of God's people are being taught that strong faith is the faith that watches God do miracles, and watches God deliver, and watches God provide, and watches God lead; you've got to see God move, or else you have fear that He has forsaken you. "Look at all God is doing. What a display God gives us. Look at the great thing God did here, a great revival, and so many were saved, and all the rest. It's all sight, sight, sight. It's not faith. Followers of Jesus let Him sleep.

People are actually taught that fear, anxiety, panic and desperation are part of faith. It's not part of faith. Don't go by appearance. God is at rest, is in control, and is the governor of all your problems. Don't hold His silence and inactivity in suspicion. Don't judge His love. Nothing He does is inconsistent with His wisdom and His love. Are you going through storms in your life? How worried is God about what you are going through? Do you realize that you can be as free from worry as God is free from worry about the storms you are going through right

now? Do you want to follow Him? Then go to sleep. You know what I mean by that; rest. He's in charge, and He's in control.

I can't tell you how many times in the name of faith, but it's actually unbelief, I've run to the Lord to wake Him up. If there's a storm in my life, and the sea is coming in my windows, and my family looks like it's going to be swallowed up, I'll run to Jesus, and wake Him up. "Lord, I've got this problem. Lord, You've got to help." Financial storms, job in jeopardy, provisions not coming in, and the kids needing shoes, clothes and food; "Wake the Lord up." He knows about that. You can rest the rest of faith. There's a temptation raging in your soul, and an uncontrollable passion, a habit for which you are the victim raging, "I better wake the Lord up." There's that attitude sometimes, a natural temptation, to wake Him up, and get God to the rescue. A child needs help, circumstances are unbearable, and nerves are shredded. "I'm cracking up, and so confused. I can't think one thought in a row. I've got to trust Him to do a miracle. I've got to see Him deliver; I've got to see Him answer; I've got to see Him save; I've got to see Him provide; I've got to see." If we've got to see, we haven't tasted what it means to follow the Lord. Sometimes He throws that in as frosting. Thank God when He lets you see, but following the Lord means that you don't have to see. You just trust God.

We aren't exempt from the storm

Failure won't anger Jesus; He'll probably calm the sea

Let me close with two practical principles. I'll just state them, and won't develop them. Being with Christ doesn't mean that you are exempt from the storm. These disciples were with Christ, and they were not exempt from the storm. Also, when we fail and we blow it, and when we're weak and we panic, and you run to wake Him up, He won't be angry with you. Not only will He not be angry with you, but He'll probably rise up, and do a mighty miracle right before your eyes, and do a wonderful thing; He'll probably calm your storm.

The other day my son, Stephen, came running through the house crying, "Mommy, mommy, mommy!" I was up in my study. My wife had gone shopping, and by the time he found me in my study (I thought she was in the house, but she had gone shopping) his little heart was

thumping out of his chest. As soon as he saw me everything was okay. Now, he was no safer after he saw me than he was before he saw me. He should have known that we would never leave him nor forsake him. He didn't have to see me in order to be safe, but he had to see me in order to be sane. He would have gone bananas with mother gone.

God doesn't deliver you because you need deliverance. But he might deliver you because you need deliverance. It isn't deliverance that you need. You don't need that sea calmed. Real faith weathers the storm, and trusts in God all the way. You don't need that sea calmed, but if you do, He's gracious, and He'll calm it for you. If you want to wake Him up, He'll just say, "Oh, you of little faith," and then He'll do it for you, and then give you another opportunity, as you're going to see, to test your faith again.

Are you following the Lord— no place to lay His head here, separated from all death, and all it represents, letting God sleep, just knowing with assurance that He's written in your heart that everything is alright in My Father's house? In this storm I don't have anything to worry about. He's sleeping down there, and He doesn't have to be active to be in control. He's in control, and He calls you to follow Him down the hill, up the planking, into the boat and into the bed. Rest in the Lord.

8

DEMON POSSESSION AS A WHOLE

Preparation for the doctrine of demon possession

We have come to redemptive miracle #5, chapters 8:28-34, the casting out of the demons in the country of the Gadarenes. The miracle is recorded in the three synoptic gospels; Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20 and then Luke 8:26-39; a total of forty one verses in the inspired scripture on this story. Something that the Spirit of God gives that much space to in the Bible must have great meaning and significance, and we better really pay attention to what God wants to communicate through this passage.

Mark said that there were two thousand that rushed down into the steep banks into the sea, and perished in the waters. And the herdsmen fled, went away into the city, and reported everything including the incident of the demoniacs. The whole city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they entreated Him to depart from their regions.

In order to get the full message of God before our hearts, let me give you a simple outline of how I'd like to present it. First I'd like to say a couple of words about demon possession as a whole. Then I'd like to get the message of this particular redemptive miracle and, finally, the revelation of Christ that is given in this redemptive miracle. We'll be weaving principles in all along the way that apply to life.

Let me say a word about demon possession as a whole, and make you aware of this fact. I don't know if you are aware of the variety of discussion and division on this particular topic in the body of Christ in

the church. Very soon in our study of Matthew we are going to come to Matthew 12, where you have the great miracle and discourse about the casting out of demons. There you have a fuller explanation of demon possession than you do here in chapter 8. Fact is, that's the context of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and the unforgivable sin.

I'm not going to give you the doctrine now of demon possession. We'll pick that up in chapter 12, but I believe that you can call this the preparation for the doctrine of demon possession. I'd like to give you four simple principles that are right on the top which are sort of foundational, very cardinal, and basic which will, at least, get our eyes looking in the right direction, and hopefully prepare us for a full discussion. You'll see how simple these are as we go through them.

Demons are real

The first general truth can be stated in these words about the demons and the demon possessed man; they are real. That's basic enough. You might say that of course they are real, and why say that. You would be amazed at how some people explain away demon possession in the New Testament. Let me give two examples from my commentaries. I don't agree with these examples, but it gives you an idea of how some people think about this. I'll be paraphrasing as well as quoting.

The first explanation is something like this, "What the New Testament calls demon possession, we who are brighter, more sophisticated, and more educated call a mental disorder. It's just a mental problem; insanity and being crazy. If you study the Bible accounts of demon possession, and then you compare them to a modern maniac, you get many striking parallels." Then they go on to document all this by bringing you into the rooms of different hospitals in the land, and calling attention to lunatics who rant and rave, who foam, and who have extra human power when they are in one of their fits. One of my commentaries comes right out and says, "This is not demon possession. It's epilepsy." I like what Dr. Ironside said in answer to that, "That's the first time I ever heard of epileptic pigs." You can see how epilepsy wouldn't really apply to the swine that they inhabited. This is one way the destructive critics try to avoid the truth that they are real; that it's just a mental disorder.

The second example is very similar to that. It overlaps quite a bit. "These New Testament people were sort of uneducated. They were illiterate, simple folks, and they were full of superstitions. They had a lot of squirrely ideas. Jesus knew better because He was God, and being God He knew all things. Jesus knew about the distant future, and about the jet planes, and guided missiles, aircraft carriers, electricity, solar energy, fission and fusion, chemistry and calculus, but He never mentioned that. The reason is that they wouldn't have known what He was talking about because those things weren't in existence and in their culture. They didn't have a vocabulary for those sophisticated things. God knew that the sun doesn't really rise and set. The earth moves, and makes it look like the sun is rising and setting, but in the Psalms God doesn't say, 'And the earth moved.' It says, 'And the sun rises, and the sun sets.' See, that's not really accurate scientifically. He accommodated His greatness to their littleness, to their weakness, in order that He might communicate."

That sounds good until you apply it to something like this demon possession. They say, "Just so, with demon possession. Jesus knew there was no such thing, but those people were superstitious. They didn't know at that time about the disorders of the mind, or about all of the manias and phobias that we discovered in our brighter age. If Jesus had gone up to those disciples and said, 'That man is a schizophrenic,' they would have said, 'Say what?' They don't know what that is. He used their language, and lowered Himself, and said it was demon possession, but He knew it wasn't really demon possession. He just used their vocabulary, so that He might deal with them where they were at the time. What He really meant was they were crazy, insane lunatics." That's dangerous reasoning. Jesus would never countenance superstition in the interest of truth. He'd never do that. He wouldn't use the language of a lie in order to communicate the truth.

Back to the principle; the first thing right on the surface is, whatever other approach you take, you've got to start with this, they are real and they are literal. These demons are actual, and they are rulers from the pit of hell, and you've got to see that, if you are going to understand the teaching on it. Jesus is not just adopting the language of their day. Take that as a fact now. There are many different ways to prove it from the scripture. We'll get into that in more detail in chapter 12, but for now just recognize that they are actual and literal, and they could

possess some of the bodies of men and women created in the image of God. It's an amazing truth that they are real.

We'll not entertain the question at this time, how those poor souls got into that mess. What did they do in order to have these demons come in and possess them? Did they willingly invite the demons into their lives and hearts? Did they sell out to Satan? Is it like some of things we read about today, especially on the West Coast where people actually worship Satan, and have synagogues to Satan? For now just recognize this, that they were real, and they really inhabited men and women, and they were really cast out by the word of the Lord. It's frightening on the level of earth to think of the fact that it's real, to think of some alien power, some spirit being coming into a life to shatter it, and lord over it, and control it, and yet you read the simple record, and for those who come with childlike dependence, you've got to say it's true and real. You don't read in between the lines, and twist it to mean something else. It's what it says it is. These demons possess these people, and bring misery and discord into their lives and hearts, and they were helpless to dethrone that spirit enemy.

Demon power is limited

That's the first observation. The second general fact, not only are they real, but their power is limited. That truth is just filled with comfort, knowing that Satan and all his demons can't move without the permission of Christ. The Old Testament illustration of this truth is in the book of Job. Satan had to get permission before he could lift one finger against Job. When you read a verse like Matthew 8:31, *"And the demons began to entreat him saying, 'If you are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine,'"* you are full of hope and comfort. You don't need to fear Satan or demons, because they can't do a thing without the express permission of God. The fact is that they can't even possess a pig unless they are given divine approval and permission.

We read that Satan is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. That scares you until you get the other side of the truth. He's a roaring lion on a chain. That's the full truth. He can't go beyond God's permission; he can't do a thing. I heard an illustration one time that someone gave of a wild rabid Doberman on a bridge tied with a chain that could not be snapped, and there was just enough room for you to walk by without

him reaching you. All he could do was foam and bark, and launch at you, but he couldn't reach you because of the chain. Could you walk by without fear? I don't know if I could. Great day! Even if I knew that chain was strong, I'd get scared just looking out my window at a Doberman. I can't imagine walking by one with only inches in between. And yet, that's what Satan is. He can bark, he can foam, and he can scare the daylights out of us, but he can't touch us. We're safe and sound, safer than a baby in their mother's arms, because of our relationship with Jesus. It's comforting beyond description to know that Satan has got to get permission before he can do anything.

Satan has no compulsory power over men. He can suggest, he can stimulate, he can provide occasion, he can discourage and tempt. He loves to harass the children of God, but Satan has no compulsory power. He can't force you. Eve would have been guiltless if Satan were sitting on her, jamming the fruit down her throat, but he didn't. He tempted her, and she ate the fruit willingly. If you resist the devil, he has no power over you beyond God's control. That's the second fact. They are limited. They are real but they have to get permission to move against the children of God.

Demons also are a picture illustrating a spiritual truth

The third fact is this. Once again, I have to keep coming back to this, and we'll develop it more in chapter 12, because that's where the doctrine is. I'll just state it now. It's real, they are limited, and I can't say this enough, God has written His Bible this way; it's a picture. That doesn't mean it's not real and literal. There are real demons possessing a real body, but that doesn't change the fact that it's a picture, and that it illustrates a spiritual truth. You couldn't get a more ultimate picture of tragedy and hopelessness than a man or woman created in the image of God being possessed by a lord of hell. That's the ultimate, the extreme. That's the picture in aggravated form. The bottom line of all sin and all misery is always Satan.

I'm not saying that, "Satan made me do it." That isn't the point. The point is if you trace it back, you are going to end up with God or Satan, one or the other. On the other side of evil, sin, hell and all kinds of violence, you've got Satan. When you trace him back far enough to his root, you've got Satan. Even beyond the old sin nature, you've got

Satan. That's why you read a verse like Acts 5:3, *"Why does Satan fill your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?"* You just trace that lie all the way back, and you'll see that Satan was behind that lie. If you trace it all the way forward, it's against God. All lying is against God, and it's all coming from the pit of hell. So, you have Satan as the bottom line.

When you see the details of the story, and picture the principles behind it, you'll see what a desperate case is laid out before us in the story of this demoniac. The first fact was that he was possessed. Mark 5:8 calls him *"an unclean spirit"*. Mark 5:9 says, *"My name is 'Legion', for we are many."* A legion in a Roman army was a division embracing six thousand men. This demon, or this leader of the demons in this man said, "My name is legion." I don't know if he meant that literally, that there were six thousand. We read about Mary and there were seven. If it's literal, I don't know, but it's a horrible situation. Try to get that before your mind's eye; demon possessed by the unholy and unclean spirit whose name was "Legion".

The second fact is where he lived. He lived among the tombs. Matthew 8:28, *"They were coming out of the tombs."* Mark 5:3, *"He had his dwelling among the tombs"*. Luke 8:27, *"He was not living in a house, but in the tombs,"* in the place of death, corruption and of ceremonial uncleanliness from the Old Testament. Take those two facts, and add to it this third; he's in awful torment. Matthew 8:28, *"They were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by the road."* Mark 5:4, *"He had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him, and the shackles were broken in pieces."* Mark 5:5, *"And continually night and day among the tombs and in the mountains he was crying out, and gashing himself with stones*." Do you see what a picture this is? You couldn't get worse than that. Demon possessed, living in the place of death, in horrible bondage, awful pain and torment, and being thrown around by these wicked spirits. Add to that, Luke 8:27, *"He had not put on any clothing for a long time."* He was stark naked. The shame!

I don't think God gives us all these details without having in His mind's eye eternal principles. Can you think of anything worse than being demon possessed, living in the place of death, in constant torment all the time, a life shattered and full of discord, lived out in shame, and separated from God and men? I say that tells a story. There's a picture,

a spiritual story there. That's one side of the picture—the demon possessed man.

There's another object lesson pictured in the story; it's pigs, swine, pork or hogs. Someone told me this was the first record of deviled ham in the Bible. We miss some of the repulsiveness that registered in the Jewish mind when we say "pigs". There is a good chance that these swine keepers in this chapter were Jews. If so, they had no business whatsoever keeping these swine, especially as their livelihood. Having a herd of pigs, especially if it were a Jew, is the same thing as being demon possessed. It's an object lesson in the extreme. It's an illustration of the worse kind of occupation for a Jew; to be a herder of swine. It's an example of worldliness to the nth degree; pigs. That word even comes across in our English language. Usually when you think about worldliness you don't think about pigs. You think about gold, silver, position or material things—some kind of wealth, mansions or good clothing. Being rich and being fed sumptuously every day is a good picture of worldliness. But God uses the word "pigs" on purpose, not only because it was fact, but because He isolated this out of a history of thousands of facts. He wanted to write a Bible.

If I were to say to you that someone chose his job over the Lord, you would probably say that he shouldn't do that, and that was terrible. He chose a high paying position over the Lord. He chose gold or silver over Jesus. Well, you might say you understand that, and that you were tempted to do that yourself. There are occasions where the temptation of worldliness comes in to choose gold over Jesus, or occupation over Jesus. But how does it strike you when I say that he had a choice, and he chose pigs over Jesus? That's the context, and that's the whole idea of this chapter. Because they had lost their pigs, they entreat Him to depart out of their coast. They had a choice; Jesus or pigs. They chose pigs. This is God's illustration, I believe, of the extreme of worldliness.

When the parable son went out in his worldly ways, where did he end up? He ended up with pigs. That's God's illustration of worldliness. If you stand back just a few paces, and look at the story, it's a picture. What a picture of conversion when this guy gets saved! He was demon possessed and living among the tombs, naked and full of shame, in awful agony and torment, and helpless before the one who was

usurping the throne of the Spirit. What a salvation! If you can reach that guy in the extreme, then there is hope for every lesser case, because the lesser are included in the greater. God chooses the aggravated case, the worse possible case, the most critical situation, and then chose to deliver him, in order that everybody in every age with a lesser problem might know there is deliverance available for them. If He could do that for him, then He can do it for anyone, anywhere in any time, and any condition, no matter how ugly and repulsive his present or past. It's full of hope. Just so, the other side is a visual aid of worldliness illustrated by the pigs.

Jesus is triumphant over every demon

Let's get back to the outline. #1: They are real. #2: They are limited. #3: They tell a story. They provide a picture, an object lesson. Here's the final observation, and then we'll get into the story itself. Whatever conclusions you draw as you come to study the doctrine of demon possession, whatever else you see when you study Satan, the fall, demons, spirits and evil spirits, and all of that, you are going to end up with this; Jesus is triumphant over all of them. You are going to end up with that. You might as well start off with that. That's why the Holy Spirit records this story. God did not tell us about demons in the Bible in order that we might know about demons. He has no interest whatsoever in teaching us about demons, so that we might know about demons. Everything the Bible says about demons is designed to turn our eyes to Christ, and to show us the Lord. The fact is, everything the Bible says about everything is designed to turn us unto to Him. That's why the Holy Spirit records this story.

Jesus is stronger than the strong man. He's able to bind him up, and then go in, and spoil his goods. I think very often God's people have made a terrible mistake. They look more at possession than they do at deliverance. They get all wrapped up in demon possession. Why did He tell us about demon possession? It's in order that we might know that he can be delivered, and he can be released, and he can be set free. This was written to introduce us to the One who can deliver us from the power of Satan. We need to turn our eyes to Him. Alright, here's review; they are real, they are limited, they tell a story and they point to Christ. We'll pick up the rest of that discussion in chapter 12.

9

CASTING OUT THE GADARENE DEMONS

"And when He had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. Behold, they cried out saying, 'What do we have to do with you, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?' Now, there was at a distance from them a herd of many swine feeding. And the demons began to entreat Him saying, 'If you are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.' And He said to them, 'Be gone,' and they came out and went into the swine and, behold, the whole herd." (Matthew 8:28-34)

Comments

Let me give a few comments to set the story in its real setting. I told you in another occasion that all the books of the Bible and all the stories of the Bible are providentially arranged by God. That is, they are in order; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. It's because they tell a story in that order. You can't take them out of order. It wouldn't help you to study Mark before Matthew, or to study John after Romans. They are in God's order. I think we can get a little light by comparing this miracle with the miracle that was right before it. In redemptive miracle #4 the Lord Jesus stilled the stormy sea. He showed Himself as Lord and Master, and authority over the outer world. He pacified the tumults and the raging storm of nature, and all of the discord that was illustrated in that storm.

In this miracle you have a different kind of storm. In some sense it's even wilder than the storm raging on the sea, rocking that little fishing boat. This was disharmony in a man's life, a life that was created for the inhabitants of God in the image of God. This is a raging storm of a different kind. This is a spiritual storm. This is on the inside. In both cases, in the storm of nature, and in this storm of human nature, Jesus stilled the storm. When it's over there's a great calm. The first miracle, I think, prepares you for the second.

When you come to a story like this, don't listen to the critics who are always trying to tear the Bible in shreds, cutting it into little pieces, and always pointing out what are seeming contradictions in order to throw aside the uninstructed child of God. Some are upset by the fact that Mark says that there was one demon possessed man, and Luke said there was one demon possessed man, but when you come to the study of Matthew it says that there were two demon possessed men. "Aha, see; contradiction!" they say. Well, that's nonsense. Matthew's account of two does not rule out one, because one is included in two. The fact that the others say there were one doesn't rule out two. It's just the same story, but in the emphasis of Mark and Luke it was more important to stress the details that they stressed, and that's all. There were two. So, don't get thrown by that.

I read one commentator (I could hardly believe this; sometimes it makes me laugh at what comes out of some people) who said, "Here's an illustration of the fact that Jesus stole, and that He was a crook. He had no right to destroy that man's business. He stole his pigs, and he had no right to take those pigs." Right off the bat you can see that he has a little view of Christ for two reasons. #1: If He did destroy the pigs, which he didn't, He had every right to destroy the pigs because He owned them. As Creator they belong to Him. You can't steal what belongs to you. That's simple enough. Because everything belongs to Him, even if He had decided all of a sudden to go in there with a baseball bat or kick them off the cliff, He would have a right to do that because they were His. Those swine herders who were taking care of them, at best, were stewards of something that didn't belong to them. It's sort of like the donkey on Palm Sunday. They say, "That didn't belong to Jesus." Well, He's creator God, and He owned the donkey, and there came a time in His redemptive history when He said to His disciple, "Just go say to the owners, 'The Lord has need of him.' That's

all. I'm the Lord of that donkey, and it's time now that I need it. It's mine." That's not stealing. So, that shows a low view of Christ.

More to the point is this, that Jesus didn't destroy those swine. We said in our introduction that the demons were limited. Jesus allowed the demons to go into the swine. The only thing Jesus did was cast it out of the men. He didn't cast them into the swine. He allowed it, but the demons were the cause of that. God is not the author of sin. Just because He permits something doesn't mean that He's morally responsible. He permitted Hitler, but He's not the author of the Holocaust. He allowed that, and He allowed those demons to go into the swine, but that doesn't make Him the author of sin.

Let's say, by way of example, for some purpose in the mind of God, say for purifying the Jews, or to take away a dishonoring business, or something like that, that He did initiate and control the destruction of the swine. There's a wonderful principle involved in that. It can be stated in these words, "Sometimes God's taking is really a giving in disguise." You'll see how that applies in life. Don't despise it when the Lord allows something or someone to disappear from your life. It might turn into a very great blessing. That loss might turn out to be a great gain. They counted it as a loss, but He could have had great purposes there. There could have been great gain. The taking in reality might be a higher giving. I'll leave that for the Holy Spirit to develop and apply in our lives.

Jesus sets you free from Satan, death, bondage, etc.

Let's come a little closer to the story and pick up the spiritual lesson that the Spirit of God intended by it. I believe if we look at the facts as the Lord puts them in contrast in this story, especially as you compare it with Mark and Luke's account, I believe the spiritual message becomes very clear. On one side, as we described already, you have demons, you have death, you have torment, you have shame, and you have graphic descriptions of man at his critical worse. You couldn't get worse than this. Hell rules in his life, and it couldn't be worse; having six thousand demons controlling your life, and casting you down, and being naked and ashamed, and living in a place of death and corruption, in the tombs with the corpse; a horrible picture!. Then the

scene changes. After Jesus comes on the scene we have words like this, *"He was found seated, clothed, in his right mind, and he had a desire to be with Jesus."* In one of the accounts he uses the word *"begged";* he begged Jesus that he might go with Him. He became a sign and a testimony in his own community. Jesus said, *"Go back and tell your family what great things the Lord has done for you."*

Now, those are only the facts. Anybody with a spiritual eye can see through those facts; demon possessed and living in the place of death, and living a life of hell, torment and shame, and then all of a sudden you are seated, clothed, and in your right mind, fellowshipping with Jesus, and becoming a shining testimony. You don't have to force it, you don't have to twist it, you don't have to bend it, and you don't have to look in between the lines to see the great message. The New Testament, all through the rest of Romans, and so on, unfolds the theology of what it means to be seated, clothed and in your right mind. You have it in picture form here. The Old Testament is in seed form, and the gospels are the bud, and in the epistles you have it in fully developed form, and the full explanation of it.

I believe this message is the grand redemptive miracle of conversion. I think that's what he is talking about; what happens when somebody gets saved. He just gives you the extreme example, and oh what a tremendous change takes place! It's an illustration, and God's picture of conversion. He takes the worse possible case, and brings them to the highest possible level in a moment of time. As soon as Jesus comes in, there is order, there is harmony, there is peace, there is reason, and there is tranquility and deliverance.

Let's ask the question and try to answer it, "What is the great revelation of Christ in this wonderful miracle?" Without trying to be fancy, using a word that grips your heart, but it's the idea of this; He's the Redeemer and the Deliverer. He's the One who brings release, and He is the One who sets you free from Satan, death, bondage, shame, hell and every evil, and man with his discord, and disharmony, and confusion of life. He's the Deliverer. This is a redemptive miracle, and the story it tells is the freedom that Jesus brings. That's what it's all about. It's the story of salvation in story form.

Every victory in our life is a present foretaste of final victory

Matthew 8:29, the word spoken by Legion, "Have you come to torment us before the time?"

Just so we don't get too dry, detached and just factual, let me share the rest of this in terms of the principles, in order that we might make practical application to our own lives. For years I regarded that as a rhetorical question, a question not intended to illicit an answer. When you come to rhetorical questions in the New Testament, I suggest that you answer them, because there is a blessing in them. How would you answer that? *"Have you come to torment us before the time?"* The answer is, "Yes." The answer is an unqualified "yes".

Let me state it as a principle. Every victory in your life is a present foretaste of final victory. Every time I have a victory in my life, Satan is tormented before the time. Each victory is the bud of coming glory. Satan is cruel. He loves to torment. Every time he appears in scripture he is hurting somebody. Every time he shows up he is tormenting and injuring. One describes in Matthew that he was grievously vexed by the devil. It's cruel. Another says, *"He takes him, tears him, foams, gnashes with his teeth, and pineth away."* He's cruel. Often times they cast him into the fire, and into the water to destroy him. He's cruel. And the spirit rent him sore, and came out of him. All that time Satan and the demons were trying to hurt. He promises the world and gold, but he only brings hell and torment. Even when he's cast out, you'll notice that his last act before he departs is to take his victim, and cast him down into the ground.

Satan loves to torment, and when he's not tormenting, he's tormented before the time. If you don't let him torment you, you are tormenting him because he lives to torment. That was what was grieving him so, because Jesus was going to take away his tormenting power, and he didn't want that. That's what I mean when I say that your victory is his pain. Every time you trust Jesus for victory, you are tormenting Satan before the time. There is going to be a day for all of us— Hallelujah— when we have all victory, and he has all pain. That's down the road. Right now, if you are anything like me, there is a lot of land to be

possessed, and you have a long way to go. We are all toddlers in this Christian life. Every forward step that you take is a foretaste of a coming glory. That's what God wants to work in our hearts. Our lives should be a continual blow upon the head of the serpent. Day by day, as we live in union with Christ in victory, we're tormenting him before the time.

Going after Jesus is our only goal—nothing else is

Matthew 8:31&32, *"And the demons began to entreat Him saying, 'If you are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.' And He said to them, 'Be gone.' And they came out, and went into the swine and behold, a whole herd rushed down the steep banks into the sea, and perished in the waters."* Hold that as one fact. Now look at the second fact. Matthew 8:33&34, *"When the herdsmen fled, and went into the city, and reported everything, including the incident of the demoniacs, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw Him they entreated Him to depart from their region."*

Remember earlier that we reported that the swine became an object lesson in the extreme for love for the world? It's shocking to read Matthew 8:34, *"And they entreated Him to depart from their coasts/region."* It was their choice that it cost too much to have Jesus. They chose the pigs. They'd rather have the pigs. They rejected Christ, so they lost Him. They chose the pigs, but did they get the pigs? See verse 32, *"The whole herd perished in the sea."* Do you see where we are heading? The principle can be stated in these words; when you choose pigs over Jesus you lose both the pigs and Jesus. We've got to bring that down to life. It's easy to say, "That doesn't apply to me. I don't have any pigs. I'm not a swine herder. I don't trade in pigs." But just like this, with the absolute illustration under which every lesser illustration could be applied, the pigs are the extreme illustration under which every lesser illustration could be applied.

Let me tell you exactly what I'm saying. Let's change the word "pigs". Let's change it to anything. When you go after anything except Jesus, you lose what you've gone after, and Jesus will depart from your coasts, as well. I'll tell you, it's a startling truth. Why did the prodigal leave the father's house? He was looking for a ring, and a robe, and a fatted calf. He was looking for friends and a party. That's why he left. What

did he find when he went after those things? Pigs. Where were those things in reality? In the father's house. He came back in order to get the things he went after, because in going after them he lost them. There's a million and one applications to this. There's a thousand different ways we embrace the disease, and ask the physician to depart from our coasts.

Let me give a list, and I trust the Holy Spirit will apply it. You young people here and those listening by tape, if you go after a life partner, you'll lose it. Marriage is not a goal. Jesus is a goal. No man has the wife that he gets on his own. You only have the wife that God gives you. If you don't have the wife that God gives you, even though you have a wife, you don't have the wife. Is that a riddle? If you get it on your own, you really don't have it, and the tragedy is that when you go after that on your own, the spiritual Jesus often departs from your coast. No woman has the husband that she gets on her own. You only have the husband that God gives you. If God doesn't give you a husband, the husband you have is not really yours. Often Jesus will depart from your coasts.

Let me illustrate it again. Don't make vocation a goal. This is especially dangerous in our materialistic society. We're so plush, and fat, and so rich. We go after things, and want things to play with, and things to entertain us. We want things to make life easier, and we want things to make life more comfortable, and we want things we can enjoy, and we want things to satisfy us. I tell you, with a spirit that has already been badly burned by materialism, if the cost of those things is to have Jesus depart from your coast, then you are going to end up having those things but not having them. You'll possess them, but they'll possess you. There will be no joy in them, and there will be no contentment in them, and in your riches you'll be poverty stricken, and empty, and dry. It's vain, and it's empty, and it's nothing/zero. To have everything without His smile, without His presence, without His embrace, without His Spirit singing new revelations of Christ into our delighted souls, what do we have? We are losers all the way around. Those things mean nothing. Sad, sad is the Christian in his new car, is the Christian in his fancy clothes, and in his fine home, and in his important job, if there is a cloud that blots out the sunshine of the Lord. We only have what Jesus gives. You'll never have what you get on your own. If you ever choose pigs over Jesus, you'll lose Jesus and the pigs.

Let me illustrate it again, and bring it closer to home. Thousands of Christians go after Christian service as a goal. They create their own opportunities; souls, souls, souls, missions, missions, missions, evangelism, evangelism, evangelism! Because that's their goal, that's their passion, that's their direction, that's their heart and their burden, they go after that as a goal rather than after Him as a goal. When you go after that as a goal, you'll lose both it and Him. If you ever make a goal out of a by-product, you lose both the goal and the by-product together. Some are able to maneuver, and are cleverer. They can manipulate, pull the right strings, meet the right people, create the right opportunities, get the right endorsements, end up on a public platform someplace, and smile and say, "Now I am in ministry. I did it! I pulled the right strings, I got the right people, and we got the funds in, and now here am I. I've got this opportunity." Have you really? You don't have it. You may have it but you don't have it! You lost the opportunity by going after it, and because you got it on your own.

What good is public ministry if Jesus has departed from your coast? Think of that. What good is sharing, if the anointing of God is not upon that sharing? What good is ministry if the Lord is not there to bless, and to quicken, and to make alive? It's not good at all. None of us are free from the violations of this principle of the pigs and Jesus. From my own heart I've often chosen pigs over Jesus. Choosing pigs is a request to the Lord to depart for a while from our coasts.

Every time any Christian goes after anything other than Jesus, he loses both the thing he goes after, and the Lord Himself. May I share with you the best way to lose friends? Try to make friends. That's the best way to lose them. You don't make friends by trying to make friends. You make yourself repulsive and awkward. You go after Jesus, and you'll be beating friends off with a broom handle. He'll give you those things as a by-product. Closer to home, I speak as a husband and a father of six children. Do you want to know how I can lose my family? It's by trying to salvage my family. The best thing I can do for my family is to delight myself in the Lord, so He can give me the desires of my heart. He hasn't called me to make men of God out of my boys, and women of God out of my girls. He has called their mother and me to be a man and woman of God in their presence, before their eyes. If we go after Christ, we save the family. If we go after the family, very

often we get frustrated, get anxious, and the Lord is driven off our coasts, and the family goes headlong over the bank into the drink.

Do you want to know the best way to lose your future? Try to secure it. Go after it, plan for your future, and set it all up, and make sure every base is covered. You lost it! You want to know how to really secure your future? Forget it, and go after Jesus, because when you go after Jesus, all those things will be added unto you. Don't go after gifts. Go after Jesus. Don't go after the fruit of the Spirit. Go after Jesus. Don't go after Christian fellowship. Go after Jesus. Don't go after education, even Bible education, not as a substitute for Him. The goal is never that I must win my unsaved husband, or I must win my unsaved wife, or I must win my unsaved parents, or I must win my unsaved children. No. You must know Jesus, and you must walk in an unclouded union with Him. You must go after Him, and pursue Him, because any time you go after anything other than Jesus, you lose both; you lose Him, and that which you go after. The safest thing, brothers and sisters, you can ever do in life is just to go after Him with every fiber of your being. I suggest that's a principle. All those other things might be nice but they are not the goal. The goal is Him. The goal is not to win your community, or to build a church, or anything else. It's to know Him. Let's not lose everything else by going after it.

Jesus never forces Himself on you

Let me give one more principle. Not only is every victory in your life a present foretaste of a future victory, not only do we lose all by not choosing Him, but Jesus never forces Himself upon anyone. In verse 34 they ask Him to depart, and He says, "Goodbye." I love it. We wouldn't do it that way. We'd say, "Let me talk to you about this, and let me try to explain it. I don't want you just walking off. Let's see if we can…" He never tried to force Himself. They said "depart" and He said, "Okay, see you later".

I get a blessing out of comparing verse 34 to Luke 5:8, because Peter said to the Lord*, "Depart from me. I'm a sinful man, oh Lord."* You've got two things. You've got the Gadarenes saying, *"Depart,"* and Peter saying, *"Depart."* He didn't depart from Peter, even though they used the very same words, "Depart from me." Why didn't He depart from Peter? It's because Peter never prayed to depart. Oh sure, he said it

with his lips, but God doesn't hear the lips, anyway. Those are just words. God always listens to the heart, and sometimes He bypasses the prayer of the lips in order that He might answer the prayer of the heart, and of a lifetime. So, He passes by the prayer of the moment. Don't get discouraged if God bypasses your superficial prayers, because He's going after your heart. Peter didn't mean what the Gadarenes meant. When the Gadarenes said to depart, they meant depart, and so He departed. When Peter said, *"Depart from me. I'm a sinful man, oh Lord,"* what he really meant was, "Draw close and hug me tight, and don't ever leave me." That's the prayer that Jesus answered.

It thrills me to death that God can hear beyond my silly words. Sometimes you get discouraged, "I don't know how to pray. I'm afraid God will hear something I don't really mean, and then I'll get all messed up." God never hears what you don't mean. He only hears your heart, and He only answers your heart, and He does it after His own pleasure. The moanings and the groanings, the sighs, the looks, and the ache is what He hears, and that's what He answers. And that's real prayer. An awful lot of what man calls prayer, God doesn't call prayer at all. The point is that He doesn't force Himself upon you. He never forces Himself upon anyone.

Once again, when we come to chapter 12 we'll see the details of this, but if you look carefully at the gospel record of demon possessed men, in every case these men were crying out for mercy. I used to have the idea that the worse sinner was the most possessed, that the guiltier you are, the more Satan had control. But when you look in the Bible you don't see this. "If this is guy is a real dirty sinner, then he's got more demons in him. If this guy is really bad, then he's loaded with them, and if you are the guiltiest sinner of all, then you are possessed by the most demons." But you don't read about the false teachers and false prophets being demon possessed. You see, they were working hand in hand with Satan. They weren't fighting to be free. These demon possessed men, by the time they came up in the Bible record, were all fighting to be free, and crying out for deliverance, and crying out for mercy. The men in this chapter were not acquiescing to this slavery that they were under. They were crying out for deliverance.

Here's the point. Jesus never forces Himself on anyone. If you say, "Depart", He'll depart. If you choose something else, He'll leave. But

if you get the worst case possible, six thousand demons in a man living among the tombs, tormented day and night, and cutting themselves, naked and full of shame, you get the worst case possible, wanting to be delivered, and Jesus is right there; he's clothed, and in his right mind, sitting in fellowship with Jesus. It's a marvelous story of redemption. Even when He departs, He departs in mercy. He doesn't leave Himself without a witness, just in case they change their mind. He leaves a glowing monument of grace; He leaves a testimony in that city in the person of that redeemed and converted person.

10

HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC

Matthew 9:1-8, *"And getting into a boat He crossed over and came to His own city. And, behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic lying on a bed, and Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, 'Take courage, my son, your sins are forgiven.' And, behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming.' And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why are you thinking evil in your heart, for which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Rise, and walk?" But in order that you might know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin,' he then said to the paralytic, 'Rise, take up your bed and go home.' And he rose and went home. But when the multitude saw this, they were filled with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men."*

Background

Let me start by giving a little background to get this story in your mind's eye. This is one of those stories that the Holy Spirit didn't want to miss, so He told it three times; Matthew 9:1-9, Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26. If you only had Matthew's account, you might not even recognize the story. The record in Mark and Luke is the familiar story. It's the same story, about the time when the crowd was so great at the house of Christ that nobody could get in. They blocked the doors and windows. There were people everywhere. Even on the inside it was wall to wall people. Mark tells us that this paralytic had four friends. They were not discouraged by difficulties and hindrances. They wanted to get to Jesus. Think spiritually as I give this next fact. They were not about to let anybody stand in their way. They were not going

to be hindered by people. So, they went up the stairs on the side of the house, and climbed up on the roof, removed the thatch and tiles off the roof, opened up a hole, and lowered their crippled friend down by ropes, until he dangled in front of the Lord Jesus, in front of the eyes of all. It's a very moving scene.

Matthew doesn't mention any of that, but if you study the context, it's the same story, and those are the details we usually remember. John 5:17 adds another detail, *"There were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judea and from all Jerusalem."* It was a special occasion; a conference. All the scribes and Pharisees got together and said, "Let's go check Him out, and go investigate." When this miracle was done, it was in front of the eyes of the big wigs. They were all there. The Bible doesn't tell us why the doctors showed up. We know they had an eye on Jesus, and we know they held Him in suspicion, watching Him very carefully.

Some people suggest, because Jesus began by saying in Matthew 9:2, *"My son, your sins are forgiven,"* that maybe it was sin that caused this man's paralysis; that he had done something in his life, and that's why he was paralyzed, and that he was suffering disability as a result of some moral malady in his life. There's no way to prove that, or disprove it. It would be nice if we gave him the benefit of the doubt, I think. It's possible to have a disease, and the chastening of God. In James 5 it teaches that. I don't know if that was his case or not. I think in John 5 you might have reason to think that, when Jesus healed another paralytic at the pool at Bethsaida. There you might think his paralysis was caused by sin, because after Jesus healed him He said in John 5:14, *"Behold, you have become well. Do not sin anymore, less a worse thing fall upon you."* So, maybe in his case it was because of sin. I don't know in our story if anything is gained by saying his paralysis was caused by sin. I think this guy has enough problems without us reading in between the lines, and seeing what a wretch he was. I think he had enough problems with his own sin and sickness.

Double Miracle #1: Your sins are forgiven

Matthew 9:1-8 records the double miracle that the Lord Jesus did that we call redemptive miracle #6. Let me show you that double miracle.

First of all, there was the spiritual miracle which no human eye could see; the miracle of the forgiveness of sin. I don't know what this man expected from the Lord Jesus. I'm sure he wasn't dragged there. I think he had a will to go, and to seek Jesus. Just because he couldn't move his arms and legs, doesn't mean he didn't have a will. It was his own choice to go there.

When we read in Matthew 9:2, *"Jesus, seeing their faith*…," I think the "their" is more than the four who carried him. I think it also included his own, and that he was brought there by faith. The Bible doesn't say what he was seeking. I would guess there's a good chance it was physical healing because he was crippled. Jesus had a reputation of healing all the people. Maybe he had more than that. I don't know. Maybe he thought he had nothing to lose, and he might as well be brought to Jesus. As far as the record goes, this man didn't say a thing. He didn't pray. He didn't say, "Lord, have mercy on me," or, "Lord, save me. I perish." He didn't even say what the leper said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me whole." He said nothing. He asked nothing. He just showed up in a very unique way at the feet of Jesus.

There are three thoughts in the words the Lord Jesus spoke to him. Glance at Matthew 9:2 as I get this before your heart. The first is, *"Take courage."* The KJV says*, "Be of good cheer."* I'm glad they changed that, because that loses a lot of power in our culture. We use the word "cheer" in such a surface way. We hold up a glass, and say "cheers" or we say "cheer up". Jesus wasn't saying to this man to cheer up. He didn't go up to the paralytic and say, "Cheer up; cheers." It's a strong Greek word, and it means, *"Take courage."* This man was carrying a heavy burden, and was down cast and discouraged. From the fact that Jesus began by saying, *"Take courage,"* you see that this man was carrying an awful weight of sin. It was a cloud of sin, a burden of guilt, and the discouragement that is caused by the sin of an inward pollution, being dirty before God. I know he had problems in his body; his muscles, his nerves, and his limbs, but he was also crippled in another way; on the inside, in his heart and soul. When Jesus said, *"Take courage,"* He was reaching very deeply into a troubled heart.

G. Campbell Morgan in his book "The Great Physician" points out that there are two Greek words for "courage". One is like our word "bravery", when we say, "That man has a lot of courage." What we

mean is bravery even when you are scared to death, and you are going to go through it, even if you are shaking, you are still brave. I guess that's what I have when Lillian wakes me up in the middle of the night and says, "I heard a noise. Go downstairs and check it out." Well, I've got to look tough, otherwise she gets too scared. So, I put my pants on, and go downstairs, but my heart is beating, and I'm waiting for someone to jump out. That's courage, in spite of my chicken heartedness, even though I'm worried.

The other word is a completely different word, and it means the complete absence of fear, that there is no fear whatsoever, and no cause for alarm. It's the word that's used when you have great peace. It isn't being brave even though you are scared. It's not being scared. It's having all the cause for turmoil removed. That's the Greek word that the Holy Spirit uses here. He doesn't say to be brave even though you have a lot of problems. He says to take courage because there is no longer any reason to be afraid of anything. That's an amazing word! No matter how much your conscience is screaming, or how dirty you feel inside your heart, and no matter how the law of God is hanging over your head, and no matter what you think about answering to God and your eternal destiny, He gives a strong consolation. He says, *"Take courage,"* the kind of courage that has no fear.

In verse 2 He gives another word, *"My son,"* and if you look in the margin you'll see that He says, *"child."* The real word is "child", and not "son. Just try to project yourself into this man's situation. According to the context this man needed the word *"take courage"* because he was feeling guilty. Is he feeling sin? I don't know what he had done. I don't know what he was carrying, but he felt repulsive, and he felt dirty. His conscience was convicted. He finally gets into the presence of Jesus, and what is the first word you hear? It's *"child"*. It does something for him.

I don't know what he is thinking. Was he scared to go see the Lord Jesus? I suppose if that were me I'd be thinking, "I wonder what He's going to say? I wonder what He's going to do? I wonder what He's going to think?" especially since they were climbing on the roof. He might have thought, "I'm not sure He's going to like this." That was His own home, and then they tore a hole in His roof. He's coming down for a gift, for mercy. I don't know if someone tore into your roof,

and then landed in front of your feet what you would think. I don't know what was going through his mind. I know he had a burden of guilt, and I know he felt sinful. I don't know what registered in his eyes and face, but as he came down in a crowd (he couldn't get in the door or in the window, the crowd was so great and the whole seminary was there, too, the scribes and Pharisees were all around) everyone must have, I assume, sat back and watched this amazing thing happen as he came down right in front of Jesus. The first words he hears is, *"Child."* That must have released a thousand fears in that man's heart. How tenderly the Lord dealt with him. The chief miracle was not the restoration of a paralyzed body. That was a big miracle. A spiritual miracle took place first, a marvelous miracle cleansing, *"Child, take courage."* Those are good words, especially in his condition.

There's a third thing the Lord Jesus said. Of course, this is what caused all the trouble. It's, *"Your sins are forgiven."* What a word! *"Take courage, your sins are forgiven."* He uses the plural for sins; every one of his sins are forgiven. And the word for forgiven is not the usual word for forgiven in the New Testament. It means literally "to send forth" or "to dismiss". "Your sins are dismissed. Your sins are sent forth. They can leave now. They have no more business here." That's the idea. If you read this often you'll get the impact of it. Jesus did that to many people. Do you realize that as far as the gospel record goes, this is the first time He ever said that to anyone, that *"your sins are forgiven"*. It was right here to this man. This was a first and it dropped like a bombshell, too.

Do you realize that He only said it once ever after this, in His whole ministry? That was at Simon's house when the woman anointed the feet of the Lord Jesus with the ointment of her own tears. Luke 7:47&48, Jesus said, *"'Her sins which are many are forgiven.' And he turned to her and said, 'Your sins are forgiven.'"* Those two times were the only times that he ever announced that. I'm not saying that's the only two times He ever forgave anything. I know better than that. He didn't throw stones at the woman in adultery and, of course, the thief on the cross received pardon from the Lord, and he even prayed for the soldiers and those responsible for His death. He said, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*."

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

Matthew 9:3, *"And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This fellow blasphemes.'"*

Do you see why they thought He was committing blasphemy? It's because only God can forgive sin. The one offended is the one that has to forgive. This is one of the greatest passages in the New Testament on the deity of Christ. Let me try to illustrate it. Suppose I told Wayne a terrible lie, and then Pat came up to me and said, "I forgive you, Ed, for telling Wayne a terrible lie." I'd say, "Wait a minute, Pat. How can you forgive me? I didn't sin against you. I sinned against Wayne. Wayne is the one that has to forgive me, not you." It would be ridiculous for Pat to say, "I forgive you," if I sinned against Wayne or Carrie. The one you sinned against is the one that has to forgive you. That's why these people raised their eyebrows, because Jesus went up to this man, and didn't even know him, and He said, "I forgive you." Do you know what He was saying by that? He was saying, "All your sins are against Me because I'm God, and because all your sins are against Me, I have the right to forgive you." They knew what He meant. That's why they said, "He blasphemes. He makes Himself God. What right does He have to forgive sins? That paralytic didn't sin against Jesus." Indeed, he did! Every sin that paralytic ever did was against Jesus. Every bad word that paralytic ever said was against Jesus. Every bad thought that paralytic ever had was against Jesus. That's why Jesus could say, "I forgive you. You sinned against Me and I'm almighty God."

Over and over again in the Bible record, when Jesus claimed deity, they knew what He was doing. In many cases they picked up stones to stone Him. We look at Him and say, "Oh, maybe He never did claim to be God." He certainly did! And they knew it. Those Pharisees that gathered on that day knew that He was claiming to be God right here. They accused Him of blasphemy. Let me say a word about blasphemy. That's one of those words that is so terrible that it's lost all its punch. Because there is a sin called "the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit", which we'll get to in chapter 12, nobody wants that anywhere near their life. They say, "Blasphemy? I might be proud, and I might lie a little bit, and I might not be humble, and I might be unbelieving, and I might

even curse now and then when no one is around, but don't tell me I'm a blasphemer. That word is too strong for me."

Let me ask this question. Can a Christian blaspheme God? The answer is "yes". Very often I blaspheme God, and I've got an idea that everyone before me blasphemes God. Let me tell you what blaspheme means in its essence in the word. Generally we think it's the way the heathen uses it, "Awful abuse and contempt for God." I remember when I was in Chicago I handed a man a gospel tract as he walked into a diner. The man jumped on the table in the diner, and I couldn't believe it. My virgin ears almost fell off my head when that man poured out blasphemy. He called God the worse things I had ever heard in my life. I tell you what, I backed off five paces. I didn't want to get singed when the fire fell down. That's what you usually think of when you think of blasphemy; someone damning God, and cursing God in the worse way.

Madeline Murray O'Hare, the atheist, is a blasphemer. But the word "blaspheme", although it includes that awful contempt of God, also has lesser applications. If you look up "blaspheme" in Webster's, here's your first definition: "To speak irreverently." That's what it means to blaspheme, "To speak irreverently and speaking lightly of sacred things." Let me give some illustrations. All irreverence is blasphemy. Anytime you joke about God or the things of God, you blaspheme. Anytime, in a light hearted way, you speak about "the man upstairs" or something like that, using a non-reverent title for God, is a form of blasphemy. You are taking His name in vain. You might say, "Well, I don't curse or swear any more. I used to before I trusted Jesus, but I don't take His name in vain anymore." Maybe. Be careful when you sing the song to Zion and you sing the name of God, make sure it's not in vain. Make sure you mean what you are singing. "My Jesus, I love Thee. I know Thou art mine. For Thee all the follies of sin I resign." Any time you sing the name of Jesus, and you don't mean it, you blaspheme. You are taking the name of the Lord in vain.

A lot of Christians get pious phrases like, "Praise the Lord!" and "Hallelujah", and they just say those words in a meaningless way. "Praise the Lord," can mean anything from the dog coming in from the rain to whatever. It's a form of blasphemy. It's being irreverent with the name of God. Anytime you snatch honors that belong to God

Himself, and take the glory, like God doing a wonderful thing in your family, and someone praises you for that, "Boy, you really know how to bring up a family." Anytime you take the glory from God, and anytime He does something in your life, and you just smile, and get puffed up inside, and you receive the glory, plagiarizing God, that's a form of blasphemy. Anytime you quarrel with God's dealing in your life, and you have a controversy with His providence, do you realize that all that un-surrender is blasphemy? It's because you are denying to God what belongs to Him. You belong to Him. In the context, they accused the Lord Jesus of blasphemy because He claimed prerogative as God. But because He is a mighty God, it's as easy for Him to do the inner work as the outer work.

Which is easier to do: spiritual or physical miracle?

Matthew 9:5, "*Which is easier, to say, 'Thy sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Take up your bed and walk?'"*

One of my favorite childhood stories was when I was in the first grade, and it was my turn for show and tell. I didn't have anything to show or tell, but I told the teacher that I learned how to fly. The teacher did not know what to expect. She said, "Alright, you can do this." So, I went in front of the room, and stood on the teacher's desk, and I did a swan dive on my face to the floor; something physical. She soon learned that I couldn't fly. It was tested and proven that the physical thing, that the doing is the harder of the two. That's if you look at it that way. But maybe Jesus didn't mean it that way. In Matthew 9:5 it's possible that He was referring to the actual work. Which is easier, to do a spiritual miracle or to do a physical miracle? If you look at it that way, then you have to turn it around and say, "Physical healing is very, very much easier than spiritual healing." The spiritual becomes harder now.

By a word He could make the universe, and by a word He made the human body, and by a word He could heal the human body. How simple; no effort! But in order to forgive us, what did it take? What did it cost? What did it involve? What was the greater work? That is a different story. When you talk about what it cost to do a spiritual work, you are talking about a God leaving heaven, becoming man, humbling Himself under the death of the cross, and suffering in three hours eternity; the wrath of God, and separation from God, His life

blood. Now what is easier to say, his sins are forgiven or take up your bed and walk? Sickness has only temporal consequences, but sin has eternal consequences, and it is a lot harder to deal with sin than with sickness. So, forgiveness, the spiritual, is the more difficult. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission. So, it depends on how you look at it.

The spiritual is always harder to do than the physical. Let me apply it a little bit. Not only did it cost Him a lot more to do the spiritual than the physical, but take a good look at your Christian life. Which is harder, to do the spiritual or the physical? I'll tell you what, it's a lot harder to do the spiritual. Going through the forms is easy to do. Doing the physical is easy. Let me give some illustrations. Is it harder to love your brother, or go to the church supper? Is it harder to share the heartaches of a brother's life, or to give him a financial gift? Is it harder to wait on the Lord for the message of God, or memorize scripture? Which is easier? Is it harder to become conformed to the image of Christ, or get involved in Christian service? Which is easier; the spiritual or the physical?

Sometimes I have to smile at the legalists who accuse the spiritual of being lazy, or being passive, or being detached from reality, and being cold, indifferent and uncaring, and so on, because often the legalists measure the spiritual person by the externals; by works, and the easy things. They look at your life, and they have a little check list. Do you go to church every time the doors are opened? Uh-oh; deduct ten. Does he get up early for quiet time every day? Deduct fifteen. Does he drive a bus, sing in the choir, teach a class, visit the sick, and hand out gospel tracts? Which is easier; the physical or the spiritual? I'll tell you what, all that "busy, busy, busy" is often a cop-out for the spiritual, because the spiritual is harder. Anybody can march on Washington, and anybody can pull out books from the public school system, and cast a vote against evolution. I'll tell you what, seeking His face in reality, being broken before the Lord, being contrite in your spirit before Him, walking in the Spirit, trusting God in the details of life, giving thanks in everything, being filled with the Spirit is the hard part. That's not easy. It takes a miracle of God. So, the spiritual things, if you look at it that way, are harder. But I don't believe in the context that He meant either one of those.

When He said, *"Which is harder, the physical or the spiritual? Which is easier to say, "Thy sins are forgiven or take up your bed and walk,"* in the context, He was just accused of blasphemy, and of making Himself God. I think what He was saying is, "I AM God; neither is easier, and neither is more difficult. I can heal with ease, and I can forgive with ease, because I am almighty God." I'll tell you, I get a blessing out of that, that no sin in my life gives God trouble to forgive. No sin in your life gives God trouble to forgive. It's just as easy for God to do a spiritual work in your life as it is to do a physical work in your life. It's exciting to realize that there are no degrees of difficulty with God. When Jesus said, "Child, take courage; your sins are forgiven," He did an easy thing, for Him. They began to think in verse 3, "This fellow blasphemes," but Jesus is almighty God, so He looked into their thoughts and into their minds (they didn't say He blasphemed; they just thought it), and He said, *"Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?"* It's almost a third miracle when He read their minds.

That's why these people raised their eyebrows. Jesus went up to this man, and didn't even know him, and said, *"I forgive you."* He was saying that all your sins are against Me, because I am God, and all your sins are against Me. I have the right to forgive you. And they knew what He meant, and that's why they said, "He blasphemes. He makes Himself God. What right does He have to forgive Him? He didn't sin against Jesus." Well, indeed He did! Every sin that paralytic ever did was against Jesus. Every bad word that paralytic ever said was against Jesus. Every bad thought that paralytic ever had was against Jesus. That's why Jesus could say, "I forgive you. You've sinned against Me and I'm God. I'm almighty God."

Double Miracle #2: Physical miracle of healing his body

Spiritual miracles are for us; physical ones are for others

Let me try to nail down the main message of this miracle. When Jesus did part one of the double miracle, after He healed him spiritually, do you think he would have walked away, or do you think He would have done part two? If you read this, you see from Matthew 9:6, *"'In order that you might know that the Son of man has authority on earth to*

forgive sin,' then He said to the paralytic, 'Rise and pick up your bed and go home.'" What if the Pharisees weren't there, and what if there were no sceptics? Would He have said, "Child, take courage. Your sins are forgiven," and then walked away to continue another ministry? It looked like He wasn't going to heal him physically. Then these Pharisees came along and said, "He's blaspheming." He said, "Alright, for your sake, to show you that I'm not," He turns around, and heals him physically. Would He have healed him if the Pharisees weren't there? Would He have only done the spiritual miracle?

There are those who insist on healing by faith, "You've got to have faith." Well, here's an illustration of healing by unbelief. If it wasn't for their unbelief, He wouldn't have healed that man. It wasn't faith. It was unbelief that caused him to raise this man up physically. There is a wonderful principle connected with all of this. Let me word it this way and say, "God does spiritual miracles for us, and He does physical miracles for someone else." God changes the inside for our benefit, and He changes the outside for the benefit for those who are around. This man had quite a testimony, and never said a word. He silently got up, rolled up his bed, and walked away in the presence of all, and there was never an eloquence like the silence of this paralytic when he was healed. What a testimony!

If you are seeking the Lord, seek for the spiritual thing. God wants to do spiritual miracles in your life. You might say, "Alright, He'll do a spiritual miracle in me, and I'm going to go out and love the poor, and give to the sick, and visit the fatherless, and I'll be changed on the outside." Here is what this passage is teaching. It takes a miracle of God to change the inside. It also takes a miracle for God to change the outside. He's not saying, "Just let me change the inside, and then you go out and do this and do that." He's not saying that. He's saying, "I'll change the inside, and that's where you are concerned. I'll do the spiritual miracle." I have an idea He would have walked away; that was enough. That man would have been happy till the day he entered into glory. That's all he needed. I don't think he was advantaged very much by having legs and arms.

He went home rejoicing about forgiveness. I know it. I bet he never forgot those words until the day he died, "Child, take courage, your sins are forgiven." He went home, and when his wife looked out the

window, and saw him walking down in full steps, I bet the first thing he said when he went in was, "And they lowered me down and He said, 'Child, take courage; your sins are forgiven. You can walk, and you can move.' You should have heard the tone of His voice when He said, 'Child, take courage.'" That's what thrilled his heart. Seek the spiritual, and God will change you on the outside, and will do the double miracle. He always does a double miracle. It's as much a miracle to change on the outside as it is to change on the inside.

I'm going to ask you as a clincher to turn the very wonderful Psalm 67:1&2, *"God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us."* God is doing something for you. Why? Verse 2, *"That Thy way may be known on the earth."* Bless me for them. Notice the last verse, same thing, that God blesses us that all the ends of the earth might hear Him. All God's blessings are missionary blessings. Every time God ever does anything for you, it's not for you. It's for others. God blesses you that the ends of the earth might see. Go after the spiritual miracles, and be satisfied with them, and then God will change the outside for others, for those observing. The result will be in your life as His life, and they'll be amazed. They'll glorify God for such a life.

#11

A BREAK BETWEEN THE MIRACLES

Matthew 9:9-17, ***"And as Jesus passed on through there He saw a man named Matthew sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, 'Follow Me,' and he rose and followed Him. It happened as He was reclining at the table at the house, behold, many tax gatherers and sinners came, and joined Jesus and His disciples at the table. When the Pharisees saw this they said to the disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with the tax gatherers and sinners?' But when He heard this He said, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill. But go and learn what this means. I desire compassion and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners.' Then the disciples of John came to Him saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away. Then they will fast. No one puts a patch of an unshrunk cloth on a garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."***

Overview

The Holy Spirit through Matthew is about to give us the last four redemptive miracles. In a special way they are climactic miracles, bringing the whole story of redemption to a wonderful consummation. It almost seems as if the Holy Spirit is afraid to jump into redemptive

miracle #7, afraid that we'll miss something, and is taking a pause. It's sort of an introduction to the miracles to come, and a summary of all the miracles that have already been.

In Matthew 9:9-17 He tells three different stories. First of all, in verse 9 Matthew tells the story of his own conversion, and then in Matthew 9:10-13 he tells about a conversation that took place at a party at his house. Matthew threw a big feast, and at that occasion there was a conversation between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees. And He wanted us to see that. Then in Matthew 9:14-17 the disciples of John the Baptist come to the Lord Jesus to ask Him a question.

When you are moving along so wonderfully telling ten miracles, why stop; why not just move into the next one, and when He's all done, just go back and pick this all up? It almost looks like He changed the subject in midstream, like He aimlessly went off the subject. Of course, we know better than that. It looks like He's saying, "Okay, now we've looked enough at the miracles, let's take a little break, so we'll all stay awake, and we'll talk about something else, and then we'll come back and pick up on the miracles." But you know that's not what He did.

THE CONVERSION OF MATTHEW

Matthew 9:9, *"And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he rose, and followed Him."*

Salvation is the Greatest Miracle

What did He say here, and why smack dab in the middle of a perfectly logically connected story on miracles? Matthew 9:9 is the first story of Matthew's conversion. In order to get the thrill of the insertion at this point, let me give you a little background of Matthew, the man. If we're going to get the impact of this testimony, we're going to have to see what registered in Jewish minds in that day when they said "tax gatherer".

As you know, the history of Israel was the history of a theocracy, at least it was in ideal. Theocracy is the rule of God. Israel was brought up in that government, and they were trained that God was the One who was the King, the One who was going to rule. Israel hated, with a purple passion, the idea that heathens rule them. They didn't like it when Egypt ruled them, and they didn't like it when Assyria ruled them, and they didn't like it when Babylon ruled them, and they didn't like it when the Medes or the Persians ruled them, or Greece ruled them, and they didn't like it now by Rome. Some of them went so far as to say, "It's not lawful for a good Jew to pay tribute to a gentile country. It's against God," and it got them into a lot of trouble when they didn't pay taxes. That was the idea when they came to Jesus and said, *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesa*r?" Rome could care less how they felt about it. Rome was insisting on their taxes.

Rome was divided up into provincials or providences, and every provincial was very heavily taxed. Every time you turned around you were taxed for something. The Jews hated the bondage of Rome, but in a special way there was a group of proud Jews, who called themselves "separatists". We don't have that word in the Bible. We have the word Pharisee; that's what the word means. These Pharisees, more than anyone else, said, "We are not under Rome. We are still under God, and we're going to obey God." Of course, they had to, but they didn't like it, and they always stirred up trouble against Rome. They considered themselves the holy Jews, and if you hobnobbed with the Romans, well, you were just sort of anti-national, and they were against you. They were pure; the teachers, the upright with the moral standards—so they thought.

Added to the problem of gentiles collecting taxes, the Jews had the problem of bad gentiles collecting taxes. They were vexed by these tax gatherers because these guys were corrupt. One of the worst kinds of Roman cruelty took place with these tax collectors. The tax collectors were an arm of the Roman government. They were not elected. Nobody voted in the tax gatherers. They bought their jobs; it was a lucrative job. The tax gatherer job was up for sale, and it was a high price. They were offensive. Zacchaeus and Matthew had to be wealthy to be tax gatherers, because it cost so much money.

Rome would say, “Here’s this province, and we’ve taken a survey of how many people are in there. Here is how much this province owes.” The tax gatherer would pay the taxes for the whole province out of his own pocket, and pay Rome. That made it easy for Rome. Rome didn’t care how they got their money. You can see what a hot bed of corruption that turned into. They could charge anything they wanted, and there was no ceiling on it. It was all backed up by Rome. They had pole taxes, dues, customs and all kinds of unbearable oppression on these people, and they couldn’t do anything about it.

I got this list of taxes from Edersheim in his “History of the New Testament”. They collected a ground tax just for having ground, a land tax. You had to pay one tenth of all your grain or money, and you had to pay one fifth of all your wine, and fruit. Then they collected a one percent income tax from every person from age twelve to sixty-five, bond or free. They had duty tax on all imports and exports. They collected taxes every time you rode or walked across a bridge, and every time you walked down a path or used any of their roads. There was a harbor tax, and town dues, and they taxed your wagons per wheel. They taxed your pack animals, and you had a special tax if you went for a walk. It was called a pedestrian tax. All carriers and all ships in all ways were taxed. Every time you let your boat out, and went out fishing you had to pay a tax; when it was parked again, you had to pay another tax. You had to pay a tax to cross the river, and to cross a dam. Any luxury item you bought was taxed twelve and a half percent.

These tax gatherers were rich. They weren’t out there collecting taxes. They were sitting comfortably at home, and hired the hoods to go out and collect the taxes. The hoods had to make their profit, too, and they did. It was a brutal time. It was full of constant agony. Every time you turned around you had to unload your animal, and take off all you had packed on it. And if you left one province and went into another, you had to go through the same thing over and over again. Then they claimed that you didn’t pay your taxes. It was just a system of oppression and injustice. Tax gatherers were much hated. You can understand why. These weren’t publicans. These were low character men, and they didn’t have any scruples. They were the official crooks.

I give this background to bring in Matthew 9:9. We say that his name is Matthew. No, his name wasn’t Matthew. Well, it was, of course,

but his name was Levi. What's so important about Levi? Levi is a Jewish name. Levi was a Jew. Matthew was a Jew. Do you know what it meant to the Jews when a fellow Jew became a tax gatherer, and worked for Rome? This was the highest form of anti-nationalism; talk about anti-Semitic. Jews who worked for the hated Roman government became hated, and they were disqualified immediately from all Jewish ceremony. They couldn't go to the temple, they couldn't worship, and couldn't sacrifice animals. They were hated as lowdown traitors.

Of course, because of the attitude that the Jews had for the Jewish traitors collecting pole tax, human nature being what it is, they started resisting again, and said, "Alright, if you are going to feel that way about me, then you are really going to pay through the nose." So, that cycle went on and on. Matthew is a rich tax gatherer, a Jew, a traitor, who joined the Roman government for money, who purchased the opportunity to bleed God's people, and, oh was he hated. His little office was set up right there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Every time Peter went fishing, he had to pay Matthew.

Why does Matthew give a parenthesis here in the middle of the miracles to tell about his conversion? You see, this doesn't actually happen like it looks like in chapter 9, after the paralytic was healed. The fact is, this took place long before the Sermon on the Mount. Why does he bring it up here, and suddenly say, "Oh yes; a word about my conversion"? I believe this is, at least, part of the answer. He wants to make dead sure that as we go through the miracles, we understand the redemptive nature of the miracles. He wants us to make sure that we're seeing more than a leper, a fever, a paralysis, crippled legs and dead bodies. He wants us to look beyond, to the spiritual miracle. He could have given his testimony any place in this book, but he put it in the middle of the miracles because he was saying, "Salvation is the greatest miracle." Right in the middle of the miracles he says, "I got saved and I was a low down sinner."

It was a tremendous thing to cleanse a leper. It was a tremendous thing to cleanse Levi's heart. It was a miracle, and that's why he put it in the miracles. Matthew wrote such a beautiful book in these twenty eight chapters, and we forget that he was once a skunk— without God, before the Lord saved him. You've heard the song "It Took a Miracle"? "It

took a miracle to hang the stars in space. It took a miracle to put the world in place. But when He saved my soul, cleansed and made me whole—that was a miracle of love and grace." That's what Matthew was doing. He said, "When I tell you all about the miracles, I don't want you to just look at the miracles. Man, I got saved, and I remember what I was, and Christ did a miracle on me." That's why he brings in this miracle at this point. It's a tremendous illustration. He said, "I want you to see the other miracles, but make sure you are seeing through the miracles, to THE miracle— what God is really illustrating through all these physical miracles." And he begins here to turn our eyes once again through the physical, so that we might see Him.

THE CONVERSATION WITH THE PHARISEES

Jesus Came to Heal the Sin Sick

Matthew 9:10-13, *"And it happened that as He was reclining at the table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, 'Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners!' But when He heard this, He said, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means, "I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE," for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*

Obviously, there is a very close connection between 10-13 and verse 9, because after rich Matthew got saved, after God worked a miracle of salvation in his heart, he threw a big party. He had a great feast. Luke 5 describes it as a sumptuous feast. I like to put it this way and say, *"He threw a feast that was fit for a king."* The reason he threw a feast fit for a king was because Christ was the King that he was honoring. Maybe it was Matthew's burden to get all his unsaved friends out to meet Jesus; I can imagine that was on his heart. He invited all of his cronies, all the publicans and sinners, and they all came to this big, sumptuous feast. Whether that was on his heart, or whether he is just throwing a celebration in honor of Christ, I don't know. But that's not the reason he tells us this.

The reason he brings up this party is because a conversation took place at this party that he says is important, if you are going to understand the rest of the miracles. It's a wonderful response to the miracle of salvation, and there is much instruction in it. When the Lord moves in our hearts, the first thing we want to do is to see our loved ones and friends come to see the same Savior we've come to see. But I believe the reason it is recorded here is not so much for the feast, though that comes in later in this section, but because of the conversation that took place. Jesus said something very wonderful, very simple, and yet, very profound. I'm referring to Matthew 9:12, *"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician but those who are ill."* It was this statement that the Spirit of God through Matthew wanted to call attention to. It's right in the middle of the miracles. Don't forget, Jesus was physically healing, and right in the middle of that Matthew says, "I want to move on to tell you about the miracles, but first I want to make sure that you see it's a salvation miracle; that He's the physician of the spirit. Those who are sick need a physician. Jesus said, 'I come to call the sinners.' It's a spiritual thing."

Because he's saying not to miss the redemptive nature of the miracle, he's not ruling out the physical. He's just saying to look through it. The physical is a wonderful thing. It's a marvel that God has power over the brain, over tumors, over crippled legs and all the rest. He's a physician, though, in a much higher sense; a physician of the soul. The Pharisees were shocked to see the Lord Jesus sitting at the same table, not with one, but a roomful of tax gatherers, publicans and sinners. They couldn't believe what they were seeing. "Is this Jesus? Look at the crowd He's hanging around with." Then they go to the disciples and say, *"Ask your teacher why He eats with tax gatherers."* They wouldn't even ask Him themselves. Implied, of course, in the question were two things. The first was the attitude, "We wouldn't do that. Look at Him. We would never do that. We wouldn't lower ourselves and pollute ourselves. We wouldn't be caught dead at a table with those low down people." Of course, it was pride that separated these Pharisees from the publicans.

The question also implied in, "Why does your teacher eat with publicans and sinners?" is, "Why doesn't He eat with us? How come He's hobnobbing with them and not with us? We are far better than they are. We're holy men." The answer He gave answered both parts

of that question. "I eat with them," says the Lord Jesus, "because I'm a soul doctor, and they are soul sick; they are spiritually sick. They have a disease, and the name of the disease is sin. On the other hand I don't eat with you because you think you are healthy, and don't need a doctor. You don't need Me. If you needed Me, I'd be eating with you, but you are so healthy that you don't need a doctor."

I believe the key to this whole section is that Jesus presents Himself as the physician of souls. He says, "I'm not eating with them because I'm their social companion. I'm eating with them because I'm their doctor. I'm eating with them because they have a need." The Holy Spirit doesn't want us to miss the true meaning of all these wonderful miracles. They're all redemptive. They all tell a story. Jesus never healed the body in order to heal the body. He only healed the body in order to lay down a spiritual principle, and to show what He could do on the inside. All some people seem to know is physical healing. They're missing so much. It's not wrong to see that, but there's more than that! All of life is more than throwing away crutches, picking up your bed, not going to the doctor, and throwing away your medicine. I'm not knocking that, but if that's all you see, then great day, you are missing the great spiritual message of the whole New Testament!

I praise God for every real manifestation of the power of God on the earth today. It's a marvelous thing, but His real pleasure is this, "I've come to call the sinners and not the well. Those who are righteous don't need a physician, but only those that are sick." I'm not saying He can't or won't heal. He can and will. I'm saying that those are illustrations of the spiritual. Jesus called the sinners to repentance and it's the whole point here.

In passing, let me say from Matthew 9:12, when Jesus said that the sick need a physician, He was also laying down a great fact. He was saying, "I believe in doctors. The sick need a physician." That was His point, and if He didn't believe in doctors, He couldn't have used the illustration. The strength of what He was trying teach depended on the fact that the sick need to go to the doctor. Some people teach that you don't need to go to the doctor. Jesus believed that the sick need a physician, and that's why He had a powerful illustration. If it wasn't true, He'd have no point; it would be destroyed. He was saying, "What a doctor is to the body, I am to the soul. I am the doctor of the soul.

I'm a physician of the heart, and I'm going to do some things on the outside in order that you might have a physical manifestation of what can't be seen; what I long to do on the inside."

In Matthew 9:13 there are a couple of ways that this can be misinterpreted. When He said, *"I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners,"* some people misinterpret that. Jesus was not saying, "The Pharisees are spiritually okay, and don't need Me. They don't need a soul doctor. They are righteous enough. I need to call the publicans." He certainly isn't saying that because everybody that reads their Bible knows the Pharisees were far sicker than the publicans. When He said, *"The righteous don't need a physician,"* He was talking about the self-righteous; it's in their own minds that they don't need one.

Many people are sick today, and they don't know it. Because they don't know it, they die, not because they are healthy, but because they are ignorant, and don't know that they are sick. The Pharisees were not healthy; far from it. They were in critical condition, and were on the danger list all their lives, but they were not in the market for a doctor. Jesus came for the sick, for those who were diseased; for the weak and weary. Dr. Jesus, and I say that reverently, never turned away anybody that was sick; sick women, men, children, sick Pharisees, or sick publicans. For Him to serve them, they had to come sick. That's the whole point. In Matthew 9:13 Jesus was talking about self-righteousness. When He said, *"I didn't come to call the righteous*," He said that He didn't come to call the self-righteous, but at any moment, if the self-righteous recognize their disease, then He would be their physician. He wasn't saying that they didn't need Him.

The second thing He wasn't saying is that He didn't love them. Some people get the idea that He didn't love the Pharisees, *"I didn't come to call the righteous,"* as if He is really blasting them, the sins of the publicans; the wicked. Jesus did not love the publicans any more or less than He loved the Pharisees. Jesus loved the Pharisees with an everlasting love. He loves sinners; publican sinners, Pharisee sinners, refined sinners and unrefined sinners, religious sinners and non-religious sinners. A physician heals a sick man, and that's who He loves. He came for the sick.

What did Jesus mean by Matthew 9:13 when He said to them, *"Go and learn what this means."* Notice in verse 11 that the Pharisees gave Jesus a title of *"teacher"*. However, don't be deceived. They didn't regard Him as their teacher. They said to the disciples, *"Go ask your teacher."* It wasn't their teacher. They didn't acknowledge Him as their own teacher. The Pharisees weren't teachable. The Pharisees weren't open. They were proud and closed. They didn't really want to know. They thought they had something on Him, "Aha. We found a flaw. He's eating with sinners. Ask Him why He's doing that." It was a dishonest question rooted in doubt.

Some see these words of Jesus *"I didn't come to call the righteous"* as a slap in the face of the Pharisees. I don't see it that way. I see a very tender dealing by the Lord. Jesus knows that they aren't open, and He knows they aren't teachable. So, in His wisdom He doesn't dump a load of dogmatism on them. They aren't open. He doesn't say, "Now, see here, whether you believe it or not, here's what the Bible teaches." Instead, He shifts the responsibility to them, and throws them a suggestive thought. He says, *"Now, go and learn what that means."* He's trying to make them teachable. He's not turning them away in anger, rebuking them or slapping them in the face. He longs that they also would come as sin sick sinners. He says, "Now go and learn what that means; search it out, meditate on it, muse it over in your minds." I can picture them at home saying, "What did He mean by, *'I desire compassion and not sacrifice?'* I don't know. Where is that at? Is it in one of the Minor Prophets? Let's look it up." If they had searched it out, they would have traced back to what it meant—that compassion is what God gives, and sacrifice is what man gives, and God did not desire what man gave, but what God gave. The Pharisees from the word "go" were givers and doers; God had to teach them that they were receivers and takers. He told them that in order to create a hunger.

Let me clinch this with a wonderful verse in Ezekiel 17:24, *"All the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord. I bring down the high tree, and I exalt the low tree. I dry up the green tree, and I make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord, and I have spoken, and I will perform it."* What is Jesus doing here? The Pharisees were high trees, green trees. He said, "I bring down the high tree, and I dry up the green tree." What were the publicans and sinners? They were low trees, dry trees. He said, "I exalt the low trees, and I make the dry tree flourish." He

was bringing down the high tree, and exalting the low tree. He was drying out the green tree, and causing the dry tree to flourish. It's not surprising in my mind that the Spirit of God interrupts the miracles at this point to remind us that Jesus is the physician of our souls. He doesn't want to commit these miracles. They are too precious; especially the ones coming up. He wants to make sure that you are looking in the right direction; "We are about to climax this whole redemptive ministry of Christ and I want you to get it."

QUESTION FROM THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 9:14-17, *"Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.'"*

We become a new wineskin to hold new wine

Then He turns to the third thing, and He says, "I want you to see one more thing before we start the miracles again." Matthew 9:14-17 is the answer of the Lord Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist. In order to get the impact of this question, remember the context. They are at a party, at a feast, and they are having fun—celebrating, eating, drinking, making merry and having a good time. John's disciples think that's a little bit inconsistent with holiness. They ask a question. I can see how it puzzled them. "Hey, how come you're feasting and we're fasting? I'm not sure I enjoy this. We live lives of austerity, and self-denial, and we're very strict. We have a lot of restrictive rules and regulations about everything, because we want to be holy men of God. But look at them. They are having a ball. How can they feast? All religious people fast." Then they point out that John's disciples fast; the Pharisees fast, and they were the big wigs in those days.

Remember in the Jewish mind what a fast was. Fasting and mourning always went together. It was a time of heaviness. When they repented of their sins, they fasted, they wept, they mourned, threw ashes on their heads, and they laid on their faces in the dirt, and that kind of thing. It was all connected with fasting. Behind fasting is the principle of self-denial; the idea of letting go. When we think of fasting today, we think about skipping meals, such as lunch, or supper, or something like that. The idea is to be holy; we don't want anything to interfere with our relationship with God. So, we deliberately let go of this illustration of a meal, something that we feed on, in order that we might lay hold of God. The principle is letting go.

It was a shock to the disciples of John to see the followers of Jesus having such a good time. They asked, "How come?" Jesus' answer is beautiful. Let me paraphrase it. The question was, "How come you're feasting and I'm fasting?" His answer is, "Because the Christian life is a wedding and not a funeral. It's a life of wedded bliss. It's a life of joy and union. It's the happiness of the groom with his glad spouse." Look at Matthew 9:15, *"Jesus said to them, 'The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But a day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they'll fast."* As long as there is union with the groom, they can't be fasting, and they can't mourn. It's not that they shouldn't. It's that they can't. When there is union with the groom you can't fast, and you can't mourn. But then He suggests that if the time ever comes when the groom is absent, when there is a broken union, then He said there is an occasion for mourning, and an occasion for being grieved, and for fasting. As long as the groom is there, and there is union, it should be a partnership; it ought to be marriage, and full of joy.

Let me digress a moment, throw a few punches in, and then come back to the text. My heart burns in sympathetic love for so many of God's children. With many Christians I know, their Christian life is a funeral, and not a wedding. It's a time of heaviness, and a time of carrying burdens, heavy loads and responsibilities. Their Christian life is just an agony made up of all kinds of rules, restrictions and regulations, "Christians do this, and Christians do that, and Christians don't go to these places, and they don't listen to that kind of music, and they don't wear those kind of clothes, and they don't wear that hair style, and don't play those games. Christians don't have those kind of relationships, and

don't say those words, and they don't read those books." Their whole life is made up fasting, of principles, of self-denial, of surrendering, and of sacrifice, and walking a strict straight line, and being separatists, and carrying great burdens. Like the disciples of John the Baptist, they look around, and get all confused when they see someone having a good time in the Lord. And they say, "Wait a minute! How come I'm having such an awful time, and you seem to be enjoying it?" They have the attitude, "My good time comes when I die. After we die, and put on our resurrection bodies, then we'll feast. We'll be at the marriage feast of the Lamb, and then we'll have a good time." However, we don't need to wait until we get your resurrection eyes to see the groom in His glory. We already have the eyes of faith, and we already can have a foretaste of that glory, and enjoy the groom right now in wedded bliss.

The reason why Matthew interrupts the miracles to drive home this truth is because He is trying to illustrate that the Christian life, not just the start of the Christian life, but the Christian life from start to finish is a mighty miracle of God—not only Matthew getting saved, but all through the banquet, sitting down and fellowshipping. Remember in Revelations, *"Open the door and I will come in and sup with you."* That's the idea, that after He saves you by a mighty miracle, then it's time for the banquet. It's time to feast, and to enjoy the Lord. It's a miracle of union and fellowship, and a time of feasting; not fasting. Thousands of Christians are so gloomy, and so sad, and always disturbed, "Jesus was a man of sorrows." That's why you can laugh, because he took your sorrows. He took your grief. "Oh we're just weary pilgrims on a desolate journey and one day…" Great day! Do you know why that problem comes? It's because you don't know God, and you don't have a relationship with the groom.

You probably notice that I changed the illustration that Jesus used. I've been talking about a bride and groom. But if you read it carefully, He's not talking about a bride and groom. He's talking about the groom and the attendants of the grooms, or the friends for the groom, or as the margin says, "The sons of the bridal chamber". I deliberately changed it to bride and groom because I haven't changed the sense. The Christian life is a wedding. That holds true. Here is the difference. In John 3, as a cross reference, you can also see that John the Baptist gave this same answer. In my relationship with Christ I'm a bride. In my

relationship to men I'm the friend of the groom. I'm not the bride. In my Christian service I'm a friend of the groom. What does that mean?

Let's say I'm the best man at Wayne's wedding. My joy as his best friend, his best man, is to see the bride and groom united. That's my whole joy. I have no right to touch the bride. She's not mine. If you are in ministry for the Lord, keep your hands off the bride. Don't try to get a following, start a group, and all of that. The greatest thing you can do in your Christian service is to find the groom, and see the bride and groom come together— to be used in some way to see people united to Jesus Christ. In your own relationship with Christ, you are the bride, but in relationship to others you are the friend causing the bride and groom to come together. That is your whole ministry and your whole life. The Christian life is not a funeral. It's a wedding. It's union with the groom.

In order to drive this home more clearly, the Lord Jesus gives two clincher illustrations. Matthew 9:16, *"the new patched on the old unshrunken cloth."* And verse 17, *"the new wine in old skins."* Both of these illustrate the same truth, and can be stated in these words; you cannot mix things which essentially differ. I state that deliberately in a broad way so that there are an unlimited number of applications to it. The mixture He had in mind here, to not mix things that are essentially different, namely in this context, are law and grace; you can't mix the old with the new. It will not take. You can't mix what man does with what God does. His point is this, that the whole Christian life is a miracle that puts you at a feasting table, and brings you into an intimate union, and unclouded fellowship with the groom. It's a miracle life, and it's not a reformation. It's not patch work. Patch work will never work. You can never mix things which are essentially different.

He's not saying, "Now that you are a Christian you are going to have to quit this, and patch up this, and from now on you are going to have to do such and such." The old can't hold the new; whether it's a garment or a wineskin. If you put the new in the old, you destroy the old, and lose the new. That's what He said. If you try to mix the grace of God with the work of men, you are going to have a messed up life because it can't hold it. The new is always the ruin of the old. There is never an exception to that. There cannot be mixture. That's the truth. He says that brings the fast into a feast.

If God just expected me to improve, I'd be in an awful mess. If God said, "Alright, you've been saved for ten years, let's get moving on that willpower. You ought to be quitting sin a lot more than you are doing now. Great day! I've been watching you and you aren't very loving, and you aren't very giving, and you are still selfish like you used to be. And what about that patience? Man, you still have a short fuse. What's wrong with you? I've patched you up ten times." He's not saying that. For years I fasted because that's what I thought. I thought God saved me, and expected me to be a good Christian. I tried my head off to be a good Christian. For seven years I mixed law and grace; I took the patch, tried to put it on, until 1965 when the wineskin burst. I'll tell you, I was a wreck of humanity when that happened. I learned one thing out of it. I learned that things that are essentially different can never mix. I praise God for the day the wineskin burst because I began to be introduced to the banquet, and to an intimate relationship with the Bridegroom Lover of my soul. He gave me a new heart. He didn't patch up the old.

There is no "OAIS" (the Old Adam Improvement Society). The old Adam can't be improved. It has to be crucified. It has to be dead. The thrill is this, that the whole thing is a miracle. He not only gives you something new, but He makes something new out of you to hold the change that He's putting in. He's made you new. You are changed from the inside, and you become a new wineskin to hold the new wine; a whole new heart, a whole new spirit, a whole new direction—not a bunch of rules and regulations, but union with the groom and fellowship with God; a wedding and not a funeral. And it doesn't depend on you or me anymore. If it depended on me, I might lip-sync in my daily quiet times in my prayers, and I might work for Him. Those were days of grief and bondage. I wouldn't have admitted it at the time. I can look back now, and I see the awful bondage. But then the bridegroom came into view. The whole thing changed, and His presence drove away the gloom.

Matthew says, "I want you to see the miracle life. I want to show you six pictures of miracles. But I have an idea that you are just looking to them. Let's stop a minute. Do you know that I'm talking about the miracle of salvation, and about the position of the soul? Do you know that I'm talking about the kind of life that is a miracle that puts you into feasting instead of fasting; union with the groom? See, I'm talking

about new wine in new bodies; things that are new, and not just painted or repaired or patched up." This is the theme of the whole Bible. Samson had a new cord, and David had a new cart for the ark, and Elijah had a new cruse, and there were new tongues at Pentecost, and Joseph had a new tomb. We read in the New Testament about a new covenant, and about being new creatures in Christ. We read about the new man, and the new heart, and the new spirit, and about the new birth, and the new nature, and the new day, and the new song, and the new commandment, and the new name, and the new heavens, and the new earth, and the New Jerusalem, and new wine in new skins. The miracle of salvation is that Christ is the physician of the soul. The whole Christian life is a miracle, bringing you into a relationship with God.

12

A MIRACLE WITHIN A MIRACLE:

THE HEALING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

THE HEALING OF THE WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE

Matthew 9:18, *"While He was saying these things to them, behold, came a synagogue official, and bowed down before Him saying, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.' And Jesus rose, and began to follow him, and so did His disciples. And, behold, a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch His garment I shall be well.' But Jesus, turning and seeing her said, 'Daughter, take courage, your faith has made you well.' And at once the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the official's house, and saw the flute players and the crowd in noisy disorder, He began to say, 'Depart, for the girl is not dead but is asleep.' And they were laughing at Him. And when the crowd had been put out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And this news went out in all that land."*

Outline

As we come to the end of these redemptive miracles, he is bringing the whole spiritual ministry of Christ to a consummation. Let me just mention the four for you, and then we'll pick up the first two of those. The seventh miracle is the healing of Jairus' daughter, and raising her from the dead; chapter 9:18&19 and chapter 9:23-26. And then the eighth redemptive miracles is the woman with the issue of blood in chapter 9:20-22. This miracle is split up, and in the middle of that miracle you have this miracle. Then redemptive miracle #9 is the healing of the blind man, Matthew 9:27-31. Then the climactic miracle of all is Matthew 9:32-34, the demon possessed dumb man. I think if you or I were writing these miracles we wouldn't end with a dumb man. We'd probably end with the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead and say, "That's how it all ends. Boy, that's a climax; bringing someone back from the dead!" However, that's not near the climax as the healing the dumb man. I'll show you why when we get to that.

Let me suggest a simple outline of the way I'd like to look at this. First of all, since God, in a unique way by sticking redemptive miracle #8 in the middle of redemptive miracle number 7, has brought those two miracles together, I'd like to study them together. Why are they like that? Why are they together? Then I'd like to look at redemptive miracle #7 in order to get the revelation of Christ, and then I'll take redemptive miracle #8 in order to get the revelation of the Lord Jesus.

Redemptive miracles #7 & 8 together

Let's look at redemptive miracles 7 & 8 together. These miracles are recorded three times in your New Testament, and every time they are recorded like this—with the seventh miracle broken up, and the eighth one right in the middle. It's found here in Matthew 9, and also found in Mark 5:22-43 and in Luke 8:41-56. Each time, the Holy Spirit split redemptive miracle #7, and sandwiched in between redemptive miracle #8. There's an interruption. And then in verse 23 the miracle is resumed again. This is the only miracle where He does this; doing a miracle within a miracle.

I believe that the arrangement of these miracles is very instructive. We learn a lot about the Lord because of this strange uniting of miracles.

Before I give what I consider to be the revelation of the Lord, let me try to bring you along with me as we try to enter into the situation. We learn from another record that this synagogue official, as he is called in verse 18, is named Jairus. He had only one child, she was twelve years old, and was ready to die. Those of us who have children can probably enter into that.

In Matthew 9:14, *"My daughter just died."* But if you read the other records you'll find out that she was as good as dead, but there was still a spark of life left in her. One record says, *"She was at the point of death."* When Jairus left home his twelve year old daughter was gasping her last breath. He didn't know for sure when he got there whether she would be living or dead, so he just poured out of his heart, *"My daughter is dead,"* even though it was if she was dead, but she was still alive.

I wonder if we can feel for this father, and enter into his life. Remember that we know the record. We slap onto it everything we've read. He didn't have a New Testament. It wasn't written yet. He only had the Old Testament. We know Jesus can raise the dead, but up until this point He had never done that. Jairus didn't know if He could raise the dead, or would. There was no record of that. Lazarus hadn't been raised up yet. The widow's son hadn't been raised up yet. Obviously, those who came to life at the crucifixion hadn't been raised up yet. This was a first. Jesus had given the blind sight, and had given the lame legs, and He had given the deaf ears, and He had shown His sovereignty over the demons of hell, and He had shown Himself strong and King over nature, but He never yet illustrated His power over the realm of death. So, Jairus as he approached Him didn't have the scriptures that we have at our disposal. He knew one thing; that he had a twelve year old daughter in critical condition and close to death, and it was very possible that by the time he reached Jesus, she would be dead.

Try to enter into the agony of this poor father. When he left his daughter, there were only a few sands left in her hour glass. Her time was running out, and she was almost dead. It's hard to try to put yourself in her shoes. If it was me and my child, I don't think I would have done what he did. I think I would have stayed until the end by her side. I would have held her hand, brushed her brow, talked and maybe prayed with her, or sung with her, or something. I don't think I would

have left, especially if I were an official like him, and had many servants all around. I probably would have sent somebody else to summon the doctor or nurse.

I believe Jairus was full of faith. His problem was desperate, and I think that's why he came himself, and left his daughter's side. I think he was so firmly persuaded that Jesus could help, that he didn't trust anyone else with the message. He wanted to make sure that message was delivered. Maybe I'm reading that in but try to enter in. The story is written with great urgency. Everything about it seems to say "hurry up" and "quickly". In a very literal way, time was running out in this situation. The idea of delay when your daughter is ready to die, and of being slow or hesitating, is inconsistent with the nature of his problem. Jairus' case was not like the leper or the paralytic. Even though they had a lot of problems, they had them for years. In that case, what's a couple of days? Even if Jesus didn't show up on Monday, it would be alright if He showed up on Wednesday. The demoniac lived a long time on the hillside among the tombs, and in his case it's the same thing. Sure, he was in bad shape, but what's another couple of hours for him? Even the paralytic who was let down from the tiles in the roof, he could have been healed on Monday, or Wednesday, or Friday. But Jairus' case was desperate, and there was no tomorrow for him. You've got to do this now or never. She's dying, and there's no delay here. This is an emergency and it's a now situation.

I looked up the word "emergency" from the uninspired Webster's Dictionary and it said, "A sudden need for immediate action". The second definition was, "action without delay." The third was, "a crisis emphasizing a life and death nature of a situation." This was an emergency. Try to enter into the sore trial in this father's heart. Look at verse 19, *"And Jesus rose and began to follow him."* If I were desperate, and the situation were an emergency, when Jesus healed the leper, at least He said to the leper, *"I'm willing. Be thou clean."* When the Centurion came to Jesus for his paralyzed slave, at least Jesus said, *"I will come and heal him."* When they lowered the paralytic down through the roof through the tile, at least Jesus said, *"Take courage, my son, your sins are forgiven*." And even when they were on the stormy sea, Jesus spoke; even though He rebuked them, He spoke. When they said*, "Lord, save us; we're perishing,"* he said, *"Why are you timid, you men of little faith?"* But at least He said something. But when

Jairus comes with a desperate need in an emergency situation, life and death, Jesus doesn't say a word.

When you read Matthew's record He doesn't say a word. In Mark's record He doesn't say a word. When you read Luke's record, He doesn't say a word. He didn't say yes, or no, or maybe, or wait, or go away. He said nothing. That's great! You've got an emergency situation, you run in desperation to the Lord Jesus, and He doesn't say a word. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that He didn't encourage him. He did. In verse 19 it says, *"He rose and followed him."* That's encouragement. If I went to a doctor's office, and in the presence of all those who were waiting in his waiting room I announced an emergency situation, and the doctor didn't say anything but began to follow me, that would be a pretty good encouragement. But be honest, look at verse 20, *"And, behold, a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him, and touched the fringe of His cloak."* You know the rest of the story.

Tell me, parent, and those of you who enter into this as Jairus, the father of a dying daughter, would that bother you if Jesus were on His way to your emergency, and stopped for somebody else? Matthew makes it a whole lot quicker than it really was, because if you read the other accounts, Mark and Luke, you see the tremendous detail. This woman reaches out and touches Jesus. He stops and looks around, and then He begins querying the audience, *"Now, who touched Me?"* And then the disciples come and say, *"Don't be silly. Everybody is brushing against you."* Then He explains the difference, and finally this woman comes in humiliation and confesses. That's delay and, on the level of earth, wasting an awful lot of time. It's not enough that this woman reaches out, but then the Lord Jesus seemingly delays on purpose, and strikes up a very boring conversation (from the standpoint of Jairus), *"Who touched Me?"*

What a sore trial for an agonizing father. I think I would at least in my heart say, "Hey, lady, I don't mean to be cruel, and I don't mean to cut down your problem, but can't you wait just a little while? You've had your problem as long as I've had my girl, twelve years, and she's ready to die. Can't you wait another hour or another day? It's not going to make any difference to you, but it's going to make a whole lot of difference to me." I would feel that way. I might not say it, but I might

even be angry in my heart, and I would feel awfully bad that this woman was interrupting.

God has no emergencies

If I understand human nature, I have an idea that the Lord was intentionally wringing Jairus' heart that day, bringing him into a furnace, and doing a work in his life that he would never forget. I believe this is why the Holy Spirit puts this miracle in the middle of the other one; to call attention to the delay and hesitation. By meditating on this delay there are some wonderful truths of the Lord, and wonderful spiritual principles of life. There are many ways to state it. Let me word it this way and say, "No matter how great the emergency seems to you, God is never in a hurry." Have you found that to be so? No matter how great the emergency seems to you, God is never impatient, and God never strives. Or to word it another way, there is no such thing as an emergency with God. When the Lord tarries, it's for a reason. When He learned that Lazarus was sick, and drawing near to death, He tarried there, also. He tarried, but He didn't lose control. He's never surprised by what we call emergencies.

Hold that a moment. Mark 5:36 has these words, *"As soon as Jesus heard the words that were spoken,"* that is, *"My daughter is dead," "He said…"* See, God has a clock of His own. He has a schedule but He's determined to run it on His own clock. God's clock is perfect and everything is on time, nothing is delayed, nothing is hindered and nothing is hastened. Seeing Jesus stop on the street to talk to this woman on the way to an emergency may have looked like on the outside that He didn't care too much. On the other hand, seeing Him move so quickly at the end of this miracle, to encourage Jairus' faith, as soon as He heard it, He spoke, and came like lightening to the rescue.

Let me give four principles that I get from the blending of these two miracles. I've already stated this—there is no such thing as an emergency with God. Please notice that I said "with God". I'm not saying that there is no such thing as an emergency. Down here it may be an emergency. I'm not suggesting that if your house catches on fire, that you read the Daily News before you dial the fire department, or if a loved one is suddenly taken ill, that you don't call the rescue. No, you call immediately. What I'm saying is this; those heart attacks,

those strokes, those accidents and those financial burdens don't come as a surprise at all to God. They come suddenly upon us. We throw our hands up in despair and scream, "Oh, no, look what's happening. Lord, did You see that?" God says, "Yes I see that; from the foundation of the earth I've seen that." It's not an emergency to Him and, therefore, we may rest in Him.

In this connection, because God never hurries and never rushes, may I encourage you to be real careful about those people who try to make you rush in your Christian life, and try to make you rush into the will of God. A lot of people come in with these great programs and say, "We've got to move now. This is the hour, and it's a great opportunity, and the door is closing fast. Let's move now. If you call before nine, God still has the time to save money, so we've got to move now. If you don't buy this house now, and you don't buy this camp now, and you don't buy this building now, then that opportunity of Christian service will be gone. Work now and move fast." Never rush into God's will. Do you know that verse in Psalm 84:11, *"No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."* If you hold back, you are safe. When someone wants to rush, hold back. He's not going to withhold it from you. No good thing will He withhold. Many who listen by tape are single. May I suggest that you not rush into marriage! No good thing will He withhold for those who walk uprightly. The servants of the Lord are never pressed over delays. If you missed the building, you didn't need it.

Sometimes it gets a little frustrating because God never hurries dealing with our loved ones. Have you noticed that? He never hurries. You look at it and say, "Lord, this is an emergency. This guy is in bad shape. This girl is in bad shape. This woman is in bad shape. Did you see my neighbor? You've got to move now, Lord. It's an emergency." He just seems all the time to take his sweet little time about moving. See, He's dealing with eternal souls, and if it takes a little time, it doesn't bother Him at all. He's not under the law of time. Our hearts cry out with the Psalmist which makes it scriptural, *"Make haste, oh God, to deliver. Make haste to help me, oh God."* "Hurry Up!" But God is not in a hurry. He puts a little seed here, and then He waits for the whole harvest to come. Long years pass, and then He puts another seed in, and then another long waiting period. Meanwhile we're getting frustrated, and we're praying and crying and longing and living

consistently, I trust. See, what looks like a desperation and an emergency to us, God knows the hard case, and it's not an emergency, not with Him. He is always calm, He's never nervous, He never gets anxious, and He never frets.

The invitation to enter His rest is not a rest that He gives you. It's the rest He has. You can be as carefree about all of your emergencies as He is. He is in control, and you can enter His rest, and have that same Spirit. He patiently, persistently and definitely deals in the lives of our loved ones, and He's in the process of bringing them low, and working in their lives the very best methods to bring them to the place where they'll be open to Him. May I suggest that you relax in God's dealings with your loved ones? He's not in a hurry. Don't get too jealous or angry at those He stops to minister to on the way to your emergency. Jesus was on the way to Jairus' emergency, and He stopped to help others. The temptation is to look at that and say, "He never does anything for me. He helps her, and helps him, and saves this one, and that one, and saves his husband and their wife, and that kid, and never does anything for my family." He's probably on the way to your house as He stops to help all those people. God is not in a hurry.

Relax concerning God's own slow dealing in your own life. He's not in a hurry in your own life, either. Don't view your growth in Christ as an emergency. You look at your own life sometimes and say, "Will you do something, God? It seems so slow, and nothing is happening. I'm the same toad I was five years ago. Change me, and do something. I don't think anything is happening." He's doing an eternal work in your life, and He's not in a rush. Growth is imperceptible, and it's slow, and it's tedious, if it's of God. Don't worry about that. The seed grows secretly. Growth is His business.

One time a Christian asked another, "How long will it take me to grow in the Lord?" And He answered, "That depends if you want to be a squash or an oak. Well, if you want to be a squash, it might be a little faster but if you want to be a strong tree it's going to take time. God is conforming us to His Son, and He's in no hurry. Because He's not under the law of time, what are years to Him? You've got to plod through day by day, but not Him. If it takes twenty years for Him to teach you one thing, it's no big deal. It took eighty years to show Moses one thing. He didn't learn it right the first time, so he went through the

wilderness for forty years, and finally he learned it. That's not wasted. That's good time. You are going along for forty years, and you finally get there. That's a long time for us, but not for God. What is fifteen, thirty, forty years? Don't be impatient with God. He's not in a hurry. There are no emergencies with Him. That's the first principle.

We don't need a definite word from God

The second principle that I learned from blending these two miracles is this, that I don't need a definite word from God. Jairus had no word from God. Verse 19, *"He rose and began to follow Him."* Some people get all shook up if they don't have God's blueprint all spelled out for them. I don't need to know what God is doing. It's enough that God knows what God is doing. You don't need to know what God is doing. It's enough to know that He knows. Your understanding of what God is doing doesn't make it more right.

We have friends in Maryland who some years ago lost a little baby. His name was Scotty. God didn't give a reason to the parents for the loss of that baby. He didn't say a word, didn't explain a thing, and didn't give any excuses. He said nothing for He Himself drew near, like He did for Jairus. They entered into a realm they had never known before; into a silent walk with God, a wonderful union with the Lord. They just silently walked together, and had quiet fellowship. It's been many years since Scotty went to be with the Lord, and the Lord still hasn't said much about it. We can look back and see some wonderful things that sprung out of it.

I think about Bible Study Ministries. I don't often mention it when I'm teaching. I think of some of the wonderful foundation stones God has used to build this ministry. To my mind one of the most precious stones in the foundation is the death of Scotty Schein. The foundation of our ministry is the death of a little baby. Hundreds of people have turned to the Lord because that baby died. I don't know if that's the whole reason. God is silent, but He knows all the reasons. And for Jairus, He didn't say a word. He just walked with him. He doesn't have to explain anything. When God allows something in your life, don't demand an explanation. Just walk with the Lord as Jairus did. If you know God, you don't have to know why. He knows, and that's enough. God doesn't have to tell you, or me, or anybody what He's doing. He knows

what is going on, and it's always good. We can rely upon that in those times when He doesn't say anything. How Jairus' heart must have thrilled as the Lord Jesus walked with him on the way to his emergency.

We can trust His perfect timing

The third principle overlaps what we've already said, but it's good to emphasize again. Not only is there no such thing as an emergency with God, and not only do I need no word from heaven, and all I need is His presence, but also I can trust His perfect timing in my life. He runs His train on His schedule. We often look at the watch on our own wrist in order to see when God is going to move. They might have looked at their clock as they did in verse 35 of Mark, *"Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher anymore."* That's the same as to say, "It's too late now." What I get out of this is that wonderful Bible truth that the longer God delays, and the more obstacles He overcomes, the greater will be His miracle when He finally arrives. When God's clock strikes, it always hits two times. The first gong is maximum glory for Him, and the second gong is maximum benefit for us; right on the button and perfect timing. That's why He said, *"My hour has not yet come."* What was the hour? Then it says, *"When the hour came that He should be glorified."* That's the hour, the hour that He gets the glory, and we get the benefit. All of His delays in our lives are merciful delays, and God will not abort the blessing by coming early. He knows the blessing to bring into our lives, and He will not miscarry because He loves us too much. He's on time for what He knows He will do, and He's not on time for what we think He should do. He's God and always will be.

If we need a word, He will give it

There's another principle I get from the story, but it's not from Matthew's account. It's from Mark's account. When Jesus arrived with Jairus in Mark 5:35, *"The news came your daughter has died. Why trouble the Master anymore?"* Well, at this point you can expect Jairus' heart must have sunk like lead to his feet. I don't know what kind of expectation rose in his breast when Jesus got up to walk to his home, and what frustrations came when Jesus delayed along the way, but I have an idea that his heart sunk when the news came, "She's dead. It's too late. Send Him away." At this point Jesus was swifter than the

lightening in the sky. No more delays. In Mark 5:36 in the NASB it says, *"And Jesus overheard what was spoken, and said…"* or the KJV says, As soon as Jesus heard those words, *"She's dead,"* He turns to Jairus and he speaks for the first time. He hadn't spoken before. And now Jairus' heart is about to die, and Jesus speaks. He gives a word and here is what He said, *"Do not be afraid any longer. Only believe."* This time He wasn't delaying.

The principle can be stated in these words; God knows my needs, and when I need a word, He'll give it. See, before, Jairus didn't need a word. It was enough to walk with the Lord in an unbroken union. But as soon as he came to the place where he would have died, and his faith would have failed, God spoke. He gives the word when we need it, and He speaks comfort and peace, and invites us back to faith—only believe. Brothers and sisters in Christ, here is a strange paradox in the Christian life. The more you go on in the Lord, the less He will speak, because He wants us to live by faith, and to walk in silent union with Him, and just abide in His presence. There is no deeper spirituality than a silent walk with God, knowing that He is in control. But you know your heart and mine, and we are weak and frail, and if there are two ways to do it, the right way and the wrong way, you know which way we are going to choose. If we fail and get weak, and if we need a word, He'll give it. He deals with us where we are.

Putting out a fleece

In this connection let me say a word from the book of Judges, and the expression is "putting out a fleece". It comes from the story of Gideon, the judge, and he was uncertain of God's will, and he wanted to make sure. So, he said, "I'm going to put out a fleece." He took the wool of a sheep, and he put it out in the yard, and said to the Lord, *"This is a sign of how I'll know Your will. If that fleece is covered with dew in the morning, soaking wet, and the ground all around it is dry, then I'll know that's your will."* Then the next morning he went out and the wool was soaking wet, and the ground was as dry as a bone. He said, "I wonder if that was a coincidence." So, he said, *"Lord, I want to make sure this is Your will. So, we'll do it again tonight, but this time I want the ground wet and I want the fleece as dry as a bone."* The next morning the ground was soaking wet, and the fleece was as dry as

a bone and Gideon walked away worried. He still didn't trust in the Lord, notwithstanding the fleece, notwithstanding the sign. Then later on God gave him a dream of a rolling cupcake, and it assured his heart. Isn't that amazing!

Here's the point. Many have taken that idea about putting out a fleece and said, "I want to be spiritual, and I want to know God's will. I'm going to put out a fleece. That is, it's a test. That is, I want to know God's will. So, if this certain school accepts me, then I'll know that it's God's will." Or they say, "If such and such money comes in by such and such a date, then I'll know that it's God's will." Or they'll say, "If God sells my house, then I'll know that it's His will." Or, "If God provides the car, then I'll know it's His will." Does God honor the fleece? The answer is, "Yes." Those listening by tape are wondering why Pat is laughing, I shook my head no, and said, "Yes." You see, here is the truth of the Bible. God will honor the fleece if you need it. He'll speak a word if you need it. He'll give a sign, if you need it. I encourage you, don't dictate your signs to God. He knows what sign you need. Gideon's sign didn't work. He needed a different sign, so God gave him a different sign. If you need a word from God, and you need an experience from God, and if you need a gift from God, a feeling, He'll give it. It's just His gracious way.

Many put out a fleece and nothing happens. They say, "I've been trusting in the Lord, and if He does this, this and this, then I'll know. And He doesn't do anything for me. He does it for others, but He doesn't do it for me. Then I go away disappointed, feeling like He's not close to me. He does it for others. How come He never talks to me, and how come He never makes it rain for me? How come He never does miracles for me?" Now watch. The opposite is true. It doesn't show you're weak when He doesn't do it for you. It shows you are strong. If you were weak, He would do it, but because you don't need it, He doesn't give it to you because He's trying to teach you to walk by faith, and he's trying to teach you to walk silently with Him, and to just leave it up to Him. God is in control, and He knows what He's going to do. Signs are for the weak and the unbelieving; they aren't for the child of faith. When we get weak and unbelieving, then you better believe God will rescue us as He rescued Jairus; as soon as he was ready to fall on his face, the Lord gave a word, and raised him up again. It's the marvelous grace of the Lord.

It's better, of course, to walk in silence and never have a subjective proof. If the Lord never gave you a visible answer to prayer, and never showed you one person that was blessed through your life, and never again gave you the sense of His presence, and He never again opened this book, and spoke to your heart, would you still love Him, and still serve Him? Would you still know that you are in close fellowship and union with Him? Or do you have to have all of those signs? He's calling you to an objective faith. He's with me whether I feel Him or not; it's the fact of His presence. I don't need the sense of His presence. If I never see an answer to prayer, it doesn't change a thing. He's answering my prayers. If I never see one person affected by my ministry, so what. He's using me mightily. I know that; by faith. He's using you, and you don't need to see it. He only shows those who are weak. He would rather walk with you in silence, and have you walk in faith. That's what He was teaching Jairus. But if you need it, He's gracious. As soon as you need it, He'll speak. He's patient, and He's not in a hurry. If it takes twenty years, and you need to have all these loose spurs under your spiritual saddle He didn't clear, He's a great God. He'll give you feelings, and He'll give you emotions, and He'll make you cry, and He'll give you gifts, and He'll show you that you can be mightily used, and do miracles, if you want to be a baby. If you would rather just walk in silence with Him, that would give more pleasure to His heart. That's what He's trying to get every Christian to do, to be conformed to the image of Christ.

13

THE HEALING OF THE WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE II

HEALING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER II

HEALING OF WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE II

Matthew 9:20-22, *"And behold a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak, and she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch His garment I shall get well,' but Jesus turning and seeing her said, 'Daughter, take courage, your faith has made you well,' and at once the woman was made well."*

Faith: touch the Lord, and not just the garment

I'm going to first say a word about redemptive miracle #8 and then I'm going to come down to redemptive miracle #7. There is a wonderful principle in connection with verse 22, the words of the Lord Jesus, *"Your faith has made you well."* Because of the wording of that statement, some people have looked at faith as if it had a virtue all of its own; *"Your faith has made you well."* They understand faith to be a medium of exchange with God; heaven's money. It's what we use when we are purchasing something from God. That's the coin of heaven. They envision faith as having purchasing power with the Lord. "If I have enough faith, I'm rich in faith, and if I'm rich in faith I can

buy many things from God. I can buy wealth, I can buy health, I can buy vocation, and I can even buy a life partner."

Often faith is used that way and, therefore, you can tell it in people's prayers, and in their conversation. They talk about having a little faith, or much faith, or strong faith, or weak faith, or they pray, "If only I had more faith." What they're thinking is, "This is heaven's money, and I don't have enough, and I'd sure like to, so that I could have a spiritual life. I don't like to be always poverty stricken, especially in spiritual things." Because of this popular conception, many thousands of Christians are having faith in their faith. They are looking to faith as the object of faith, and anytime faith looks to itself as the object of faith, in that moment it ceases to be faith. It's no longer faith. Then they get discouraged because they feel like they are on the short end of the stick as far as spiritual things are concerned. You see it all the time. People stand up who claim (we don't know their hearts) they have faith, and they are going to do daring things for God in the name of faith. They talk about starting this work and that, and then sending God the bills, and the Lord is going to provide all of their needs. In some cases they often quit jobs and that kind of thing. They say, "God is going to provide. The Lord is going to do it because I have faith." They think if they believe hard enough, and long enough, if they commit themselves beyond the point of no return, then certainly they've obligated God to act, or they are dead. If God doesn't come through, they'll sink for sure. So, they go way out on thin ice, and in many cases presumptuously, in the name of faith, trusting God to rescue.

Of course, God is so patient, He often does. They think they can control God by faith, "I have faith and God has to do this. I'm trusting and He has no choice. Overpower the Lord with your faith. Faith moves the arm that moves the world," and that kind of talk. Faith is so basic to the Christian life that it's a shame not to have a clear view of what faith is. It's everything; we walk by faith. You better have a clear grasp on it because it's cardinal to everything else. It's foundational. On faith the whole superstructure of your Christian life is built, and if that's not strong, you are going to totter all over the place, if not fall down. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Your faith has made you whole?" Did He mean that you have enough faith, heaven's money, to purchase something from Me, namely healing? You give Me your faith, and I'll give you your healing." Is that what He was saying? In the next

redemptive miracle you have the same sort of statement, verse 29, *"Be it done unto you according to your faith."* It looks like the same thing.

In order to get the simple answer to this, it helps to see the background. Matthew leaves a lot of that out because he's getting right to the point that Jesus is King over disease, and so He leaps over some of these details. By seeing the background and some of the details we have the answer to the question, "What is faith? What was He complementing and commending when He said, Matthew 9:29, *'Your faith has made you whole. According to your faith, be it done unto you.'"?* What did she do? Let me give a couple of suggestions. First of all, she exhausted all human resources. I love the way Mark words it, Mark 5:25&26, *"And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hand of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse."* I think that's a graphic way to say that here is a woman that had tried everything on the earth, exhausted all her resources, got rid of all of her wealth, spent all that she had, and not only wasn't helped, but actually her case got worse.

Earth had no answer to her problem. Earth could not lift a finger to help her. The fact is, earth aggravated the situation terribly. She exhausted her resources, and she came empty and penniless, and when she reached out to Christ, whatever else you see, you've got to see helplessness and hopelessness. She reached out in desperation. She didn't have the attitude that she was on a shopping spree with heaven. The opposite was true. She was in a desperate situation. She didn't say, "I have so much faith, I think I'll try something daring with the Lord, and I'll just trust Him to heal me." That wasn't her attitude. She reached out in hopelessness. Let me say it as a figure of speech, and then try to illustrate what I mean. Not only did she find no help from earth, but she reached through earth to God.

In Matthew 9:21 we see what was going through her mind. She was saying to herself, *"If I only touch His garment, I shall be well.'"* I don't know the physical condition this woman was in. I know she was sick, and she had been sick for a dozen years. I don't know if you've ever tried to picture this scene in your mind. To put the records together, it was a tremendous crowd that day. They were pushing and shoving. That's why the disciples were so surprised when Jesus stopped, and

queried the multitude, and they said, *"You see the multitude pressing in on You and You say, 'Who touched You?'* There was a lot of people.

I did a word study on what she touched. The KJV says "hem". This says "fringe". When she came up and touched the fringe of His garment, in order to do that, there is a good chance that she was crawling on her hands and knees. The fringe of the garment was down by His feet, the bottom of His robe. I picture this crowd pushing and shoving. This woman had to be on her hands and knees crawling and reaching out in desperation. What is faith? Just take a good mental picture of this woman. She had tried everything on the level of earth, and it only got worse. Nothing down here could help, and she is on her hands and knees crawling to the Savior, reaching out to touch Him. Whatever faith was, it made Jesus say, *"Thy faith has made thee whole,"* I'll tell you, it wasn't that public brass that often stands up and says, "We're trusting God for this building, and this land, and all these workers."

In order to get the thrill of faith, I want you to see the wonderful blending. That's why I introduced it as I did. I want you to see between the physical and the spiritual; the material and the real. In Matthew 9:21 she said, *"If only I could touch His garment."* You know what a garment is. It's a physical thing; a robe, a cloth. It's material, literally. She touched a material thing, but when Jesus turned around He said, *"Who touched Me?"* not, "Who touched My robe?" Matthew doesn't record it. It's in Mark. And the disciples said, *"How can you say, 'Who touched Me?'"* That's what I mean when I say that she reached through the earth to Him. She touched more than His garment. She touched the Lord. There are many that day who touched His garment. They were bumping into Him. That's what caused the disciples to say, "What do you mean who touched you? Everybody is touching you." He said, "No, not everybody is touching Me. There's only one that is touching Me, and really touching Me, with the hand of faith." They might have bumped into the physical Jesus, but they didn't touch Him. Even if they fell on Him so hard that their body knocked His body on the ground, they wouldn't have touched Him. That isn't touching Jesus. *"Who touched Me?"* See, she reached through. I think that is the essence of real faith. It's reaching through the garment to the Lord. It's touching Him.

Mark 5:30, *"And immediately Jesus perceived in Himself that virtue went out of Him."* NAS says that *"power went out of Him"*. Why does God put that in there? I think He anticipated that people would think that there is virtue in faith. It doesn't say that virtue came out of her faith. Virtue came out of the Lord. There is no power in faith. There is only power in the Lord. There is no power in prayer. There is only power in the God you pray to, and if you can reach through unto Him, you've got power. Faith is just reaching out in desperation and touching Jesus. That's all faith is. It's going after Him. It's an attitude and a direction of your heart. It's an attitude that earth can't help, and that earth can only hurt, and, "I'm going to trust the Lord."

Let me ask this question, and then I'll give some applications to it. What if Jesus were not in the garment that day, and she touched just the garment, "If I only touch His garment, I'll be whole." If the garment were folded up on a chair, and she went over and touched the garment with Christ absent, would she have received healing? The answer is no, she wouldn't. It wasn't the garment that gave her the healing. It was Christ in the garment. To put it another way, it wasn't the material that helped her. It was Christ in the material. There's nothing wrong with material garments as long as Christ is in them. But if He's not in them, they become worthless pieces of cloth. It's a principle of nature. In 1 Corinthians 15:46 the Apostle Paul took that as a principle of nature and said, *"That which is first is not spiritual, but natural; afterward is that which is spiritual."* It starts with the natural, and moves toward the spiritual. Everywhere it's that way. Lips have to come before words, before speech. You have to have a candle before you can have the flame. You have to have the canvas before you can have the painting. You have to have the brain before you can have the thought. The physical comes first, and then the spiritual.

Let me apply it. God has given us many garments. We come here, as an example, to study the word of God. Bible study is a wonderful thing if Christ is in it. I'll tell you, if Christ is not in it, it is not a wonderful thing. It's empty, it's dry, and the fact is that it will make you proud. Knowledge puffs up. If you just study the Bible, you think you know everything. It's a garment. If Christ is in it it's a beautiful thing. Prayer is a wonderful thing, if Christ is in it. But there are prayer meetings where Christ is absent; people recite their grocery list to the Lord, and the Lord is not in it. It's just a garment. Praise God for the garments

that He's given us, but we better touch more than the garment. We better, like that woman, with the simple step of faith, reach through, and we better touch the Lord.

I love Christian fellowship. It's a wonderful thing if Christ is in it, but if He's not in it, it's not a wonderful thing. It's an occasion for more gossip and back biting. It's only a garment, but if Christ is in it, it becomes a wonderful blessing of God. You can make your own list. The ordinances and sacraments are a wonderful thing if Christ is in them. But if He's not in them, they are a curse and not a blessing. It's all formal and ritualistic, and it's all cold and dead, and it's all legal; there is no life. Faith is reaching out in helplessness through material things, and touching the Lord, touching Christ Himself.

We have reason to thank the Lord for the garments He has given us. Physical creation is a garment. You can see the Lord out there; the sun, the moon, the stars, the flowers, the mountains, the animals, the insects, the fish and fowl. Some people don't see the Lord in that. Then it's just a garment. They worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. They never see through to the invisible God, and that becomes their great condemnation. So, the appeal of this story, redemptive miracle #8, is to touch the Lord and not just the garment, and to reach through and touch God Himself. Thank God for the garments; thank Him for health, for good friends, for fellowship. Thank Him for jobs and homes and shelter. Thank God if the Lord is in it.

THE HEALING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER II

Matthew 9:23-25, *"And when Jesus came into the official's house and saw the flute players and the crowd and noisy disorder, He began to say, 'Depart, for the girl is not dead but is asleep.' And they were laughing at Him. But when the crowd had been put out, He entered in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. This news went out into all of that land."*

Jesus is King over death and is Lord of life

What is meant by "sleep"?

In this miracle the Lord Jesus presents Himself as the Lord of life. Matthew passes over the details. He gives you just the marvel of it; that Jesus is King over death and Lord of life. Some people try to show from verse 24 the false doctrine of soul sleep, which teaches that when a Christian dies, he's unconscious until the resurrection. He sleeps, and his soul doesn't know what is going on. In other words, if your Christian loved one were to die today, they would be unconscious until the Lord returned, until the resurrection. They would be out of it, and would be asleep. They say that it doesn't matter anyway, because the unconscious soul doesn't know time. Ten thousand years would seem as ten minutes. It wouldn't really matter. Some take that false doctrine one false step further, and say, "For the ungodly, they never wake up. That is their punishment." It's called annihilation of the soul. It comes from soul sleep, and the wicked just cease to be. 7th Day Adventists have two doctrines; annihilation of the wicked and soul sleep. That illustrates that error begets error.

Why does the Bible use the figure of speech "sleep"? He does it over and over again. In John 11:11-14 with Lazarus, after he was a corpse for four days, Jesus said that he was sleeping. The same thing is true here. When Jesus said to the girl, *"Talitha koum,"* ("I say to Thee arise,") we miss it in the English. It was an idiom. Let me give you a couple of idioms that apply to this idiom. If you go to someone who is sleeping and say, "Rise and shine," it means to get up, that it's time to wake up. Or they'll say, "Out of the sack," or, "Up and at 'em." What we mean by that is *"Talitha koum."* That was the idiom that they used which meant, "Rise and shine." The parents probably used that every morning when they woke their daughter. Literally it comes out this way, "Darling, it's time to get up now." Isn't that an amazing thing? Here is a girl that is dead, and the Lord Jesus embraces an idiom that they used all the time, "Rise and shine," "Darling it's time to get up now." I believe He was believing—not soul sleep—but that it was just as easy for the power of God to say to a dead person, "Rise and shine," as it would be for us to wake up somebody who is physically sleeping. It magnifies His power. That's why He used the figure of speech

“sleeping”. Do you know how easy it is to awaken some people? Jesus is almighty God, and He’s just illustrating how easy it is to raise the dead. Just go up to a dead person and say, “Come on, it’s time to get up. Come on and wake up now.” That’s what He did there. It’s very tender and precious.

14

HEALING OF THE TWO BLIND MEN

HEALING OF THE DUMB MAN, DEMON POSSESSED

Matthew 9:27-34, *"And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Have mercy on us, son of David.' And after He came into the house, the blind man came up to Him and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' And they said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' And then He touched their eyes and said, 'May it be done to you according to your faith. And their eyes were opened and Jesus sternly warned them saying, 'See here, let no one know about this.' But they went out, and spread the news about Him in all that land. And as they were going out, behold, a dumb man, demon possessed, was brought to Him. After the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke, and a multitude marveled saying, 'Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees were saying, 'He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons.'"*

We need to be open and say "yes" to His Lordship

We come to the end of the ten redemptive miracles and I want to look at redemptive miracle #9 and #10 together, because together they recapitulate and summarize all the redemptive miracles, and bring to a

consummation the great truth of spiritual healing that He is illustrating through all of these physical miracles. Follow along from verse 27—the last two miracles; giving sight and giving utterance, causing a man to see and speak. Think how that is a consummation of all spiritual miracles. When it's all over, and God has finished doing all of the miracles in your soul, you'll be able to see, and you'll be able to communicate. That's why He ends with that. It's a marvelous consummation.

In verse Matthew 12:34 we read these words, *"The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart."* KJV is more popular, *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."* Why does He end with that? You see, He's doing miracles on the heart, and then finally when He finishes all the miracles on the heart—*"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh"*—He ends with that deliberately. I don't think it's a surprise at all that He should end with sight and utterance. He met those who couldn't see, and one who couldn't speak, and by His mighty miracle He opened their mouth, and opened their eyes. The Bible is about as full of these two miracles as any other. Every time you turn around He is healing the blind. Matthew 9, Matthew 12, Matthew 20, Matthew 21, John 9 and in other places He says, *"And He healed the blind."* These are just specific cases. He's always healing the blind, and He never did it in the same way, by the way. He always did it differently; the infinite variety of His healings.

The reason there is so much in there about healing of the blind and about giving utterance is because that's the greatest joy on His heart, spiritually; to get His sight, and to cause the comportment of the heart to flow out, and then have the mouth speak. That's His greatest joy. Let's take them one at a time. There are two aspects of spiritual blindness. One, of course, applies to the unsaved. They are blind absolutely. It's as if they have no eyes; totally blind and their souls are pitch dark before God. But for the Christian, he can also be blind, not absolutely but relatively. Of course, the blindness of the Christian is very far more serious than the blindness of the unsaved in this regard—that the Christian has potential eyesight. He doesn't have to be blind. He chooses to be blind.

In Matthew 9:27, *"As Jesus passed on from there two blind men followed Him crying out and saying, 'Have mercy on us, son of*

David.'" Then look at the next verse, *"After He had come into the house*," it almost looked like He was ignoring them. When people cried out in mercy He was right there. He just turned around, and dealt with them, but not these blind men. They followed Him down the street crying out, and He just ignored them. He gives sight to seekers, and He's making sure they are seekers. They follow Him into the house, and keep crying unto Him. It comes across on the outside as almost rude. They are crying out for help, and He seems to ignore them, not giving them any kind of indication that He's going to help them at all; cold, detached and indifferent. But their answer to His question, *"Do you believe I'm able to do this?"* is the climactic answer for every Christian who will have spiritual miracles. They said, *"Yes, Lord."* Boy, you put those two words together, and you have a whole theology. "Yes," is the heart that's willing! "Lord," is the recognition of who He is. You get a willing heart embracing the Lordship of Christ, and you are in for some miracles. The most basic sentence God ever wants to teach you in your whole Christian life is, "Yes, Lord." If you ever pray that in reality, you've learned how to pray. Oh God, burn that into our heart. We need to learn how to say, "Yes, Lord." Those are two of the greatest words you'll ever learn in the Christian life.

Our only testimony is a healed heart on display

Some have wondered why Jesus told them in Matthew 9:30, *"See here, let no one know about this."* When you get to Matthew 12 you'll get the full answer to that, but let me give you the partial answer. If you have the NAS you'll see that some of those words are in italics, and the reason they are in italics is because they are not in the original Greek. When they translated the Bible they said, "This will help you to understand it." *"See here, let no one know about this,"* the word "here" is in italics. There is no Greek word for "here". It's, *"See, let no one know about this."* But you also notice the words "about this" are in italics. *"See, let no one know."*

What is He saying when He said, *"See here, let no one know about this"?* It sounds like He's saying to them that they're in trouble about this. That's not what He said at all. What He said is this. They were blind men. They couldn't see. He gave them back their sight, and now they could see. So, he said, "See." That's the same word used in

Revelation 22:4 when it says, *"They shall see His face."* What He's saying is this. He's not saying, "Don't tell anybody." He's telling them how to tell. They didn't disobey Him when they made it known throughout the land. Do you know what they did? They went out and saw, and it was spread all over. If he had healed the deaf man He would have said, "Hear and let no one know. Don't tell anybody. Go and hear." If it was a crippled man, He would have said, "Walk and let no one know." If it was a dead person He would have said, "Live and let no one know." What He's saying is, "The way to testify is not by jamming tracts down people's throats, but if you have had a miracle performed on you by the living God, then go out, and put them on display. You have received your sight, now go out and see. If you had a word from God that you heard, then go out and hear. Has God begun to transform you? Then go out, and live in that transformation. They weren't disobeying Him. He wasn't commanding them not to go out and make it known. He was telling them how to make it known. "I've given you sight, so now go out and see." It's a marvelous, marvelous word; getting on with your life will tell the story.

He followed that up with Matthew 32 & 33. Is there a time to speak? Indeed there is. When God opens your mouth. God opened the mouth of the dumb. He couldn't speak. When God opened the mouth of the dumb, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Sometimes I get tickled at this climactic miracle because it's so casual, and so matter of fact. Verse 32, *"He did it on the way out."* It's almost as if it didn't happen. When He's all done with the miracle, after He's finished doing spiritual things in your life, how will it end? "Alright, now speak." See, that's how He ends with that. "Now speak." Psalm 51:15 is my clincher prayer for that, *"Oh, Lord, open my lips that my mouth may show forth Thy praise."* What a marvelous prayer that is! I believe in these last two He just wraps everything together. "I'll give you sight, and I'll give you utterance, and you'll become a testimony. Go out and see." You don't have to say it. Just go out and put on display the marvelous things that He has begun to do in your heart and life. And, oh, you'll have an utterance. He'll put a new song in your mouth. Psalm 40:3, *"He'll put a new song in your mouth, and many will see it and fear and trust the Lord."* It doesn't say that they'll hear it. He'll put a new song in your mouth, and many will see it. It will be on display, and we become testimonies.

We will also walk the same path of rejection

These last two are climactic in every way. Let me get this before you suggestively. We won't develop it because I want to start the great harvest next time. Remember the great message of Matthew—the path of rejection, the path of divine approval, and the path of missions. Jesus walked this path, and He was rejected by men, and He was accepted by God, and therefore He brought redemption to the world. If I'm going to bring redemption to the world, I've got to walk the path the King walked. The path of the King is the path of the King's subjects. To the degree that my heart says, "I just want to please Him, and I will be rejected by the world," I'll also become a testimony.

Let me show you through these miracles, that if I'm serious about having spiritual miracles, what I can expect in my life. Here's a great principle. Those miracles illustrate the principle of rejection. I can expect my ministry to be among rejected people. Illustration; the leper was a rejected person, an outcast. The Centurion was a gentile. It was unethical in those days to do miracles on women, and to be seen with them. I can expect to be numbered with the transgressors. I can expect to be misunderstood; Matthew 8:22, *"Let the dead bury the dead."* It was a hard thing. In those days, remember, it was the highest possible duty to bury your family. It's possible in the will of God. I know a missionary that this happened to one time. He couldn't come back for the family's funeral. They were on duty in the mission field. There was great turmoil because of that. "You don't care for the family," and all of that. You can expect to be rejected.

There is another illustration. Matthew 8:34, He was kicked out, the whole city came to Him, and they chose the pigs over the Lord. I can expect, if I'm going to follow the King, to be numbered among transgressors, to be sitting down with sinners. I can expect to be misunderstood and kicked out of many places. That's what He did. I can expect, also, to have my authority questioned, "He's doing it by the prince of demons. He's doing it by Beelzebub. He's not of God." I can expect that. That's what He had. *"This fellow blasphemes,"* Matthew 9:3, *"By whose authority do you come here and tell me to change my religion?"* You can expect it, if you are following a rejected King. Matthew 9:24, I can expect people to laugh me to scorn. They

laughed at Him. The path of the King is the path of the King's servant. How did Jesus bring salvation to the earth? He had a heart set on pleasing the Father. He was rejected by men, and He brought salvation to the earth. That's missions. May God burn that in our hearts!

How are we going to bring salvation to the earth? Not by saturating the city with literature. That's for sure. It's by following the King. That's how He walked, and that's how we walk, having our hearts set, and saying, "LORD, all I want is to please You. My meat is to do the will of God that sent me." You'll be rejected, but I'll tell you, you'll become a testimony to the world. Understand when I say this, "See. Come Lord." Go on out, and put Christ on display in your life. Sure, He's going to be rejected, but you'll bring redemption to the earth, and you'll become a worldwide blessing.

At the end of chapter 9 Jesus says, Matthew 9:38, *"Pray the Lord of the harvest that will send forth laborers into His harvest. The field is white already to harvest, and the laborers are few."* Chapter ten gives ten reasons why the laborers are few.

15

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL BUT THE WORKERS ARE FEW

HOW CHAPTER 10 RELATES TO CHAPTERS 8&9

Matthew 9:37-38, *"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'" Matthew 10:1, "And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness."*

Very often the ones who pray for laborers become the laborers

Chapter 9 ends with the truth of verse 38, "pray" or as the NAS puts it, *"...beseech the Lord of the harvest."* Matthew 10:1-6 begins with the truth *"go"*. He's going to send His ambassadors into His kingdom. Chapter 10 is the sending forth of the King's ambassadors. As is mentioned in verses 1, 2 and verse 5, and also in chapter 11:1, there's twelve of them. One of the things I get out of how chapter 9 ends and 10 begins is this—how often God calls us to be the answer to our own prayer. As chapter 9 ends He says, *"Pray that God would send out laborers/workers."* In chapter 10 the ones who are praying are the ones who are sent out. They are the answer to their own prayer.

There are a number of ways to apply it. If God burdens you to pray for the physical necessities of a fellow Christian, chances are He's also called you to give to that fellow Christian. You are part of the answer, as well as the request. When God calls you to pray for the salvation of a loved one, very often God will use you, your testimony, your life, and your faithfulness as a mighty influence for good in the life of the one

you are praying for. When God burdens you to pray for the spiritual growth of brothers and sisters in Christ, there's a good chance He's going to use you to share some of the principles that He's broken upon your heart, and discovered to your own soul. There are so many hungry Christians; prisoners, widows, children, orphans, service men, college students, teens, the young married or families. If you are not willing to be God's answer to your burden, you aren't ready to pray for it.

The Lord continues to do miracles through His human instruments

Matthew 10:7-8, *"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give."*

Though chapters 8 & 9 are the great miracle chapters, I believe with all my heart that chapter 10 is the greater miracle chapter. Chapters 8 & 9 show the mighty power of Christ to work miracles by Himself. Chapter 10 shows the mighty power of Christ to work miracles through others; through human instruments. In one sense that's far more miraculous, because He's using frail, weak and simple human beings as His tools.

My father-in-law is very handy around the house. He's Mr. Fix-it. He said to me one day (He was trying to get me involved. I stay away from that), "Anyone can do anything if they have the right tools." Then he gave me a big sermon about tools, and how important it is to have the right tools. If you have poor tools or the wrong tools, and have to adapt and make do with what you have, then every job is a chore.

Well, I read chapter 10, and I suggest that the tools Jesus had didn't make His job any easier. He used men, human instruments of the weakest kind. The fact is, the tools that He used, on the level of earth, were more of a hindrance than a help. It's one thing for Jesus to heal disease and lepers, cast out demons, raise the dead, and walk on water, but it's another thing, verse 8, when He tells them to *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."* In chapter 14 we're going to see Peter walking on water. It's one thing for him to do it by Himself, but it's another thing to do the same miracle through human instruments. He's trying to teach us something, and He's taking a forward step in the truth of redemptive miracles—that is that Jesus

Christ continues to do miracles today, but now He's using human instruments. He's not doing them independently. He's using us. In chapter 8 & 9 He did supernatural miracles, and in chapter 10 He did super supernatural miracles, because He used human instruments. We haven't left the miracle section by moving into chapter 10. Here the Lord is using His silly children in order to accomplish His great works.

The reason why the true laborers are few

Matthew 9:36-38 "Seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them because they were destressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Therefore, beseech the Lord of His harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'"

In Matthew 9:36-38 there are two word pictures. One is *"sheep without a shepherd"* in verse 36. The other is *"a harvest without workers"* in verse 37 & 38. There are some interesting Greek words that are used to describe these sheep. No wonder Jesus felt compassion—because they were distressed, and they were downcast. Literally, the word means that the sheep were harassed and bewildered and rejected.

A. T. Robertson does a word study on the word "downcast" and says, "It's what happens when you receive a mortal wound." Let's say that someone stuck a spear or shot an arrow through your heart. What would you do? "I'd fall to the earth, and I'd be downcast in a most literal way." That's what the sheep looked like to Jesus. Their shepherds had taken a spear. They weren't feeding them. They were killing and destroying the sheep. They were downcast with a mortal wound, and were distressed. It isn't that they didn't have shepherds. They had a lot of shepherds, but they were killing the sheep. Jesus was burdened for the sheep. Jesus saw that crowd as spiritually wounded sheep. He longed that they have a shepherd, and He longed that there would be workers.

Sometimes those who have begun to have their eyes open to the message of victory, grace and liberty in Christ, run from the word "work" and "workers". Even if they see it in the Bible, they try to change it to mean something else. If they see "laborers" or "workers" or "service" they are immediately on the defensive, and are trying to

change that word to mean "rest" and "peace" and "inactivity" and that kind of thing. Those are not bad words. God uses the word "work" all the time. Work is a good word. As Christians we ought to be workers. That's not legalism. There is a way to be legalistic in working. But there is a way to be a worker in grace. We must understand how Jesus used the word.

As Jesus stood there that day, He said, *"The workers, the laborers are few."* What did He mean by that? Certainly, the Pharisees were not few. There were many. There were tons of them, and they were all over the place. The Sadducees were not few. There were tons of them, and they also were all over the place. The Scribes were not few. There were thousands of Scribes, and they were all over the place. There were many priests. They were on every street corner. Yet Jesus looked out and said, *"The workers are few."*

If the Lord Jesus were to appear bodily in the church of Jesus Christ today, would He have to say, "You don't have to pray that prayer anymore, to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers, because the laborers are few. You don't have to pray that anymore because now the laborers are many. Thank you for praying but the prayer has been answered."? Or would He still look over the people of God, and see them as sheep with spears in their hearts; downcast and dejected? Would He have to say that, in a world that is so busy for God, *"The workers are few"*? I believe with all of my heart that the laborers are as few today as they have ever been in any age of church history.

I took the local phone book today in this city, and I counted twenty six churches, and that does not include the Roman Catholic churches, and it doesn't include other groups and Bible studies that meet all over the place that are not in the Yellow Pages. I know at least two other churches that are presently being erected. There are thousands of Bible Schools all over the land. There are seminaries, and there are workers, and missionaries in the world by the millions. There are many Christian authors, Christian psychologists, Christian counselors, Christian psychiatrists, Christian lawyers, Christian doctors, teachers, music ministries, TV ministries, radio ministries, and tape and literature ministries. I don't think there's any situation in life that hasn't started a ministry. Yet, I believe the workers are few, because of what I understand when I read this, and by what Jesus meant by

workers. Even with all of that list I just rattled off, you'd be amazed if you could see as God can see, how few real shepherds and real workers there are.

The heart of Christ and His compassion is always for the sheep. It grieves His heart when the sheep are downcast and thrust through. We may have all of these programs and ministries, and not have a worker among them. That's why Jesus was so moved. We look at things in such a surface way. There are plenty of numbers, but few of the quality that He would call workers; few that He could call shepherds. We are going to study chapter 10, and it will tell you why there are few. God is exercising my soul as I study this. He slays me with conviction. When you see the principles of the true shepherd, and of the true workers, then you'll know why they are so few. God is doing a number on me, seeing what He calls a worker, and what He calls a shepherd. There are many busy Christians, but no laborers, and the workers are few. Busyness and work is not the same thing. You'll see that when we see the characteristics of these workers.

This is the main burden and main message of chapter 10—the characteristics of the true shepherd, the true worker. This chapter answers the question, "Why are the workers so few." You read verses like, *"I come to send a sword, and if you don't hate your father, mother, wife and children,"* you'll know why there are few. Not many are willing to pay the price of what He calls a true worker. It's spiritually demanding, and you'll see that as we go through it.

Look at Matthew 10:5, *"These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them."* Notice that expression, *"instructing them".* Then look at Matthew 11:1, *"It came about when Jesus had finished giving instruction…"* So, you can call them the "instructions of the Lord Jesus". He starts instructing them, and then at the end He finishes instructing them. These are His instructions and His principles of the real worker. He sent out these twelve and said, "Pray for real workers, real laborers," and then He instructs them, the same as to say, "Here is what a real laborer is."

God has given true workers authority

Matthew 10:1, *"And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority*."

The first principle can be summarized in *"He gave them authority"*. Verse 8, *"Freely you have received; freely give."* I defined authority for you when we did the Sermon on the Mount from chapter 7:29, *"He was teaching them as One having authority, and not as the Scribes."* The word "authority" is not volume, decibels—the louder you yell, the more authority you have. Sometimes volume is a cover-up for weakness rather than authority. You don't have authority just because you can bring blood vessels to your temples, or can shake a pulpit, or scare somebody with loud dogmatic statements. Authority is not taking a rugged stand on dogmatic truth. Fact is, authority is quiet and serene.

The etymology of the word "authority" according to Robertson, Vine and Wuest, and some of the Greek scholars, is the word "liberty, freedom". Authority is someone who has liberty, and the power to communicate it. That's authority. When Christ spoke with authority, every time people were set free. You can't speak with authority unless someone is set free. That's what authority is. It's speaking from freedom with the effect that chains are broken, and people are set free. It's the power of a very quiet word.

G. Campbell Morgan likened it to the chords of a guitar in your heart. He said that when you speak with authority, the Spirit of God strums the strings in the listener's heart. Let's say that some teacher is standing before you with the word of truth, and in your heart you say, "Yes, that's right. I never saw that. It's beautiful." And your heart rings true, and the chords down deep begin to vibrate, and you give an intuitive acquiescence; "Yes, that's what it is. I always knew that, and I was afraid to say it. I thought no one would ever say it. I thought I was too square and radical when I believed that, but yes, my heart says Amen to that." That's authority, when you reach down inside the being to the root and blood of the soul of another person, and very quietly say a truth of God that strums that chord, and begins a music in their heart, and the chains drop off, and they are set free. That's speaking with

authority. The more you speak with authority, the more your words are going to revive those sleeping chords in others. If there's no freedom or liberty, there's no authority. Authority is power, spiritual power. It's when God breaks the chains, and when the Spirit of God opens the prison doors. Only the free can speak with authority.

The first characteristic, the first instruction the Lord Jesus gives of a true worker, the kind He says prays and seeks the Lord, and He'll send out, are those with authority. Bible schools and seminaries cannot give authority. They can give facts and knowledge, and they can give information, but they cannot give authority. The church and the world is full of busy Christians without authority. They are not free. They are in bondage. They are smart and orthodox, they are dogmatic, and in many cases are eloquent, but they have no authority. They can't speak anybody free. They are not free themselves. They are in bondage. They are in Christian service but they hate it. I know. For seven years of my own life I was there, and was teaching and preaching, but I had no authority.

Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones has written a little paperback published by Intervarsity called "Authority". Listen to this sentence, "The Apostle Paul decided he was not going to waste his time arguing about presuppositions, and he was not going to start with a preliminary philosophical argument, and gradually lead them on to the truth. No. He begins by proclaiming authoritatively the Lord Jesus Christ. Then He makes this statement, "I'm not sure that apologetics is not the curse of evangelical Christians. Apologetics is the intellectual defending of the faith." I agree.

Where are the workers? Where are those that have authority, who have been set free, and who speak in such a way that their message is able to set others free? We're building works, we're building buildings, we're building organizations and corporations, and we have many programs. We're civilizing and feeding the heathen, but we're not setting them free. No wonder Jesus said, *"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*," because workers having authority are few.

I've met with many pulpit committees, have received many requests from schools to recommend students to go to a particular school. Never once have I ever heard on any application a question that would come

close to this; "Do they have spiritual authority? Are they free, and do they speak in such a way that the anointing of the Spirit of God is upon them, and they set others free?" The questions they ask instead are, "Do they have a degree?" "Have they been through man school?" "Do they have man's authority?" "Tell me about their experiences." "Who recommends them?" "Are they good leaders?" "Do they smoke, go to movies or play Monopoly?" Those are the kinds of questions they ask. This is one of the most tragic realities in the church of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, that a man can know nothing of the Lord's liberty, and know nothing of the Lord's freedom, and not even have a particle of spiritual life, and yet he is qualified to become a shepherd. Do you know what he is doing? He's destroying the sheep, and he's breaking the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was moved with compassion. That word *"moved with compassion"* is a deep word that means that He was turned over inside, and the Lord was grieving when he saw the sheep, that they had to listen to that junk all the time. The sheep were distressed and received a mortal wound.

It's a shame that man's authority without God's authority qualifies missionaries and ministers. It's a slap in the face to our Lord Jesus Christ; a dishonor to the Lord. I don't think you'll find an assembly of Christians in a thousand who don't care about man's approval, and only look at the qualifications in chapter 10; "Is this a man of God? Does he have authority? Is he set free? When he speaks and shares, does he set others free?" That's the qualification that's needed. The reason why chapter 10 follows the miracle chapters is because authority is a mighty miracle of God. Christian service is not a job. It's a miracle, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the One that must work this authority. Christianity is not a philosophy of life. It's life itself. Authority is living and communicating that life. Thousands of workers are not workers because they have no authority. The harvest is plentiful but the workers with authority are few. Beseech the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust out workers filled with authority into His harvest.

True workers trust His sovereignty/miraculous sufficiency

Matthew 10:1, *"He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness,"*

Matthew 10:7&8, ***"As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you have received, freely give."***

Matthew 10: 9 & 10. ***"Do not acquire gold or silver or copper or money belts or a bag for your journey or even two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his support."***

The second instruction of the real shepherd, the real worker, can be stated in these words, "The principle of miraculous sufficiency." When you read a verse like verse 1, *"He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out and heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness,"* and verse 7 & 8 seems to say about the same thing, *"As you go preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you have receive, freely give."* In verses like that we ask the question, "Can we expect power for such literal miracles today?" Remember when we went through chapters 8 & 9 we pointed out that they were redemptive miracles, and contained spiritual principles. These are also redemptive miracles; through instruments containing spiritual principles. The workers He sends out not only have spiritual authority, but they are trusting His miraculous sufficiency for everything. Chapter 10 gives three illustrations of this principle. The first is trusting His miraculous sufficiency to get the job done.

Some Christians, really born again Christians, claim that they are not charismatic. The word "charisma" means gifts. All true Christians are charismatic, because they believe in gifts. What some Christians mean when they say they are not charismatic is that they don't put gifts in the center, but they all believe in spiritual gifts. What can we expect in our day and age concerning miracles, signs, gifts and wonders? I believe the answer is this; we can expect His miraculous sufficiency to get the job done. See, that's common denominator. What form will these miracles take? Whatever outward form that is necessary to get the job done; that's God's answer. Some Christians insist on outward forms. Some Christians insist on no outward forms. Those that Christ sends out as true workers, they don't care. If God wants to do outward manifestations—Hallelujah! If He doesn't, that's okay, too. They just trust God's miraculous sufficiency to get the job done. God knows what He's doing. If it glorifies the Lord to raise up a crippled body,

and bring that one back to full health, don't fight that. If God wants to do that in order to work out His redemptive purposes; let Him do it. On the other hand, if it glorifies Him to strike a body down, don't fight that. Let Him do it, whatever is necessary to get the job done. Don't look for signs and wonders, and don't look for absence of signs and wonders. Just trust His miraculous sufficiency to get the job done. He knows what is needed. Those are the ones that He sends out. He knows what He's going to do.

One of the tragedies of the last decade of Christianity is the way the fighting fundamentalists and the charismatics have squared off against each other. It's tragic, and while they are fighting, the heart of the Lord Jesus is breaking over the poor sheep without a shepherd, longing for real workers, because the harvest is so ripe. Those that trust His miraculous sufficiency, in other words, whatever equipment I need to fulfill the will of God, I can trust Him to give me that. Sometimes we might say, "Well, I don't have a gift." You just surrender yourself to the Lord, and whatever gift you need when you need it, you'll have it. The Lord will give you that. You might say, "There's no way through this except by a miracle." Well, okay, then He'll give you one. Don't worry about that. Those He sends out just trust Him. They aren't worried about the theology of the thing. They are just trusting the living Savior, a living friend, a living God, and they are resting in His all-sufficiency to do whatever He has called them to do, whatever it takes, and whatever outward manifestations are formed—it doesn't matter.

There is another illustration in Matthew 10: 9 & 10. *"Do not acquire gold or silver or copper or money belts or a bag for your journey or even two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his support."* Let me ask the question, "When you were thinking, did you say, 'That's exactly how it is today in the world. Nobody is acquiring gold and silver.'" Boy, I tell you, the laborers are few. A real laborer that He sends out trusts His miraculous sufficiency, not only for the equipping necessary to get the job done, but trusts His miraculous sufficiency for all physical needs. Even the government is investigating some of these Christian organizations. What a black eye for the people of God. They are doing the opposite of verse 9 & 10.

Christian workers are gathering gold and silver and copper. You get special reports of them on TV. The postal service is full of beggar mail.

You must get it, too; envelopes and everyone asking for money all the time. That's all you hear, "Give, give, give and send your dollars. Remember us in your will." There's a new country song out now, "The Great American Dream". Here's one of the lyrics in it, "A preacher comes on TV, and has a suit and a tie and a vest, and tells you to send your money to the Lord, and gives you his address." Exactly right! It's tragic. It's a whole lot sadder than it is funny. The workers are few; those who are trusting His miraculous sufficiency for support. There are cases that I know where gold determines obedience. "He gladly ministered to the Lord among you if you pay enough." How few are the laborers who are not going out acquiring gold and silver, and could care less about those things? Some would be missionaries, and never get to the field because the deputation failed, and they can't earn enough gold.

Modern Christianity with its multimillion dollar industries and corporations, its gathering of buildings and hospitals, schools and movies must break the heart of our Lord Jesus. They have a thousand and one gimmicks to get money, and they all sound so good. "Make sure you tithe, and make sure that it goes into the local church and local pot, and make sure you've given to your faith promise program, and make a promise to the Lord, and entrust Him to supply the need; seed promises, high pressure suppers and sales, and all that kind of thing. Workers are few; the kind He sends out, the kind He longs for, the kind that fit in with the program of redemption, the kind that really get the job done.

True workers trust His sufficiency for "emergencies"

Matthew 10:19 & 20, *"When they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how and what you will speak, for it will be given to you in that hour what you shall speak. It is not you who speaks but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."*

There is a third illustration; they are also trusting His miraculous sufficiency for so-called emergencies**.** They trust His sovereignty. Here is an amazing thing. Here is an emergency in the life of a disciple. We just read this la, la, la, "Oh, they delivered you up." When He said that I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, He was saying that I send you forth as meat. You are their supper. They are going to

devour you. They are delivered up to die. They are going to the lions, or to the rack, or to the cross. What does He say to those who are delivered up? *"Do not be anxious."* "Yeah right; we're about to die." Why? The ones that He sends out are not anxious because when God is in charge, there is a sweet supernatural naturalness.

There are no emergencies with the Lord. They don't even prepare a defense, "Take no thought what you are going to say. They are about to deliver you up, and you are about to die; don't even think about that. Don't be anxious, and don't be afraid." These he sends out are not fighting for the gospel to defend God and defend the gospel. They don't have any defense. They don't make it happen, and they don't prevent it from happening. They just let it happen. God is in charge, and they just rest in the Lord. Those are the ones that He sends out. They are not concerned, they aren't anxious, and they aren't fretting. This is 180 degrees from those who are always fighting in all of the issues, and marching, and taking sex out of the schools, and trying to get the library purified, and censoring all the movies, fighting liberals, and all that kind of thing. Jesus didn't march, Paul didn't march, and they had more issues than we do. They could have marched against slavery. They didn't march. They just rested in the Lord.

I love in this connection 1 Timothy 6:13, *"Christ Jesus testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate*." What was the good confession that He testified? *"He opened not His mouth and said nothing."* That's a great confession. And what did Pilate say when He said nothing? He said, *"I find no fault in this man."* A holy life was the good confession that He presented before Pontius Pilate, and that was His good confession, and that's our confession. Take no thought. Just be holy and pure, and walk with Jesus; walk in fellowship. We don't need to defend ourselves, or fight for the truth, and we don't need to fight cults and liberalism, and all that kind of thing. The ones He sends out are resting, and trusting God to provide whatever equipment necessary to get the job done. They are trusting God for everything that comes into their lives as needs. They are trusting God for every so-called emergency that comes. They are not fretting and they aren't worried.

I used to think that the main point of Matthew 10:29-31 was "God will protect you." It's not. *"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent, yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father? But the*

very hairs on your head are numbered. Therefore, do not fear. You are of more value than many sparrows." If you read the context in verse 28, *"Do not fear those who kill the body,"* they are about to kill the body. The point of the sparrow in verse 29 is this; trust Jesus if you fall to the ground dead. That's the point. He's not saying, "I'm going to protect you." He's saying, "If you fall to the ground dead it will not be unnoticed. God even controls the lives of sparrows. God is sovereign; even a sparrow can't die apart from the Lord." He's not saying that you won't fall to the ground. He's saying that when you fall to the ground, know that it wasn't an accident; the Lord is in charge, and even in falling to the ground, you are working redemption's program. We're not exempt from falling to the ground dead. Nothing that comes into our lives contradicts His wisdom, His love and His sovereignty. It can't.

Same thing is true in verse 30 of the hair. I used to think that my hairs are numbered. That means that God must love me very much. I love Lillian very much but I don't know how many hairs she has on her head. It's true that God knows how many, literally, the number; He can compute how many hairs, and He knows every detail, and knows all of our freckles and pores, and all. He knows all about you. If you read Song of Solomon you'll see that. The groom there even compliments her belly button, everything, because He loves us so much. That's a Bible truth here. If you lose one hair, it has not gone outside of God's control. God knows every hair on your head, and not one of them will be lost. John the Baptist lost all his hair; it came off with his head. That doesn't mean that your head isn't going to come off. He's not promising to keep you from physical death. He's saying that those who He sends out are willing to die, and are resting; they don't worry about it. When they are brought before the court they don't even think about what they are going to say. They are not anxious at all. They are walking in the sovereignty of God. They know that not even a sparrow can fall, and not one hair on their head can fall unless God says, "Okay." They are not afraid of any human being whose flesh is in his nostrils.

Today we have a bunch of chicken hearted people who are tickling the ears of men, and trying to satisfy everybody, and stroking egos all over the place, so that they are not stepped on, and not rejected, so that people don't think bad things about them. Oh, that God would send

out laborers! God doesn't have a standard where He says, "This is for the leaders and this is for us." Even the qualifications in Timothy for elders and bishops are not double standards. That's God's qualifications for all Christians. But you have had to at least reached that far before you take on responsibility. Those are principles of maturity for every Christian; not just elders. God has no double standards. We are all the same.

A true laborer is one who has the authority, and trusts the miraculous sufficiency of God. "All I need for equipment, and whatever it takes to get the job done, and all I need for material provision, whatever I need, He'll provide. All I need for any emergency that comes into my life is to trust Jesus." Pray the Lord of the harvest; the workers are few. Even today, there are busy Christians, but no workers, and the sheep are suffering.

16

JESUS SENDS OUT HIS WORKERS

Matthew 10:16, *"I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men."*

A true worker spiritually discerns the will and revelation of God, as well as the world into which he is sent

More than half of chapter 10 is spent in warning those he sends out, telling them to keep their eyes open, and telling them what to watch for. Let me show you a couple of areas in which the true worker is to be spiritually discerning. Here's the three areas. A true worker is spiritually discerning about the world into which he is sent. Secondly, a true worker is spiritually discerning about the will of God. The third and most important emphasis here, a true worker is spiritually discerning about the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I'm not saying that he's judging other people. Jesus filled his disciples with warning. Remember the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:15, He said, *"Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are raving wolves."* Now in chapter 10:16, *"I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be shrewd*

as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men." He's warning them to be discerning, to watch out for people, especially in the context of hypocrites; sheep in wolves clothing.

I think one of the ways they were put on the alert for hypocrisy is in verse 4, as He lists the disciples He says, *"'...and Judas Iscariot,' the one who had betrayed him."* That was an amazing thing. Judas is one of the twelve. I know there are many books and articles written on why Christ chose Judas. Didn't He know he would betray Him? Certainly He knew the condition of his heart. I don't know the full theological answer to that question, but I know at least one practical reason. He chose Judas to give an object lesson warning to His disciples. He taught them through Judas to be on the alert for hypocrites, that they are all over the place, even in their midst.

In at least two ways Judas is a wonderful object lesson warning. First of all he's a great warning to unsaved religious people. Judas shows you how far you can go without truly being born again, and how many externals you can embrace without having reality in your heart. Judas is a warning to all church members. Judas was a church member. Judas is a warning to all church workers. He was a church worker. Judas is a warning to all church leaders. He held an office. He was the treasurer. Judas is a warning to all who have had great and tremendous privileges. Do you realize the privilege Judas had? He was in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, and heard the God-man in the flesh.

Do you realize that of the twelve disciples, only Judas was a true blue Jew? The word "Iscariot" is not his last name; that's where he comes from. The word means "man of Cariot", "Judas of Cariot", and Cariot was a city in Judah. Judah was the Messianic tribe, the tribe from which Messiah came. All the other disciples were plain old Galileans. They weren't true-blue Jews. They didn't come from the Messianic tribe. What a privilege Judas had! He was born in the tribe of Judah. What a warning to all of those who have had great privileges, born in Christian families. He lived right under the ministry of the God-man, heard Him speak, sat at the table, and ate with Him.

Matthew 10:8, *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons..."* There's reason to believe that Judas did these miracles, and maybe even raised the dead. Jesus set them out to do all

these miracles. Judas is not only a warning to those who try to ride to heaven on the coat tails of other believers, and being hypocrites, but he's also a warning to the apostles to be on guard for such hypocrites. I don't think anybody expected Judas. I think he looked good on the outside. Judas became a tremendous purifying influence to those early disciples as God began to establish the church on the earth. He was an object lesson warning of a wolf in sheep's clothing.

No matter how select the group you may be in, it's possible that someone in your midst is not born again. It's possible there is always a Judas. I don't care how handpicked the group is, there might be a Judas there. A real man of God has an eye, not reading hearts, but he's discerning. Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing. Be on the lookout, and beware of men. There's another illustration of discernment here, not only to be on the lookout for hypocrites, but discerning the will of God. We usually think of the will of God in the positive. *"Go, go ye in to all the world."* That's part of it but look at verses Matthew 10:5&6, *"These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them saying, 'Do not go…'"* See, the word of God has a negative, as well as a positive. This is the principle of restriction.

It's another question why they were to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and not to the gentiles. Some say, *"Go not to the gentiles,"* was a temporary command while, *"Go into all the world,"* is an eternal principle. For myself I think He's talking about spiritual Israel and spiritual gentiles. Many Jews had gentile hearts and many gentiles had Jewish hearts, and He was talking about spiritual Jews. I think He was saying in plain words, "Go after the hungry, and don't bother with those who don't want it anyway." Notice Matthew 10:14, *"Whoever does not receive you nor heed your words, as you go out of that city, shake off the dust from your feet."* In other words He was saying, "Don't feel a burden or obligation to minister to those who do not want to hear."

Let's get back to the principle of discerning the will of God in the negative, as well as the positive. We must know when to go, and when to go not. I believe it's accurate to say this; in all true leading of the Lord, there's also the element of restriction. You not only know the "yes" but you know the "no". You know what not to do; discerning the will of God. I like Acts 16:6 when the Holy Spirit forbid Paul to preach in Asia. There was a restriction, "Don't do this." True servants of God

have insight. They are shrewd as serpents, and harmless as doves. They are on the lookout, and are on beware of wolves in sheep's clothing. They've also learned, as one brother put it to me recently, to move in God; when to go and when not to go. Matthew 10:23, Jesus said, *"Flee into another city."* Whenever they persecute in this city, flee to the next.

Jesus told his disciples to avoid danger. I know how that would look on the outside; running away looks like cowardliness. Running away may be cowardice, but it may also be the will of God. The true servant of God knows which it is. He's discerning the will of God. It's not always God's will to stick it out. Sometimes you run away. If they are going to persecute, you might say, "I'm just going to stand there and fight for Jesus." Don't' stand there and fight for Jesus. You discern the will of God. He might want you to run, and to shake off the dust from your feet, and move on out. A true servant of God has an eye, a discernment. He knows who the lost sheep of the house of Israel are. But this is most important; he's not only to be discerning about people, discerning about the will of God, but he's to have eyes to see the Lord, and that's why there are few out there. People "ain't" seeing Jesus. God's servants are not seeing the Lord.

A true worker doesn't have to defend themselves…

Matthew 10:17, *"Beware of men. They'll deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in the synagogues, and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for my sake as a testimony to them and to the gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you are to speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it is not you who speaks but it's the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."*

Matthew 10:26 & 27, *"Therefore, do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light. And what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops."*

This is one of the main reasons I believe the laborers are few, and why Jesus' heart is so burdened, because there are so few worker-laborers who are willing to wait before Him for a word from Him; to wait for

the revelation. When Christians are under the gun because of their walk with the Lord, like in verses 17 – 20, *"Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts…,"* over and over again people are trying to defend themselves, instead of applying the principle that He opened not His mouth. You don't have to defend yourself. You don't have to think at all about how to answer. People are always trying to prove that they are right, and come up with a thousand and one proof texts to show that they didn't go astray.

"I will be your defense. Don't worry about that." That's the context. But the principle is, "Don't speak until you listen." That's God's order of Christian service. You listen and then you speak. Jesus said that the laborers are few. There are few that will listen, and then speak. I love the expression in Matthew 10:27, *"What I whisper in your ear…"* Isn't that tender—the confidential whisperings of the Lord Jesus to His true shepherds and true workers? Thousands of workers and laborers, so called shepherds, have no word from God. *"What I speak to you in the dark."* Has He spoken to you in the dark? Has He whispered to you in the silence? Because if He hasn't, you have nothing to say. That's what He's saying. If He hasn't spoken in the dark, and hasn't whispered in the silence, then you have nothing to show in the light, and no message to proclaim. It's tragic that many are out there working and laboring, and they have no word from God. They've got a word but they didn't really get it from God. They got it from books, or from tracts, from school, from the radio, or the TV, or from their pastor, teacher, elder, or some other person, or from some of their own meditation.

The true laborer will hear the confidential whisperings of the Lord. Those who do not wait privately before God cannot share publicly for the Lord. Oh that God would raise up laborers that would take the time to sit in the darkness and in the silence, until they heard his voice whispered in their ear! That's the cry of the heart of the Lord Jesus back then, and it hasn't changed. If men of God, workers today, would only wait before God, and let God speak, what a tremendous work the Lord would do! But there are many that have no idea about the revelation of Christ. They see with mortal eyes, but their heart is blind. They hear with mortal ears, but their heart is deaf. He says, "The man I send out in reality, his life will be touched by the life of God; his spirit

over flooded by the Spirit of God. He'll know the word of God. Jesus will whisper it in his ear, and he'll have unction and power.

If there is no word of God in the dark, no word of God in the silence, no message from God, and He hasn't ministered unto the servant, then it doesn't really matter what we say, or how we say it, it's going to be fruitless. I don't care how true it is. We could have the truth of God, but if you have the truth of God without the unction of God, it's a waste of people's time, and a waste of your own time. Thousands have no word from God. A real servant has spiritual insight. He not only can see beyond the sheep's clothing to penetrate and see the wolf inside, not only knows and discerns the will of God, "I'll go here and I won't go there—I know the will of God," but he also discerns God Himself, and waits in the private place. And in the dark and in the silence, the Lord Jesus Christ whispers in his ear, and speaks a word, and he then has a message from God, "Now you can go out into the light and onto the housetops, and proclaim it publicly." Jesus looked for them and said, *"Beseech the Lord of the harvest, for the laborers are few."*

When you find a man or woman of God who is a true shepherd, a true worker, who knows the voice of God, and has waited before the Lord, that one will speak in power, and God will anoint it, and many things will happen. People will respond and say, "Where did this fellow learn these things? How does he know all of this? Who is this? Where did he come from? He didn't go to our schools? Who whispered in his ear?" Jesus did. That's the third characteristic of a true laborer. Not only the one who has authority, and not only the one who trusts Jesus for everything, but he's one who has spiritual discernment. He discerns reality, and discerns the will of God, and discerns the God whose will it is. He waits for the revelation of Christ.

When you catch a real servant of God, he's not moving around in the noise and hustle and bustle of big programs. He's off in obscurity in the dark and silence, with his ear lifted toward heaven, and he's listening, waiting for the voice of God. He's not trying to defend himself, and not all anxious when he gets in trouble. He knows it's not him that's going to speak, but the Spirit of his Father that is in him. If you find a man that just waits and listens, he's got something to say. Matthew 9:38, *"Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out*

workers out into His harvest." Matthew 10:37, *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."*

True workers are willing to die to self

Chapter 10:13&14, *"If the house is worthy, let your greeting of peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your greeting of peace return to you, and whoever does not receive you nor heed your words, as you go out of the house of that city, shake off the dust of your feet. Truly I say to you it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city."*

Matthew 10:16, *"I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as serpents, and as innocent as doves. But beware of men, because they will deliver you up to the courts, and will scourge you in the synagogues. You'll be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to the gentiles."*

Verse 21, *"Brother will deliver up brother to death, and father his child, and children will rise against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name. But it is the one that has endured to the end who will be saved. Whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next, for truly I say to you that you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, and a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household?"*

Verse 28, *"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Verse 34, *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."* Do you wonder why the laborers are few? *"He who*

does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it. He who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."

This is THE principle of chapter 10. Those others I've given are sort of incidental to the true worker. The one I'm giving you now is THE principle in chapter 10. It's the heart of God, and one of the most important principles in the heart of God, and the chief reason why the laborers are few. We can label it many different things, but I'm referring to the principle of the cross, of rejection, of opposition.

He said to pray for real servants, because there are few who are willing to pay the price of Calvary. Jesus was rejected in order to bring salvation to the earth. God has willed that as we become as Jesus, we must be rejected in order to bring salvation to the earth. The passage shows why the laborers are few; because there are not many who are willing to pay the price of rejection. Verses 11-15, rejection by strangers and the unsaved; verses 16-20, rejection by the authorities; verses 21 & 35-37, rejection by the family; verses 38 & 39, rejection by your own self (we'll look at that in a moment). There's a tremendous cost at lining up with Jesus. Let me paraphrase verse 16. Here's the inspired version, *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."* Here's the uninspired version, "I send you out as meat; lamb chops." That's what He's talking about. When He said, "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves," what is a wolf going to do to a sheep? "I send you out as lamb chops in order to be devoured."

Christians haven't understood the principle of the cross. They just look at some historic little event where Jesus died, or some theological event where they were identified with Christ in crucifixion. But there's a principle of the cross. When Jesus said in verse 34, *"I did not come to send peace. I came to send a sword,"* on the surface it looks like God's goal is disunity and war and disharmony. *"I came to set a man against his mother and a man against his father and a father against his child and in-laws against each other."* But God's goal is not war and disharmony. God's goal is the glory of God. And what does the sword do? The sword cuts down everything that hinders the glory of God, and cuts down everything that hinders the will of God.

One of the most severe titles of Christ in the Bible is Prince of Peace, because He has a sword in His hand, and He's cutting down everything that hinders peace in your life. If you really see Him as the Prince of Peace, I'll tell you, you are going to see Him as a consuming fire, because He is going to be destroying in your life. You'll find as you go on, that in order to save your life, He may have to amputate many limbs. Over and over again He takes his faithful sword, and amputates precious things in order to save a life. Life comes through death. God will never stop working death and the cross in your life.

What is the cross? I asked Lillian today, "Did you take up your cross?" She said, "I don't think so. I didn't get much accomplished today at all." What does it mean to take up your cross; to deny oneself? It goes right against the grain. But that's the inside spiritual. I was talking to someone recently, and I asked the question about the cross. What does the cross mean to you? And they said, "My cross is arthritis." Is that what He's talking about. I've talked to others, and they haven't said it, but if they thought of it, they probably would have, "My cross is the guy I have to live with," or, "The woman I've got to live with. That's my cross and my burden." Some songs are written that way, "Everybody has a cross to bear." And sometimes they talk about retarded children or migraine headaches or some deformity. "That's the cross you've got to bear and carry." Well, that's not the use of the word "cross" here in Matthew 10.

The cross was the symbol of ultimate rejection. When they couldn't reject Jesus any more, they put Him on the cross. The cross has become a shameful symbol of ultimate and utter rejection. You know what it stood for in the Lord Jesus. On the surface, outside the circle, the cross meant potentially ultimate rejection. There's a possibility that when you know Jesus Christ, and line up with him, that because you are a servant, you will die, literally; that you will stop breathing for Him. Are you familiar with the word *"witness"* in the Bible, *"You shall be witnesses,"?* People say that you should go out and bear witness. It doesn't say to witness for Jesus. It says that you shall be witnesses. The word "witness" in the Greek is the word "martyr". Every witness was a potential martyr. That's what the word means. You want to witness for Christ? Be a martyr. A witness was a martyr.

I took the time to go through Matthew 10:2-4—the names of those men. I did research on how tradition (because it's not in the Bible except for James) they died. Peter was crucified upside down. Andrew was stoned, hung on the cross, and stoned again while he was on the cross. James, the brother of John, son of Zebedee, in Acts 12, was beheaded by King Agrippa the First. The Apostle John was boiled in oil at Rome. Phillip was crucified, and then stoned while he was hanging on the cross. Bartholomew was placed in a sack and drowned in the sea. Thomas was pierced through with a lance underneath the cross on which they finally hung him. Matthew was martyred but they don't know how. They have the date for it; Sept. 21. James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, and then they stoned his body. Thaddeus was torched to death. Simon the Canaanite was crucified. They were real servants and witnesses, and the world wasn't worthy of them.

That was what was on the heart of Christ. And that's just the outside. We didn't get into the spiritual. That's the least; servants that are willing to go all the way and die. Matthew 10:21, *"Brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father's child and children will rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated on account of all because of my name."* No wonder they are few, and that's only the veneer. That's just the outside. That's the least of it; you are going to die physically.

The cross is deeper than physical death, even violent physical death. Once you get through the rack, the pain, the animal, the sword, the fire, the ax, the bomb, the bullet, the knife, when you get beyond that, then you come a little deeper into what the cross is. Matthew 10:34, *"Do not think that I come to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set a man against his father and his daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."* How does God set a man against his family? Matthew 10: 25 gives you the key, *"It's enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher."*

As you grow in the Lord, becoming as your teacher, and getting conformed to Him, you will realize one thing about Jesus, and that is that He is radical. His ways are not our ways. Radical changes are wrought by the gospel. The more you say "yes" to Him, the more you

say “no” to the world. The more you become like Jesus, the more you become unlike the world, and that’s what they are rejecting. You are becoming more like Jesus, and that’s a cost. He begins to reveal Himself, and you say “yes” to those principles. When you say “yes” to His principles, you say “no” to the world’s principles and methods. When you say “yes” to His values, you say “no” to the values of the world. When you say “yes” to God’s pleasures, you say “no” to the pleasures of the world. They can’t stand that. You are weird and odd. You are a squirrel, a duck, or a speckled bird, and they begin to hate and reject you because you are so strange.

Why are the laborers few? The laborers that God sends out are champions of the cross, and have understood the principles of the cross. They not only preach Christ crucified, but they preach Christ crucified in a crucified manner. They themselves identify with that, and are willing to be rejected. They embrace the truth; the principles of God that the world hates and rejects. They are all nobodies; simple, ordinary everyday people. I like Acts 4:13 in that regard, *“They were uneducated and unlearned men, but they had been with Jesus.”* Let me give you the Greek on the word “uneducated”. The Greek word is “idioma”, where we get out word “idiot”. They were idiots, but they had been with Jesus. He still chooses idiots. Where would we be if He wasn’t choosing idiots?

It’s a great purifying influence for the Lord to choose weak instruments to do great work. The weaker the instrument, the more glory goes to Him. Just read the history and life of some of those bunglers that He chose. Remember that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and there wasn’t a Pharisee among the disciples. It must have been a humbling thing for Nicodemus to serve under Peter, the fisherman. And then in Acts 6:7 we read a great company of priests believed, and then they put themselves under these twelve nobodies; these twelve idiots. A humbling influence! It’s part of the cross; not only literally dying, but identification with weak things, with the principles of God, things that are not, so that He might glory, and that no flesh would glory.

I know the Holy Spirit wrote chapter 10, but Matthew also wrote chapter 10, and in verse 3, Matthew calls himself a tax gatherer. Now, if I were Matthew, I speak as a fool, I would probably introduce my audience to the fact that I was from the tribe of Levi. But he didn’t do

that. I would have probably mentioned, "Hey, folks, did you read chapters 10 & 11. I'm the one that foot the bill for that big meal that day when Jesus sat with the Pharisees and the publicans." He didn't say any of that. Do you know why? It's because the cross was in his life. He was a nothing; a nobody. The principle of the cross just slashed across everything that the world runs after. The world runs after fame, and after popularity. The world runs after riches, and after positions, and after success, and all of those things. The cross is literal dying. The cross is associating with the ways of God in such a way that you become an oddball and are rejected. We can't go too deep, because I haven't been too deep. I can only begin to touch it. There's more here. More than I'll ever know.

Matthew 10:37&38, "*He who loves father and mother more than Me, he is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who does not take up his cross and follow after Me…,"* and Luke says, *"Take up his cross daily."* The cross means death to self, not only physical death, and not only death to the world's system, but death to self; the self-principle. When others reject me, they put me on a cross. That is a rejection. What does it mean to take up the cross? That isn't somebody else doing it. When they reject me, they put me on the cross. What does it mean to take up the cross? The answer is, "I put me on the cross. I'm not only rejected by the unsaved and those who don't love God, I'm not only rejected from the world and its principles, but I am rejected by the new me." Now, follow this. Of course, I understand the truth that we are crucified in Christ, and that we are in His crucifixion, and that it is finished, and it's accomplished; it's over. I understand that. But Matthew 10:37&38 is not over. It's a continuing process.

Let me put it in these words. Since the fall, man has been independent, the old big "I", the ego, and man has been living for himself. It's been the history of mankind that man always chooses, without exception, that which will please him, benefit him, minister unto to him. Man loves himself. I love me, and you love you. And now there's another will introduced into our lives, and another pleasure, and another goal; I'm talking about God Himself, the will of God. I'm talking about the principle that is deep into the heart of Christ, which was the principle of the cross. He said, "I didn't come to please myself. I came to do the will of Him that sent Me." And it became an increasing passion in the

heart of Christ to do the Father's will. That was His meat. Not only are others going to think I'm crazy and squirrely, reject Me, and even may kill Me—that's incidental—but as I go on in the Lord, increasingly I'm going to be saying "yes" to Him. In order to say "yes" to Him, I've got to say "no" to myself. There is no "yes" without a "no". There is no positive without a negative. There is no way to say "yes" to God and "yes" to myself at the same time.

So, I make a choice. Every day, as we choose, we say, "I choose death for Me, that I may have Life; His Life. I say 'no' to my life, that I might have His Life." It's an actual decision. It's an act of the will. It's a daily process by which we appropriate His Life. Every day we reject ourselves. We say, "I'm a death deserving criminal. I understand that I belong on the cross. All of my reasoning, all of my powers, all of my desires, and all of my ambition; I deliberately reject them today. I consider them crucified. I reject me. I reject my thinking and my plans, my strength, my wisdom, my patience, my love, and I reject everything. I count myself dead. I'm on the cross, and deserve to die."

He who loses his life will find it, because through death comes life. It's the Life of God. It's the Life for which we have been created. It's the purpose of our being. It's the purpose of our redemption. God has always wanted His Life to be in us, and to flow through us. God has heavy on His heart the redemption of the world, and in order to bring redemption to the world He had to go to the cross, that through His death He might bring Life. It's no different now, as He is being formed in us. It's Christ all over again. And the Christ within us is working in our hearts at cross principles. We will die. We will become that seed that falls into the ground, or else it remains alone by itself.

The worst thing you could ever do is try to pour out your life for others trying to serve others. Don't do it, because your life is not going to help them. The one hope the world has, pray the Lord of the harvest, and that He would send out laborers who would lose their life, and will just die, because in the place of death they become the instruments through which God can pour Life through them. Until then, they are going to come up with all the natural talent, and all their bright ideas, and all their programs, and they are going to try to work, and help people. It's not going to work. Those servants of God who have an ear for God, and are listening to His voice, who have the authority of God,

that are trusting Him, are also servants who have embraced the cross. They are not only willing to be burned—that's nothing—not only willing to walk a crazy life by new principles—that's nothing—but who take the place voluntarily and willingly, to have their will absorbed in His will, surrendering their all, and dying, that they might live; not their life, but the Life of God. And then God begins to flow through, and will never let up.

Brothers and sisters, I wish I could tell you that God would lay off, and make it easier as you go down the road and get mature. He will not. He works the principle of death. There is no other way He can reach the world. He's got to have dead servants, and He's got to have grains of seeds that have died, and fallen to the ground. We can try to live our stupid little lives, and try to accomplish things, but until we die we aren't going to be used in the great stream of God's redemptive purposes. That's why He prayed, and that's why He said to pray, "Pray for laborers; they are so few; that are willing and daring enough to believe that they are not going to be lost in their death." You don't lose. The safest thing, brothers and sisters, you could ever do is to accept the principle of the cross, and die. He who loses his life will find it, and he that saves his life will lose it. May God work in us these principles! That's not me going out and becoming a martyr, and glorying in suffering, and saying, "I'm going into a place where I get pain." God will work the principle of the cross. You don't have to work it in yourself. It's the doctrine of the divine woodshed!

17

MORE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE WORKERS

Dangers of trying to die to self

I can hear someone thinking something like this, "What do you mean there is a price to pay. There's no cost. Salvation is free. The Christian life is free. There's a cost alright but Christ paid it and it's free to us." That's true. But that's only one side of the truth. I like to express it in these words and say, "Salvation costs us nothing in its reception, but it costs us everything in its out workings." It means death. The cross is more than being rejected by others. That's part of it, a big part of it. When you start following on to know the Lord Jesus in reality, and start lining up with the ways of God, you are going to become a Nazarene. A Nazarene is a rejected person. They called Him a Nazarene. You are going to be a rejected person, living outside the camp. Your principles will be lined up with God's, and that's as far removed from the principles of this world as the sky is removed from the earth. They are contradictions. To line up with the Lord you have to break ranks with the world. You can't have both.

Oswald Chambers made this interesting comment about verses 34-39, "To talk about cost when you are in love with someone is an insult. The point of suffering is what it costs other people – a father, mother, household. If we go on in Jesus, others will suffer, and it costs us pain to see them suffer." It's an interesting approach. He's right. That's

what hurts the most, not that I'm rejected, but my dear mother who rejects me, has lost her son. That's the point; she's the one who suffers. The Christian has to go on with the Lord, and is not hurting. They're the ones hurting, the ones being pained. Their life partners are confused because we have to go on in the Lord. Our hearts are fine because we have the peace of God. They are suffering, and our suffering is to watch their suffering, and to know that there can't be any other way. That's what the rub seems to be.

Matthew 10 is so full of the truth of the cross; almost every place you look it's talking about this truth of the death of self. What I fear is that it might end up a work that we're going to kill the self; a work of the flesh. "I've got to get rid of self. I've got to put it down. I've got to let God live." The temptation might be, "Therefore, we must deny ourselves," and we fall into a very spiritually sounding form of legalism and works and salvation by men; a work of the flesh. It's a tragic thing when the flesh tries to suppress the flesh because it can't be done. When some have caught a ray of truth on the crucified self, they've run to very strange extremes. All you have to do is read a little bit of church history to see this. Over and over again God's people, in an attempt to know God, and in an attempt to live a life holy and pure, and in fellowship with God, and because they've seen that self was in the way, they ran to being ascetic and to self-denial, and they ran to self-mortification in order to be spiritual. They chased after and embraced suffering as a means to be spiritual. In many cases, the suffering that they ran after was incompatible with the plan and purposes of God.

Some have fasted themselves into ill health. They wanted to be spiritual, and they thought to deny themselves, and refuse their body its pleasure, God would be pleased, because they were putting the self down. Others have cast off, with good intentions, the simple comforts of life. If you read some of the early mystics like Madam Guyon, who just went into this self-denial, she used to whip herself, and stick herself with pins, and cut her flesh, because she just didn't want self, and wanted to put the whole thing down, falling from the rule of grace by the rule of law, in order to live by grace. It's a very subtle thing.

I remember when I was at Bible School in Columbia, South Carolina, a man stood up in a testimony meeting and vowed that all the days of his life he would never eat dessert. He was trying to be spiritual. His

heart was so right. He wanted to give up important things for God. Another man stood up and said that he would never get married, and would deny himself a wife for the Lord. An awful lot of the separatism of the fundamentalists today is just pride proudly denying itself in order to be spiritual.

The crucifixion that God speaks of in Matthew 10 and in the balance of scripture is not just a list of don'ts, "I don't do this and I don't do that, and I don't associate with this group and that group," It's not possible. It's a contradiction of terms. Self loves self. All self-denial is a big waste of time. It's like a New Year's resolution. It will not work. A kingdom divided against itself will fall. When Jesus said that, what He intended was to say, and this is the principle, "A kingdom will never be divided against itself. It's foolish. It will fall. Self will never be divided against self. It can't be. So don't be deceived." Self, ego, pride, me, can look awfully spiritual. It sounds right; it can sound good. I've seen not only the ugly side of the self-life in my own life, but there's also a refined side.

Here are things I've picked out of my heart; self-love, self-will, self-indulgence, self-complacency, self-satisfaction, self-confidence, and self-seeking. Anytime you are sensitive, that's yourself. Anytime you are offended by anybody for anything, that's yourself; self-righteousness. There's also a more ugly side of self, and the more ugly side is the beautiful side, and that's what makes it uglier; it's refined and dignified, and it looks spiritual. Not all tears are signs of the working of the Lord in someone's heart. They can be self-induced. I've seen the self preach a message on grace, and then congratulate itself for the way it got the message of grace across. Self can stand up, pray, and sit down, and be satisfied with the way it expressed its words, that people heard it with pleasure. Self is willing to give away all of its possessions if the right people are watching. It's amazing. Self-will can even die, and die proud of its courage and bravery. Self is an amazing thing. When you begin to see self as God sees it, it becomes awfully hard to bear. It's like a thorny weed in your heart.

When you read a verse like Matthew 10:38, *"He who does not take his cross, and follow after Me is not worthy of Me,"* I'm assuming that I'm normal, and some of the things I have experienced, others have experienced. But sometimes we become very impatient with the thorny

weed in our own heart, and in our impatience we become resolved to pull it out, and to get rid of that awful sin. So, we tug and chop at it, and dig it up, and try to pull it out, but it's all in vain, and it never works. Since it's thorny, all that happens is that we get more hurt trying to get rid of that self, and then it pricks us again and again, and the poison goes under our skin. So, we begin to be spiritual, and we pray, and we cry, and we surrender, and we dedicate, and rededicate, and we do everything we can think of, and we struggle, and become more impatient with the old heart. We begin to tear at it again, try to pull it up to get rid of it, and it never works. We only hurt ourselves. There is an enigma there because the Bible says I must be dead to self. The Bible teaches that's the kind of a missionary, a Christian that He wants; one who is crucified to self.

The principle here is not trying to curb your passions, and trying to suppress all of your lusts and desires, and that kind of thing. The first observation is that whatever this means, it is not a work of man. You've got to understand that. It's not by being ascetic or denying yourself anything. You will never deal with self. You might as well give up trying because the more your try, the worse it gets. Your pride is not going away, stubbornness is not going away, and your independence is not going away, especially by trying to chase it away. You aren't going to be able to do it. If it's not a work of man, what is it? It's a work of God. That's a basic truth. It's a work that God is doing right now.

Don't confuse the finished work of God with the process that is going on right now. As far as the finished work is concerned, every Christian is already dead to self, every Christian is already crucified with Christ. That's why Paul could say, *"I'm crucified with Christ."* Now watch. When did Jesus Christ die for your sins? 2000 years ago is part of the answer, but that's not the real answer. The Bible says that He's the lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the earth. When did Jesus Christ die for your sins? It was before the foundation of the earth, before there was anything, Christ died. It's a finished work back there. People say that the Old Testament saints looked forward to the death of Christ. They did not. They looked backward to the death of Christ, because He was already dead. Where? It was in the mind and purposes of God. That's where He was dead. It was necessary what was a fact become a process, and He had to work it out historically. He had to go

through what was already true. He was already dead, but then He had to go through that process on the earth, in history.

Just so, that His death was a fact, His death became a process. I suggest that your death is also a fact, and that doesn't contradict the fact that it's also a process. In the mind and purposes of God, you are crucified with Christ. You are already dead; dead to self, dead to all the drives, all of the propensities, and all of the inward currents of your natural heart. That's a fact. God has called you to rest in the fact that you are already dead in Christ. But just as the Lord Jesus had to work it out in history, unfortunately we, also, are dying daily. We're dead, but we're also dying. We're already dead to sin but we are dying to sin. There is a process going on in our life called "the crucified life", called "death", called "crucifixion", and it's this process that I want you to understand more clearly than anything else you've ever understood. If you can get hold of this principle, you are going to take forward steps in the knowledge of God, and in the knowledge of His word.

How did the Lord Jesus work out the process of His death—by being ascetic; by self-denial; by struggling with all of His wants and desires? No; the record is clear. Jesus had one passion and only one; "I want to please My Father. I want to do the things that please Him; nothing else matters." That was His heart, "Only to please Him; only to satisfy Him. I only want to do His will. That's my meat, and that's my drink, and that's my food." Everything that came into the life of the Lord Jesus, no matter how bitter it was, He just responded, *"Not My will, but Thine be done."* That was His whole drive and passion.

What the Lord is working in our heart is the same drive; that we go after and please Him, and that nothing else matters; that He gets the glory. You might say, "Well, aren't I supposed to be dead to sin?" Yes, you rest in the fact that you are already dead to sin, in the mind and the purposes of God. In Christ Jesus you are identified and crucified with Him. He says, "Rest in the fact that you are dead, and you leave the process to Me. Your only responsibility in the process is to seek My face. I'll work that into your life. As I begin to engineer your life, and bring death into your death, all I'm asking you to do is to say 'Thank You.'" In everything give thanks. Rest in the accomplished death, and seek the face of Christ alone, so that nothing else matters, and you just want to do His will, and leave the process to the Lord who knows how

to break the vessel. We don't. He knows how to perform death, and how to put that seed into the ground where it will bring forth fruit. He'll bring us to the place where we need nothing, and where we feel nothing, and where we desire nothing, we are inconvenienced by nothing, and where we are nothing. There is no other way to get there. He'll bring us to that place, and He'll spare nothing in His bringing us to that place. I just present myself to Him, and all I want is Him. Appropriating His life, I rest in the fact that I'm already dead.

Someone looks at my life and says, "Ed Miller, I can't believe the sin in your life. You're so alive." Ed: "No, I'm not alive; I'm resting in the fact that I'm dead." They say: "What about all that junk in your life?" Ed: "That's God's process, and He's doing a work on it, and it's going to take a little time, but I've got to work out historically what is fact. And God said that as I do that, all I do is seek His face, and say 'Thank You' for everything that comes into my life. He's working that process in me." Therefore, I announce to you, a child of God, that you will have tribulation. By tribulation you must enter into the kingdom. And everyone who lives Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. What He's going to bring into your life I don't know. It might be bitterness, it may be dryness, it may be darkness, and it might be boredom. It's alright; whatever comes in, say "Thank You". It might be bereavement, or rejection, and it might be bondage and captivity; "Thank You." It might be poverty, discouragement, confusion or pain. It might be physical pain, or it might be mental pain. "Thank You, Thank You. Thank You." Maybe He'll bring loneliness in. He'll allow your sin, and it will be shamed.

Whatever it is, He's going to bring you to death. He's going to bring you to a death that being ascetic, or self-denial, could not bring you to. You could stand there jumping up and down on a bed of nails, and crawl on Bermuda shorts through broken glass from here to China, you are not going to deal with self. Only God can deal with self. Only God knows what to put in your cup, and at what time, and what mixture to give it, that you might drink it in grace. You are going to the cross. You are already dead. But you have got to work out historically what has been accomplished in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is going to work out the fact of your crucifixion. It never pleases God when we strive against the flesh. We're not supposed to do that. That's an enemy of the gospel. Dealing with the flesh is beyond our

strength, and beyond our endurance. There is none of us who are sufficient to deal with the flesh. It's the same attitude Jesus had toward His Father, "Nothing matters; only You."

A true worker wants only the Lord; hates everything else

Let me try to clear up a practical question, and try to state it in simple words, "What is my part and what am I supposed to do when self seems to be so big, so Goliath in my life? Great day! Can't He hurry up and deal with it? There just seems to be so much sin in my life. How can I quit, and how can I stop?" Let me state it in a shocking way first, and then try to explain what I mean by the shocking way. Man's part is easy. Love God, and hate everything else. Isn't that easy? Look at Matthew 10:34 again, *"Don't think I've come to send peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."* When you read verse 37, it's not too tough, *"He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."* Luke is the one who gets tough, talking about the same story. Luke 14:26, *"Unless you hate your father,"* not love him less, but hate him, and hate your mother, and hate your son and daughter, and then Luke adds, *"...your brothers, your sisters, your wife, and your own self."* He uses the word "hate".

What does it mean to hate your wife? Jesus said, "If you don't hate them, you can't be His disciple." Do you hate your children? Let me explain what that means. I read many of the commentators on this particular passage and most of them try to weave around it by saying, "He doesn't mean 'hate'. What He means is love. It's a comparative love. In other words, you are to love God so much that your love for your children will look like hate, because you love God so much. I'm to love my wife but not as much as I love God." I don't know if that is accurate or not. I've never been able to make that my own.

Let me give you what I think God intended. If this isn't real to you, then just scrap it. In order to make it clear, let me give a few foolish illustrations. Let's say that you had in your yard a pile of old, oily rags next to a tree. And one day the Lord, deciding to test your love, to purify you, to deal with self, and to work out historically what is already fact, sends a test into your life, and you wake up in the morning, look out, and behold, all your oily rags are gone out of your life forever.

Would you have a hard time adjusting to that? Would it be a problem for you? I'd probably thank Him for cleaning up my yard. I didn't want those old, oily rags anyway. I didn't like them, and wasn't even friends with them. I hated those old rags.

When God removes something you hate, it doesn't bother you. If you have old garbage out there, broken dishes or old shoes, and He calls you to surrender those things, you'd say, "No problem, Lord. Look how surrendered I am. Take my broken dishes, take my old shoes." because you hate them. That doesn't mean you have a vengeance against them. It just means that you don't love them at all, and that you hate them. I think that's what the Spirit of God is intending here; that we are to have the same passion that Jesus had, "I want You alone, and nothing else matters. I hate everything else. Take it if you want to. It will make no difference, any more than if you took some oily old rags or some broken dishes or some old shoes,"; an attitude toward everything, no matter how innocent that thing is, it's got to be hated. That is, we are to look to Christ alone so that nothing else matters, and if the Lord were to touch anything else, it would not interrupt our rest, our rejoicing, our fellowship or our praise in the least iota.

Jesus was ready and willing to lose anything, and to lose everything at any time the Father wanted to touch it, because all He wanted was the Father's will; not a house, just the Father's will; not gold, just the Father's will; not a job, but just the Father's will; not children and a family, but just the Father's will. That doesn't mean that He didn't have those other things, but it meant that if the Father wanted to change courses, it was okay because all He wanted was the Father's will. Are you so related to God that everything else can be called hate**?** Are you so related to God that if He were to take anything out of your life, it wouldn't affect you at all, and you'd just keep going on saying, "Thank You, Lord, whatever pleases You." That's where He is bringing us; that's what He's working out historically. Jesus longs for those kind of workers. Pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth those who understand the principle of the cross, and will just say 'thank You' for everything that He works in us.

Don't try to die. You are already dead. Just follow on to know the Lord. You'll find out you are dying because He is going to work it in your life. Don't worry about that. Don't try to suppress the flesh. Just

follow on to know Jesus, and everything that comes into your heart, and into your life, just say "thank You". I realize what I'm saying is easy to say. It's easy to just say, "Okay, whatever comes into your life, now you just say 'thank You' and 'praise God - hallelujah" but it's another thing in life, isn't it? If someone misrepresents, or lies about, or spreads rumors or gossips, God is going after self. He's got His arrow pulled back, and He's going after self. You attitude is to be, "Thank You, Lord. I could never deal with that thing. Thank You and keep on working. I can feel the old self, and it's getting mad and angry, and it's rebelling, and it can't stand being opposed like this. You've allowed this, and I'm going to shut up. Thank You, Lord. I just thank You. Keep at it." So, then He reaches out, and maybe touches something physical, either by a storm or by flame, or by sickness or by some other reason, maybe a poor investment or just hard times. You say, "Thank You, Lord." You are counted a fool for Christ. "Thank You, Lord." That's easy to say until you are slapped on the other cheek, until someone takes your coat, or forces you to go a mile. Then it becomes another story altogether.

I can stand up here and say, "No matter what comes in I hate my wife." Let God try to touch her, and I'll see how much I really love my wife. But this is the goal. That's the process He's working in us. So, ideally, when I am dead, when He begins to work it out in the process, we'll say, "Thank You"; sweet peace all the time because God is ruling our life. That's why it's so important that we set our hearts on the Lord only, and hate with a spiritual hatred everything else. If approval goes, friends go, opportunities go, family goes, and if our possessions go, nothing is gone because we have Him. We have a long way to go, don't we? He's working the process. Let God work death in you; don't try to die. I beseech you, don't do that. God will take care of the process. You rest in the fact.

The true worker just faithfully and privately lives, and are just themselves

Matthew 10: 40-42, *"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive*

a righteous man's reward. Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you that he shall not lose his reward."

In order to get the full impact of this last principle, remember He is bringing the truth of chapter 10 to a climax. When you read the chapter you think verses 38 & 39 are the climax. Great day, when you come to death, you lose your life, you find your life and lose it, you say, "Verses 40-42 is anti-climactic. All you have in this passage is somebody receiving a prophet, someone receiving a righteous man, and giving a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord. What is climactic about that?" I would expect a missionary chapter to end up, "Let's go out and work for the Lord, evangelize, be dynamos for Him, shake the world, win our generation, saturate the community, get everybody saved, and we'll plant churches all over the place." He doesn't even mention that. He sends them out, and never even tells them to do anything like that, because those are not the spiritual principles that are beating in His own breast. He has plenty of those kind of workers. He doesn't want any more of them. He's looking for something more profound and spiritual than that.

Let me state the principle, and then illustrate it to see how it's a climax. The real worker just lives, just faithfully lives. The ministry Christ is burdened for is not a public ministry, and it's not platform stuff. It's every day behind the scenes kind of living. It's private. He says to pray for someone who is willing to give a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord; not someone who will give up his job, his ambitions, his family, and go to some far corner of the world to pave a path in the jungle to reach some Aborigine tribe. He doesn't mention that. He said, *"Oh pray. The laborers are so few. Isn't there anybody to give a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord, and to receive a prophet? Pray for someone to receive a righteous man."* What is He saying?

Wouldn't it be a humbling thing if someone were to come to you and say, "You've been saved for twenty years now? What has your ministry been in the Lord?" And you said, "Well, one time there were some children playing with my children, and one of them was thirsty, so I gave him a glass of water. I remember that. And then another time there was a righteous man, and I received him. He ate at our house. And that's it." You might say, "You aren't working for the Lord, are

you? You aren't laboring for Jesus, are you?" I'll tell you what, this isn't anti-climactic. This is climactic and consummation. This is crescendo, and the goal of the whole chapter. Jesus is looking for, and asking us to pray for people who will just be themselves.

There's a song we used to sing in Bible School, and the refrain went like this: "If just a cup of water is placed within your hands, then just a cup of water is all that He demands." I like that. I think that's the emphasis here. We get the wrong idea about missions. We think about the full time worker, Bible teachers, pastors, missionaries and people who have all kinds of special ministries, singers and musicians and all of that. But verse 41, *"He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet."* You might say, "Oh, I want to be the prophet. It's more fun being Elijah than the widow of Zarephath. I'd rather be Elijah. How exciting it's going to be for Elijah. Can you picture Elijah when he stands before the judgment seat of Christ? He was the one mighty in prayer, and trusted God to close up the heavens for three and a half years so that it wouldn't rain. He was the one that was mighty in faith, and was provided for by a raven. He's the one that was the instrument to bring a child back to life again. Boy, I'd love to be Elijah. What a channel! Wouldn't you like to be a prophet of God like that? What rewards he is going to get!"

Look at verse 41 again, *"He who receives a prophet shall receive a prophet's rewards."* You might say, "That widow wasn't where the action was. She wasn't on the front lines or on the platform. She's behind the pots and pans, and was with the broom and the apron. She was a mother, and she had to stay home." Yes, but because she had an influence in the prophet's life, everything the prophet will be rewarded for, she'll be rewarded for. She's going to receive a prophet's reward. In other words, Elijah will not get one more reward than the widow of Zarephath who received the prophet." Do you see what He's saying? He's saying to be open and be faithful in where you are, and what He's given you, and then He'll use you as His channel. Those are the laborers that He longs for. Everyone you influence, you'll share in their reward, and they will share in your reward.

Usually theologians say they just have the five crowns, and they divide it up this way; there is the soul winner's crown, and the pastor's crown, and all that stuff. Don't get into that. Don't draw sharp lines of

demarcation between the rewards in the Bible, because they overlap. I don't know if I'm going to be rewarded for any of these tapes, or any of this ministry, but every one of you have had some part in my life. If I am going to get any rewards, you are getting them, too, because you are open, and have received the word of God. If in any way you have ever prayed for anyone, you are going to have a part in any of their rewards. You can't begin to see the great rewards. He is saying, "You don't have to be Elijah. Just be yourself; be open and be thankful."

He closes with that great passage, "I have such a burden that people would go out with my authority, that there just be someone to trust Me for everything, who has spiritual eyes, and are discerning the ways of God, and seeing Christ. I'm praying for those who are dead. I can use them." He's praying for someone who would just be themselves, and not try to get some great ministry, and when the opportunity arises, just give a glass of water in Jesus' name. That's what was on His heart. If we miss that, we've not only missed the boat but we've missed the ocean. We've missed everything. We're so far away from that. Pray the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers.

Section III

(People respond to what Jesus said and did
Chapters 11 & 12)

The Responses

1

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

THE RESPONSE FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Christ can't be separated from what He says and does

In Matthew 5-7 He says something, and that's the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 8-10 He did something, and that's the great miracle section. Now we're beginning 11&12 and how people responded to what He said and did. After we get through that, the Spirit of God takes us right back again. In Matthew 13 He says something; those are your great parables, and He begins to explain the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 14 He does something; that's another great miracle chapter where He walks on the water. And then in Matthew 15 – 16:20 people respond to what He said and did. You see where we are in our study. He's already said something, and He's already done something, and now we're going to begin people's response to what He said and did.

Let me make a couple of observations about all of these responses in general, looking at the section as a whole in chapters 11 & 12. When these people, with the exception of Jesus Himself and God the Father, responded to what He said, or to what He did, they were responding to the person of Christ Himself. Christ cannot be separated from what He says, and what He does. People's attitude toward what He does and

says is really their attitude toward God Himself. A person's attitude toward the word of God, for example, will tell you what their attitude is toward the Lord, toward God whose word it is. Nobody can doubt the book of God, and trust God. You can't do it because they are one; they are the same. This is His word, and your attitude toward His word and work reveals your attitude toward the Lord Himself.

Sometimes it gets a little confusing in our mind. We want to live right, and enjoy the Lord, and understand the precepts of the Christian life, and sometimes it gets mystical, and we say, "Now, how can I trust Jesus? I want to trust Him. How do I trust the Lord?" Well, here's a simple way, trust His word. Every time you claim a promise in His word, and every time you, by His grace, obey a command, follow a precept, take a warning, what you are doing in terms of the written word, you are also doing in terms of the Lord. It doesn't have to be vague. You don't have to say, "I don't know what it means to trust God." It means to follow His word, and to respond to His word. For this reason we need to be careful of our critical spirits, because when we hold in suspicion what God does, either in our lives or someone else's life, it's also sort of a slam on the Lord Himself. We're holding Him in suspicion. That's the first observation. In these responses, though it looked like they were just responding to His word or miracles, they were responding to Him. That was the revelation of their heart.

Outward response is not always an index of inward

The second observation is very simple and clear, and He calls attention to it, especially when He gets on the Pharisees' case. That is that the outward response is not always the index of the inward response. In other words, you could respond on the outside in a certain way, and that may not be at all what you are really responding like on the inside. In this case, and in all of these cases He bypasses the outward response, and He goes right down to the depths to the heart, and pulls out the inward response. There has been an awful lot of outward response, like the kiss of Judas, for example. There's an outward response, but as you know, it came from a very hateful heart, and it wasn't an indication of his real heart. There is a lot to learn from this. We need to be real before God. Tears don't always mean a contrite heart. We can have alligator tears, and not really repent before our God. Just because we

use expressions like, "Praise the Lord," and, "Hallelujah," and, "Thanks be to God," doesn't necessarily mean in our hearts we're praising the Lord. Anybody can say those words, "Bless God," but do you really mean that from your heart? We need to be cautious—not suspicious—about outward responses; our own and others.

When we come to chapter 13, and begin the study of the parables, the first parable we'll look at is the parable of the sower. Remember the seed that fell on rocky soil? Here's what God says about that, *"Hearing the word, immediately they received it with joy."* There is an outward response. Outwardly it looked like they were gobbling it up, and it looked good. They received it with joy. That was the initial response. But you can't bank on outward response. The Bible says, *"And because there was no root there, it withered and it died."* I remember coming back from many Bible conferences, and I'd be all excited. It looked like there was a great reception, and like to human eyes that their hearts were open. Maybe and maybe not. All I want to call attention to is the outward is not always true as to what is going on inside. There's a whole world of difference, and sometimes in the heart it's a million miles away from the outside. Fact is, that's the heart and core of hypocrisy. If that weren't so, there wouldn't be hypocrisy. That's what He's warning us against; an outward response.

Table grace is a ritual in our family. We want to teach the kids to be thankful, and over and over again we just recite the same old words, and sometimes my heart feels so cold. Saying thank you doesn't necessarily mean your heart is thankful. Sometimes we say, "You can tell by the look on somebody's face." Be careful about that. You can't tell by the look on somebody's face. You can't read into the heart. A person may look outwardly cold and unmoved, very strict and stern, and yet God may be doing a wonderful work inside that soul. Don't judge by the outward, "Oh, he looked cold, and looked like he snubbed me, and looked like he didn't care." On the other hand, that which is outwardly warm and receptive may not really be the heart either. Sometimes I've found in my own heart I'd be sympathizing with someone, listening to their problems, and consoling them, and in my heart I'd be saying, "Oh, I wish they would go away. I don't want to hear this anymore. I just wish they'd leave." We can really be deceptive outwardly and inwardly. He called attention to the inward responses.

Wherever Jesus was, there was riot or revival

Wherever Jesus was, speaking or working, there was always a response, and usually it was outright rejection. Sometimes it was glad acceptance, but you'll never find a case where it was neutral, where they just said, "I'll take it or leave it." One commentator worded it this way, "Wherever Jesus was, acting or speaking, there was riot or revival." It's for this reason; Jesus is the truth. Man has accepted the lie, and every time Jesus is there, it contradicts the lie. It always runs across the grain. Every time Jesus did anything or said anything, it stroked the cat the wrong way. There were only two possible responses; turn the cat around, or else the cat would arch its back, hiss, spit and claw its way out. That's all it could do. Jesus always went across the grain. That was true when He walked on the earth in His physical body, but it's also true now. Every time He lives or says anything in our life, people are going to respond in some way. You'll know that's true if you begin to live a full Christ. If you go on in the knowledge of the Lord, you are going to be greatly hated, or you are going to be greatly loved. Both of those are true, but there will never be an in between. The idea of that human attitude, "Take it or leave it," does not apply to the Christian. You can't have an in between attitude.

As the Lord Jesus was hated by the majority, and loved by the few, if you are going on in Him in reality, you will also be hated by the majority, and loved by the few, but you are going to find this, that the love of the few is so precious and so wonderful, that it compensates ten thousand times for all those who hate you. You won't even miss it. Let them hate you. For every ten thousand that hate you, if you find one that has opened their heart in terms of the Lord, it's well worth it.

So, responses are directed toward a person, there's a difference between inward and outward responses, and when Jesus is really present, in word, or in action and deed, then there is going to be a response. What that means practically is this; if there is no response to your life or your ministry, then the presence of the Lord is absent**,** because every time the presence of the Lord is there, there is a response. There has to be, because He's truth, and that goes against the grain. It's a very heart searching thing to have response.

Matthew 11:1-15, *"It came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John in prison heard the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, and said to Him, 'Are you the expected One or shall we look for someone else?' And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see. The blind received sight, and the lame walk. The lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them, and blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.' And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John. 'What did you go out in the wilderness to look at; a reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see; a man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in king's palaces. But why did you go out; to see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you." Truly, I say to you, among those born of women, there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force, for all the prophets in the law prophesied until John. If you care to accept it, he himself IS Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"*

Struggling faith versus unbelief

The Spirit of God could have dipped down anywhere in that marvelous life of John the Baptist and recorded it, but He dips down on this occasion in a very low spot in John's life. John, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, has the response of struggling faith. It will help us see what struggling faith is, by looking at a little background of this. At this point John the Baptist was confused and puzzled. His life and ministry was almost over. He was pretty mixed up, and couldn't put it altogether. Remember that John the Baptist was a rugged man; a man's man. He lived apart from all the easiness and luxuries of life out in the desert. Some believed that he belonged to that strict sect called the Essenes who lived in the desert in a very ascetic life. He reminded you

of Elijah, the way he dressed, the things he ate and his whole appearance. He lived in a self-denying way, and dressed in what we call burlap. It was a camel's hair skin coat and a leather girdle. He ate wild honey and locust for food. He was a rugged man, and a true herald of the Lord Jesus. John the Baptist did not fear the face of any man. He had a tough message, was a tough man, and had guts and boldness. He dared to say it like it was. He preached a lot about the judgment of God. He talked about chaff burning with fire, the ax laying to the root of the trees—the judgment of God. He called men to repentance. He stood up against the religious leaders of his day, and called them "a brood of vipers and a den of snakes".

Matthew 11:2, *"Now when John imprisoned heard.."* This finds him in prison. How did he get there? John had a passion for purity, and a hatred for sin. Because of his holy hatred for sin, there was a day that he went right into the oval office, right up to King Herod, and rebuked him to his face for adultery. King Herod had taken his brother Philip's wife, and John knew that was wrong, that it was sin, and he went right up to him, and rebuked him in the name of the Lord. Because of that he was thrown in prison. It wasn't long after this that he was decapitated, and it was in the cause of righteousness.

As he was in prison he began to meditate on the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. That's why the Holy Spirit puts it first. As he meditated, it wasn't making sense to him. John had taken a rugged stand for the Lord, and had gotten himself thrown into prison, and was ready to die for righteousness sake, and the One that he announced, the One that he pointed out to the people, and said, *"Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world,"* the One he called, *"The Bridegroom,"* and the One he said, *"Must increase while he decreased,"* the One of whom he said, *"I'm not the light; He's the light that lights every man that cometh into the world,"* this One, Jesus, didn't lift one little finger to help him when he was thrown into prison.

The Bible doesn't say what went through his mind. Maybe he thought, "Sure, it's easy for Him to say, *'I was in prison and you visited me not,'* but now I am in prison, and where is Jesus? He hasn't come to visit me, and didn't write me a letter. He didn't even send any of His friends. He hasn't lifted a finger to defend me. He didn't mention me in His

preaching or teaching. It seems as if He doesn't care about me while I was out preparing a way before Him and calling men to repentance."

It's this that the Spirit of God calls attention to, and as He often does in the Bible. He takes the weakest situations and circumstances of His saints, and then He hangs them out for the world to see in every generation. Actually, it's full of comfort, because you realize that these men were real men with real passions just like we have. Looking out of those prison bars, the great prophet began to doubt and to entertain fears, and great questions began to well up in his soul, "Did I make a mistake? Do I have the right One? Is this Jesus really Messiah, or do we look for somebody else? Did I miss the boat?" Not only was he confused at the Lord's apparent unconcern for him, especially in light of his own personal loyalty toward the Lord, but he also was confused about the Lord's mission and ministry.

Listen to a commentator called Lange, "John felt the Lord was too slow and unostentatious in His manifestation and the true nature of His kingdom." Let me translate that in English. When John preached, *"Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"* he really believed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He believed that it was right there, and John was puzzled about the suffering of Christ, and the glory of Christ. All the prophets were, but in a special way, John was. He saw Him as the Lamb of God. He knew He had to die, and that He had to be slain, but he also saw the great glory of God, and that He was going to judge and fan His floor, and gather the chaff, and throw them in the fire. He knew there was a judgment, as well.

Many commentators call John the Baptist, "The last of the Old Testament prophets," because he closed the door on their old system of the law, and introduced Christ. Let me give an illustration. Some scriptures spoke of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, and there were other scriptures that spoke about the great glory of Christ when He would set up His kingdom. From the prophets vantage point, as he looked at that prophetically, the two mountain peaks appeared as one, and so they wrote sometimes in the same verse about the suffering of Christ, and the glory that should be revealed, and they couldn't put it together, because they didn't see in that valley that there was going to be over two thousand years in between His suffering and His glory. They didn't realize in between was that great age of grace in which we

are living now; the church age. They just saw the suffering of Christ and the glory of Christ, and it was confusing to them, and was confusing to John the Baptist. .

John seemed impatient as he was in prison. He wanted something to happen. The Lord Jesus was healing the lame, healing the blind, raising the dead, and John understood the great prophesies of scripture. He was the last of the prophets, and his attitude was, and I don't mean to be hard on him, "If You are going to suffer, then suffer. If You are going to reign, then reign, but do something. Get on with it. If You are Messiah, show Your hand. It's Your turn to play Your cards. Do something. Here we are being subjected by Rome. Overthrow the Roman government, and throw down the Herods, and throw down the Caesars, and turn over imperial Rome. If you want to set up a kingdom, then set it up. You sent me out to preach the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and look where I've found myself; in prison and ready to die. And where are You? You haven't even come to see me. You could do a miracle. You are raising the dead out there. How about knocking down these bars, setting me free, vindicating my cause, and setting Your child free?" For these reasons and maybe some others that I don't know, John was struggling in his faith.

John has his own friends, and they came to visit him while he was in prison, and he says, "Hey, listen, go on out and ask him point blank, 'Are you really the One or not?' Expect a straight answer. Go ask Him if He's the Messiah, if He is the Christ." I want to point out that in the heart of John there is no disloyalty. There's just struggling faith, and in this, he represents all of us who have had or have struggling faith. I don't know how you feel about this, but I often thank the Lord that I was not alive when Jesus walked on the earth. I would have had a hard time. If somebody came up before me in the flesh on Main Street, and said they were God, and then started doing some miracles, I'd look for the trick. I'd say, "He's deceiving me somehow. I just don't believe this is God," especially if you knew his mother and father and family, and growing up you knew all about him. I'd have more than struggling faith. I might have unbelief.

Let me give you the difference between struggling faith and unbelief, because this is at the heart of what is being taught here. Struggling faith and unbelief differ in this; in the will, and that's the only difference.

Struggling faith is willing to believe and wants to believe. It doesn't want to doubt. It wants to know for sure. Unbelief doesn't want to believe. Unbelief just comes out and says, "No, I reject it. I don't want it, and I refuse it." I get much comfort out of a passage like this because it gives tremendous hope when you have struggling faith. We who are weak, and have questions and doubts, are often perplexed and confused, and things seem to blend together, and we aren't able to distinguish one thing from another, and we're sometimes even depressed because God doesn't live up to our expectations; that's where John was. This was a real man with a real problem—struggling faith. He expected God to do one thing, and God wasn't coming through. There's comfort in that because there is hope for struggling faith.

Jesus is very tender with struggling faith

I want you to notice this, that Jesus was very tender. John had all these doubts and questions, and maybe some hard thoughts about Jesus, but Jesus was very tender. He was not severe, and didn't get angry. If you look through the whole Bible at all the different people who had struggling faith, not one time did Jesus rebuke them. He never got angry at that. He was tender. I like to word it this way, that Jesus regards struggling faith as faith, therefore, struggling faith is very precious to the Lord. Struggling faith has a will to believe, and that's the heart and core, and nerve center of faith. You say, "I want to believe," and that's faith; just the wanting to. "I don't know if I want to. I'm willing to be willing," is faith; that's the heart and core of faith. We sometimes look at struggling faith and think, "Oh, that's unbelief; wicked, dirty, no good for nothing inconsiderate rotten unbelief." Not necessarily. Jesus looks at struggling faith, and He goes down to the heart of it to the blood of your soul, and when He sees a desire to believe, He calls that faith, and gives you full credit for the whole thing, just as if you never doubted at all. Jesus can accept struggling faith, because it's really faith. In its heart it has a will to believe.

We need not air our doubts before the world

John had doubts. It's not wrong to have doubts. The question is not if you have doubts. Every honest Christian has doubts. Some people don't admit it. The question is not if you have doubts, but what do you

do with your doubts when you have them? Look at Matthew 11:2 & 3, *"When John in prison heard of the works of Christ he sent word by his disciples, and said to him, 'Are you the expected One or shall we look for someone else?'"* What did John do with his doubts? He sent them to Jesus. There's the will of faith, taking your doubts to Christ. Let me encourage you at this point that when you have doubts, and you will, and when questions begin to cloud your mind, and they will, and when you get confused and perplexed, and you will, confusion and perplexity is a mighty weapon for good in the hand of God to crowd you to Christ. He uses those things for you. When you get those questions, don't air them before the world. Bring them to Jesus. Send them straight on to the Lord, as John did.

Let me give a quick Old Testament verse in this regard. Psalm 73, a psalm of Asaph. Asaph, in my opinion, is the Old Testament John the Baptist because he's just all full of doubts. Matter of fact in one place he said, *"Surely in vain have I washed my hands and made myself pure."* He is saying that he got saved for nothing, and it wasn't worth it. He looked around at all the ungodly, and how they prospered, and he just said, "I'm full of doubts." Now watch; he had great wisdom. He also wrote this verse, Psalm 73:15, *"If I should speak thus,"* that is I have a lot of doubts, *"But if I should speak it, behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Thy people."* That is a marvelous thing. You are going to have doubts, but ask God for the grace to keep your mouth shut about them, or you will betray the generation of God's people. You are going to lead the weak astray. When you have doubts bring them to Jesus. Don't bring them to men. Don't vent them before the world. Vent them before the Lord, and only Him.

Then he writes later on in that Psalm, *"It was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God."* You are going to have doubts, and it's going to trouble you. If you air them before men you are going to betray God's people. You will be troubled until you come into the sanctuary of God. And then, of course, He'll set you free. Very often you are going to find that it's on these very occasions, in darkness, confusion and bewilderment, when the Lord lets you sit alone in your prison, and it looks like He doesn't care, and you are by yourself for His sake, and He doesn't come to visit you, and doesn't seem to care, that it's going to be those experiences that are the very vehicles that will carry you to the Lord. Over and over again you'll find that's true.

Struggling faith needs revelation of Christ in scriptures

Notice the answer that the Lord Jesus gave in Matthew 11:4, *"And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see,'"* and then He quotes a scripture, *"The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them and blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me."* John had a problem. John had struggling faith. He had the will to believe. How does God meet struggling faith? Well, there's one thing right on the surface that He does. "Are you the One?" He could have said, "Yes," and it would have been all settled. But He didn't say yes. Instead, in His marvelous way, He lays down a great principle of life. He reveals Himself through the scriptures. That's what you need when you have struggling faith; the revelation of Christ through the scriptures.

Jesus quoted the top half of the bottom half of a prophesy. It started in Isaiah 35, and went all the way through the middle of the chapter 40. It's a great prophesy. One day somebody came to John the Baptist and said, "Who are you? Are you the Christ, the Messiah?" John goes to this prophesy, Isaiah 40:3, and says, *"No, I'm not Him. I'm the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight."* I'm not him; I'm a prophesy. He prophesied my coming, and it's the same prophesy verse 10 gives you. John took the top half of that prophesy, and made this comment, "I know who I am. I'm the one Isaiah wrote about. I know who I am." Then later John gets his own doubts, and he comes to Jesus and says, "Who are You?" Jesus did exactly what John did, but He quoted the bottom half of the same prophesy, Isaiah 35:5, *"The blind see, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up."* Here's what He was saying, "John, do you really think this is about you? You know who you are, and you know who I am." There's a great truth there. If you know who you are, you'll know who I am.

When you are sitting in your prison all alone, and God doesn't seem to care, and then you remember who you are, a child of God, redeemed by the blood, on the way to heaven in union with Christ, and filled with the Spirit of God, and sealed to the day of redemption, it won't be long before you know who He is. If you know who you are, you will know

who He is. That's what Jesus did. He took the word of God, because that's the only thing that's ever going to meet struggling faith, and through the word of God He gave a revelation of Himself, and started with what was known, and then He moved toward what was unknown, which, by the way, is a great principle of teaching. Any passage would have touched John's heart, but in a special way, quoting from that passage made a mighty impact on the soul of John.

Matthew 11:7-14, I promise I'll spread darkness on this, because I have so little light on it. I read some of these verses, and I don't know what it's talking about. Look at verse 12, for example, *"From the days of John the Baptist until now the king of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force."* I don't know what that means. I have a few ideas about verse 11 but I don't even think I'm right, *"I say to you among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."* I don't know what that means either. It might mean privilege; that John had the greatest privilege of all the prophets; he not only foresaw Him, but he is the actual one who introduced Him. Maybe He's saying that you have a greater privilege as a child of God because he not only lives in your heart, but you have the life of Jesus in your soul. Maybe He means that. I'm not even dead sure about verses 8 & 9, about the reed and soft clothing.

I know one thing, that the Spirit of God gave us Matthew 11:7, *"As these were going away…,"* as who was going away? It was the disciples of John. Jesus waited until they went away and went back with the message, and begins to pour out one of the greatest complimentary passages ever spoken about any man. I have no idea what it means, but I'll tell you one thing, if Jesus ever said about you, that no greater person was ever born to a woman than you, that would be really something, wouldn't it? This is Christ speaking, and He is saying, verse 11, *"Among those born to women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist."*

What's the point? Jesus said, "John is not a reed shaking in the wind and he's not a sissy dressed in soft cloths. John is a prophet, and more than a prophet, better than all the prophets. The fact is that nobody born to women is greater than John." That is some estimation. Now watch—John never knew that. He was sitting in his cell, and he went

to the grave not knowing how Jesus felt about him. This is a marvelous revelation of the heart of Christ. Jesus is telling how much John means, and how great in His estimation this prophet is. Meanwhile he's sitting in his cell, "Is this the right one? What's going on? Why am I sitting here? Why doesn't someone come see me?" And yet the Spirit of God, for important reasons, pulls the veil aside and says, "I want you to take a look into the heart of Christ. Look at the thoughts of love He has towards this man."

When confused about His ways and methods, you can still trust Him

May I suggest, by way of application, because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, that there will be times in our lives when we hold His love and wisdom in suspicion, and when His dealings with us will not be according to our expectation, and figuratively we'll be sitting in our cold, damp cell wondering what in the world is going on, where God is, and why He doesn't rescue. Meanwhile, God will be having some pleasant thoughts about you, thinking about you in high terms, and you may never even know it. It's not important to know it. And that's why He said in Matthew 11:6, *"Tell John, 'Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.'"* Just trust.

When you are confused about His ways and His methods, you can still trust Him. Don't hold His love in suspicion. He loves you more than any tongue can tell, or any pen can write. There is no possibility of expressing how much He loves you. The weakest thought God has toward you breaks the back of words. John becomes the illustration of all mankind, that first response of struggling faith. We're going to have struggling faith, but if it has in it the will to believe, we're not going to be rejected by the Lord. He accepts struggling faith. Let's not stumble in it. Take your doubts to Jesus. Bring them to the Lord. If you know God, you don't need to know why; you don't need to know anything. God gave us this as a picture, so that when we're feeling lonely and full of self-pity, and feeling sorry for ourselves, we can remember John the Baptist. *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* We're going to have struggling faith. Just don't have unbelief.

There was a father of an epileptic who prayed one time, *"I believe; help Thou my unbelief."* The word "unbelief" there was used in the sense of struggling faith. It's always safe to pray the epileptic's prayer. When things are all confused, just come to Him, "Lord, I believe. Help Thou my unbelief." I can't go beyond that in these first fifteen verses, because they are a puzzle to me. I've read all the dispensational approaches and all, closing one age and opening another, and my head swims in that. But at least this much I know. We can trust Him. Let's not be stumbling over Him. He does everything right

The law of multiple fulfillment in scripture

Matthew 11:14&15, *"And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Before we leave this section I do want to call attention to one more principle. I'm going to make four columns on the blackboard, and try to identify what's in each column. The first column has the word "Malachi" in it. The Old Testament ended with a promise from the book of Malachi. Malachi 4:5&6, *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord."* The believing remnant expected that God would send Elijah. Some rabbis interpreted it literally, saying that Elijah never died, and he was caught up in a chariot of fire to meet the Lord, and that God is literally going to send back that same Elijah; in person. Others interpreted it figuratively and said, "No, it's not the same Elijah. That's a figure of speech. The Lord is going to send another messenger in the spirit of Elijah, in the power of Elijah, in the character of Elijah. A person like Elijah will appear." Well, time went on.

In the second column we write the word "John the Baptist". When Gabriel announced the birth of John to his father Zachariah, the priest, Gabriel quoted Malachi 4:5&6. He said that the birth of John was the fulfillment of those scriptures. It's recorded in Luke 1:17, Gabriel is speaking of John the Baptist and his birth, *"And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make a people ready and prepared for the Lord."* He applied it to John. And here in our chapter, Matthew 11:14, the Lord Jesus applied it to John, *"If you care to accept it, he*

himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Time went on.

In the third column on the board I'm writing the words "The death of John the Baptist". The record of how he died is in Matthew 14. We won't take time to look at it; you remember the story. He died a martyr's death because of his boldness. He condemned Herod for the sin of adultery. He was imprisoned, finally beheaded, and entered the glory of the Lord, numbered among those who were faithful unto death. Time went on.

In the fourth column I'm just writing the word "Jesus". To better identify it you might also include the word "transfiguration". The Lord Jesus preached after the death of John, at the transfiguration. Matthew 17:9-11 records it. After the transfiguration the Lord Jesus said, *"Make sure you don't tell anyone until I've risen from the dead. His disciples asked Him saying, 'Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first.'"* I want to call attention to his answer. *"And He answered and said, 'Elijah is coming, and will restore all things."* Do you see the seeming conflict? In one breath the Lord Jesus said that John the Baptist is Elijah, and the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. Then, after John died, the Lord Jesus still spoke of a day when Elijah would come. He spoke of it as future. He said, *"Elijah is coming, and will restore all things."* Did John fulfill that prophecy or is Elijah yet to come? The answer is, "Yes on both counts." John fulfilled the prophecy, and the prophecy is yet to be fulfilled.

I believe this principle will greatly aid in your study of the Bible, especially the prophetic sections. The theologians call it "the law of multiple fulfillment". Prophecy is as a seed growing. It's fulfilled over and over and over again. Let me give another example, and then come back to the principle. Will there be a literal antichrist some day? The answer is yes. But listen to 1John 2:18, *"Little children, it is the last hour, and just as you've heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen. From this we know it's the last hou*r." Antichrist will come, but before he comes there will be many antichrists. Just so, there will be many Elijah's. Certainly there is going to be a time when it's finally fulfilled, but until that day many messengers of the Lord will come, many forerunners of Christ in the power and spirit of Elijah. John was one, and there will be many others.

God intends that we find the principles that are in these prophecies, and that they are repeated increasingly over and over again. That's why in the study of the prophecies and eschatology there is so much confusion today, because every age sees those prophecies fulfilled, and yet He still doesn't return. Every age has its earthquakes, its wars, and rumors of wars, its pestilences, its famines, and the heart of men growing colder. As the day draws near I'm certain these things will be on the increase. We see multiple fulfillment over and over and over again. In order to make this practical, let me make a couple of suggestions. First of all, look for the present principle in prophesy. God has not written His Bible that we might be educated as to future events. He's not concerned that we know about the future. The reason He tells us about the future is because that information contains present principles that help us trust Jesus now. God doesn't want us looking off into the future, any more than He wants us looking to the past. He's a present tense God, and He's called us to look in simple faith now to Him.

The second thing we should learn is not to be dogmatic as far as prophesy is concerned, because there is multiple fulfillment. People who try to read current events into prophesy often get into a lot of trouble. They talk about advance knowledge, and Israel becoming a nation, and all of the turmoil taking place in the Middle East now, and about the European common market, and the computer on the rise, and the numbering systems, and money systems. It's all guesswork, man's opinion and speculation. For myself, and I can't judge anybody else, I wouldn't go across the street to hear a prophetic conference. It's all man centered. It's reading into God's word rather than taking out of God's word. God gives us principles. I like what the Lord Jesus said about prophesy, John 14:29, *"After it comes to past, then you shall know."* I agree with that. I suggest this law of multiple fulfillment is a great principle of Bible study as we study the word of God.

2

THE RESPONSE OF THIS GENERATION
THE RESPONSE OF THE CITIES

THE RESPONSE OF THIS GENERATION

Matthew 11:16-19, *"But to what shall I compare this generation? It's like children sitting in the market places who call out to other children and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, the gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax gatherers and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."*

General Observations

The Spirit of God compares this generation to children sitting in a market place responding to situations. On the one hand, there was John the Baptist, and he was extreme, tough, and austere and ascetic, and he lived an exclusive life away from the people. He lived in the wilderness, and his clothes were rough, his food was rough, and his message was rough. John wouldn't dream of socializing. He was a rugged prophet with a rugged message. He was bold, daring and strict. That was one extreme. On the other extreme was the Lord Jesus. He was a mingler, and He was soft and merciful, and was called "the friend of sinners". He socialized, went to parties and weddings, He dressed in common clothes, and ate the common food of common people. The Spirit of God is showing two extremes.

John was a preacher of the truth, and his message was "turn or burn". The Lord Jesus was also a preacher of the truth, and His message was "look and live". In the illustration John was singing a dirge, and Jesus was playing a flute. What was the illustration of children in the market place intended to illustrate? I believe He was saying something like this, "Just as to children, everything is a game, and just so, this generation is like children. Nothing is real, and there are no lasting impressions."

In Matthew 11:16&17, in the context, one group of children said, "Let's play mock wedding; make believe wedding." So, they played the flute, but the children didn't want to play. They didn't dance. They didn't want to play make believe wedding. So, they changed it and said, "Okay, let's play make believe funeral, and go to the other extreme." And they sang a dirge. But they didn't want to play make believe funeral. They wouldn't mourn. "I don't want to play wedding. I don't want to play funeral." It's a powerful illustration of wayward children, children refusing to play the game by the rules—just rebellious, and nothing satisfying them.

We can expect our generation to be dissatisfied with our message

The response of this generation can be summarized in this expression, "stubborn rebellion"; no matter what you offer them, they don't want it, and they aren't satisfied. "I don't want to sing. I don't want to mourn. I don't want John. I don't want Jesus. I don't won't you to pipe for me. I don't want you to mourn for me." "What do you want to do?" "I don't want to do anything." In order to make this intensely practical, let me show you how the response of this generation is not really so different than our present generation, who are also living among a people of spoiled brats, always discontent, always complaining and always fault finding; children and kids who want their own way, and then when they get it, they are still not satisfied. It's a generation of boredom, a generation of no response, viewing life as a game, and then not wanting to play the game. They don't want to respond to John or Jesus.

In Mark 3:17, James and John are called by the name *"Sons of Thunder"*. There's another name in the Bible, *"Barnabas, Son of Consolation"*. Man is not satisfied with either extremes. God uses all means to win the lost. He sends the Sons of Thunder, and they won't respond. He sends the Son of Consolation, and they still won't respond. They refuse to listen, and are like little children in the market place. They refuse all of God's dealings. They will not be bound by laws, invited by promises, not frightened by threatening, not awed by the glory of God, not allured by the sweetest things, not made sensible by the plainest truths. They are hard, and they don't play the game. They won't sing, they won't mourn, they don't want Jesus, they don't want John, they don't want the Sons of Thunder, they don't want the Son of Consolation, they don't want to play wedding, they don't want to play funeral; they just don't want to. They won't listen to the voice of conscience, of reason, of experience, of providence, of their own interest or the voice of the Spirit of God in the word of God.

In Matthew Henry's commentary on the book of Matthew, he called attention to a cross reference in Jeremiah 6:28-30, *"All of them are stubbornly rebellious. They are bronze and iron. They are, all of them, corrupt."* Now listen to this. It's so tender. *"The bellows blow fiercely. The lead is consumed by the fire in vain. The refining goes on, but the wicked are not separated. They call them rejected silver because the Lord has rejected them."* Do you know what bellows are? They are a device for blowing a stream of air to fan a fire to get something going. Jeremiah pictures God as a God with a bellows in His hand, and Jeremiah says that the bellows blow fiercely. Then he adds *"in vain the refining goes on."* What a tender scene; God laboring tirelessly with the bellows trying to revive the dying embers. In vain the refining goes on. They don't want to play the game.

Let me draw some present principles from the response of this generation; stubborn rebellion. Here are some practical things that we can look for and expect in our own lives. The first is this. We can expect our message to be rejected. If we come as John came; strong, bold, austere, and strict, they'll say, "Legalist; they're too strict, too precise, too puritanical, too dogmatic and too narrow minded. It's too much to expect." If we come as the Lord Jesus came with the gospel, the Good News, the message of victory and rest, emphasizing the positive and finished work, then they'll go to the other extreme, and

still reject it as too easy; easy believe-ism that leads to laziness and to license. It's antinomian and against the law, too free and too much levity. If you are always rejoicing you are too detached and too heavenly minded. If you are somber and serious, then you are too gloomy and sour. We can expect this generation to be dissatisfied with our message.

Expect to be abused because of our message

The second thing we can expect, not only will they be dissatisfied with our message, but we ourselves, like John and like Jesus, will be abused and maligned. In Matthew 11:18 they said of John the Baptist, *"He has a demon."* In verse 19 they said of the Lord Jesus, *"He's a glutton and a drunkard."* I've heard people say something like this, "If you lead a holy and clean life, have a good testimony, and do everything above board, then people will not say bad things about you. You know that's not true. Who lived more holy than the Lord Jesus? He was always right and above board, and He never blew it. He was the most unspotted innocence and unparalleled excellence that ever walked on the earth. And the pure Lord Jesus was called a drunkard and a glutton. The purest life and the finest testimony in the world is not a fence against the reproach of tongues. When a person has set his will against the Lord, he's not going to respond, not matter what you say. If you pipe a wedding, he'll not respond. If you play a dirge, he'll not mourn. He'll misinterpret your message, he'll mock you, he'll say that you have a demon, you are a drunkard and are lazy. The Spirit of God records this response in order that we might not be taken off guard or surprised when it happens to us.

God has different ministries for all of us

In this passage He deliberately chose extremes; the wedding and the funeral; John and Jesus. We may assume that He chose these representative extremes in order to teach us that He has a variety of ministers in between those extremes. The principle may be stated as a caution, and even as a warning. Don't judge the variety of instruments that God uses, even though they don't approach the truth the same way you do. God has different ministries for all of us. Some are given flutes, and they present the gospel as a wedding, and talk about its

consolations and its promises, its deep relationships, its joy, its happiness, its peace and its fruit bearing. There are others who preach like John, and they sing a dirge, and their message is full of threats and warnings. They preach the law and repentance, and God's high standards, and the need for separation, and they preach duty and responsibility. God has many billows and all kinds of instruments. We must not be critical.

We must play the instrument that God puts in our hands, and not insist that every Christian play the same tune that we're playing. Expect your message to be misinterpreted, and expect yourself to be bad mouthed. They'll call you a devil and a drunkard, a glutton and worldly, exclusive and lazy. Don't be critical of the other messengers of the Lord because they are preaching a stronger message, or emphasizing things that he hasn't called you to emphasize. No one could be more opposite than John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, and yet they weren't opposites in heart, and not opposite in purpose. They were on the same team, and were one in heart and purpose. They were united in cause, and they loved one another very dearly. This generation is fickle and capricious, are unstable, and stubbornly rebellious, and never happy, never satisfied and never content.

It's so easy to apply this when we put ourselves in the shoes of John the Baptist, or in the shoes of the Lord Jesus, or even in the shoes of those messengers in between those extremes, but I believe there's a more piercing application. The response of this generation is not limited to the unsaved. I'm sure in this context it was the Pharisees and the religious crowd to whom the Lord Jesus was directly referring to, but these things have wider application. They often find their way into the hearts of his children who can be unresponsive like children in the market place. I've known my heart to be this way. There were times when nothing turned me on, when it seemed like everything turned me off, and I didn't want soft preaching, and I didn't want hard preaching. I didn't want to sing, and I didn't want to cry, and I had some kind of hard thought toward everyone who wanted to minister to me in some way. Some would warn me, and some would share precious promises, and I wasn't responsive. It's a sad experience to go through, and even tragic, that unwillingness to be dealt with by God. I found in my own life that one of the main characteristics at those times when I'm acting

like a child in the marketplace, was boredom; monotony. Everything was uninteresting and dull. It's death to the soul.

When you are dead to His consolations, and when you are not moved by His threats, and when His joy is not real, and when you are dead to the reality of the whole fellowship with God, your soul feels like lead. Songs, hymns and spiritual songs do nothing for you. Even the scripture seems dry, and God's varied instruments have no impact on your life. It's a spiritual nightmare. You become critical of everything, everyone, every movement and every ministry. These are dangerous times for the children of God, being capricious and being like a child in a marketplace. A capricious person is one who is quick to make changes, and he lives by his moods, and he chases after shadows by whims and impulses. I've known that experience, and your soul feels like death. Your pride doesn't want to admit it. Without apparent reason you're running here and running there, and running to this book, or that church or this movement, seeking after this gift or that feeling or this experience or that ministry. It's a horrible death.

We must not think of the response of this generation as belonging only to the unsaved, the unconverted. It's a frightening reality that this response can be in the Christian's heart. I don't want to spend a lot of time on the solution because we're looking at the responses more than the solution, but I don't want to leave this without a solution. Let me say in a word, faith is always, and there's never an exception to this, a matter of the will, of the desire. The will runs deep. It's the blood of the soul. The will is the deepest river in the heart of man. Everything else is external and is decoration. Feelings and sensations do not run as deep as the will. An excited imagination is a wonderful thing, but it doesn't run as deep as the will. An enlightened mind is a gift of God, and praise God for it, but it doesn't run as deep as the will. The will can run freely if all those other things are removed. If you have no feelings, and no sensations or contrary feelings, and have no enthusiasm, and your mind is very confused, you can still say "yes" in your will, and you can still live by faith. Fact is, God often allows us to be stripped of those things in order that we not be supported by false pillars. Some Christians have never realized that you can be discouraged, downcast, afraid, nervous and lonely, and still walk by faith. Those things don't touch faith.

Faith runs deeper than that because faith is a matter of the will. The soul may feel as dead as midnight, and you can still say "yes". Dryness and distraction are surface streams. They can run swiftly in an opposite direction, and dry up altogether, and not affect the will. The will never has distractions unless it chooses to have them. There is never an excuse for having the response of this generation, for being a capricious child. They said, "I don't want to be ministered unto, and I don't want to sing, and I don't want to dance, and I don't want to mourn. I choose to be unresponsive. I believe that's the Bible illustration of the response to this generation; rebellion, unresponsive like little children in the marketplace.

Before leaving this passage, let me say a word about Matthew 11:19, that last expression *"Yet, wisdom is vindicated by her deeds"*. The KJV says, *"Wisdom is justified by her children."* Exactly what is meant by this verse is not 100% certain. Once again, the commentators can't exactly agree in what the Holy Spirit intended. He may mean something like this. A doctor is justified by his patients. A teacher is justified by his students. A merchant is justified by his customers. A good parent is justified by his children. A strong building is justified by its architect. A musical composition is justified by the composer. And just so, wisdom is justified by her deeds, by her children. The response of this generation in acting like capricious children, I believe He is saying it's not the response of the wise. Wisdom also has its children. This response, capricious children, is the response of fools. Wisdom has her children, and she doesn't live like that.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CITIES

Matthew 11:20-24, *"Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! If the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sack cloth and ashes. Nevertheless, I say to you it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of Judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades, for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which has occurred in you, it would have remained until this day. Nevertheless I*

say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you.'"

God measures sin by the light in us He has already given

Let me identify Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. According to verse 21, great miracles were done in those places. Chorazin and Bethsaida were cities on the east and west of Galilee. As far as the Bible record is concerned, we don't have a record of one single miracle He did in those places. Fact is, we can't really nail down those places. One commentator believes maybe the miracle in Cana where He turned the water into wine was done in one of those places. If it weren't for this passage we wouldn't even know there were miracles done there. Of course, that's not true for Capernaum. Capernaum was a place where He displayed His miracles. There He healed the Centurion's servant, and Peter's mother-in-law, and the man sick with palsy. There He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, and healed the woman with the issue of blood, healed the two blind men, and cast the demon out of the demon possessed dumb man. How much the Lord did in that place! What a privilege that place had! What light!

What is the Holy's Spirit's chief point of this? For some people there is a certain problem here. It doesn't bother me at all. It looks like Jesus is saying this, "If Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, those wicked cities of the past, if they had the same opportunities, privilege and light, and had seen the same miracles that Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum saw, then they would have repented." The question comes, if He knew they would repent under greater light, then why didn't He give them greater light? With questions like these, some men hold in suspicion the decrees of God. What is His point? I believe it's this. Tyre, Sidon and Sodom were abominable despisers of God, and they were wicked, foul and filthy cities. What He was saying is, "Do you know what comes to your mind when I say 'Sodom, Tyre and Sidon? Well, you are even worse, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. You are worse in malice, and in your incurable contempt of God." What made them worse was their response to the Savior-King. They rejected Him in greater light. They had greater privilege, opportunity and greater light, and when you sin in great light, you are worse than those who sin in little light.

We don't measure sin that way. We measure sin in the sight of men relatively, but God doesn't measure sin that way. We say that drunkenness is worse than lying, and adultery is worse than pride, but God doesn't measure it that way. God measures sin by the light He has given. It's possible that American hate is worse than African murder, because we know better. We have more light. Judgment is in terms of light; the greater the light, the greater the responsibility. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were cities that had great light and great privileges. The Son of God did miracles in their midst. Tyre, Sidon and Sodom had little light. That doesn't give them an excuse. They'll go to hell on the basis of that little light. They are still guilty. But those who spurn opportunity and privilege are guiltier. I believe the response of the cities is unrepentance in great light.

I think when He says in verse 21, that they would have repented long ago, I think He's using a figure of speech; it's irony. I don't think He's saying that literally. I don't believe if the Lord Jesus was there in person, and He did all of His miracles there, they would have repented. I think He's just trying to show by contrast how awful these people are who have rejected great light. We use expressions like that today. "If Grandmother heard you say that she'd turn over in her grave." You don't really literally believe that Grandmother would turn over in her grave. "Rome would have given all of its wealth if they had this weapon." Well, maybe they'd like the weapon, but I don't know if they'd literally give all their wealth for that. "Even Judas wouldn't do what you did." We make statements like that. Jesus was showing how great their responsibility was, and He just contrasted. He said, "You are worse than Sodom, Tyre and Sidon, those wicked cities."

God gives more light to those who are living up to the light already given

In order to make this more practical, let me state two truths, and we'll develop them next time. Revelation, by that I mean when God opens a truth to your heart, always means responsibility, and responsibility always means accountability. It's easy to pray, "More light, Lord. Show us new things, and give us new light." One reason God withholds light is that we haven't lived up to the light He's already given us. You are going to find this as you go on in the Lord, that God will always

test the reality of a truth in your life. He won't just give you truth and keep piling it up. He'll give you a truth, and then test you in life until that thing becomes real in your heart. He gives you light, and then makes you accountable for that light. In this connection I love Psalm 36:9, *"For with Thee is the fountain in life. In Thy light shall we see light."* Isn't that a tremendous thing? If we're not living up to the light He's already given us, we can't expect Him to give us more light.

The more praise worthy a ministry, the more blame worthy the people

The next truth can be stated in these words, "The more praise worthy the ministry (in the case of this illustration and context, John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus), the more blame worthy are the people. That's why we are called "lights". Our Christ-like lives are what leave people without an excuse. The best thing you can ever do for your loved ones and your neighbors is to live in the presence of the Lord as a shining light. That's what brings conviction into their hearts and into their lives. Oh, the judgment for those who are unrepentant in great light!

Do you realize that there are degrees of punishment in hell—that certain people will have a hotter hell than other people? The opposite is also true; there are degrees of glory in heaven. How can that be? In terms of capacity, if you picture different size containers; a thimble, a cup, a pail, a barrel; all of them will be filled to the brim. In heaven you'll be totally happy, but for some people their capacity for happiness will be greater than for other people. In hell all people will be totally miserable, and filled to the brim with misery, but their capacities for misery will be increased, and is based upon the amount of light they received and rejected when they were on the earth. Here's a question that you can think about, and may the Spirit of God help you to answer it before Him! Are you living up to the all the light God has given you? Oh, we have such light as American Christians! We can read our Bibles, our Bible commentaries, Bible aids, listen to tapes, and we can turn on radios, and read tracts, magazines and books, and we can fellowship together, almost at will. We have light, and therefore we have no excuses before God.

3

THE RESPONSE OF THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF

Matthew 11:25-30. *"At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise Thee, oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My load is light."*

"Easy Yoke" applies to the believer and unbeliever alike

On the level of earth we start off with a little problem which is the infinite fullness of this particular passage. Every part of the Bible is infinitely full, but some parts man has plowed through more than others, and this is one of those sections. I know that this passage would rank among the best of all the preaching texts. Everyone can teach

from them, and there is no end to it. There's no bottom, and it just seems to yield and yield.

One of the greatest Bible invitations you recognize in these verses, *"Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest."* This passage has charmed and gripped the hearts of sinners. So, I say in one sense that's a problem, and in another sense, it's not a problem, because I don't care how bad the teacher is, or the preacher, you can't mess this passage up too badly. These verses stand on their own. They are beautiful. I trust God will use some of these old familiar truths. You don't always need to see something new. These things should thrill you because they are true, and not because they are new. Perhaps God will have something for us.

The reason I have a problem with these six verses is because in most cases when you read the commentators, sermons or chat with somebody, these verses are lifted out of Matthew as if they were a book by themselves. They are taken out of context. There's nothing wrong with that, except for our purposes we're studying the book of Matthew. How does this tremendous section fit in the book? That's how the Holy Spirit inspired it, He put it in here. We want to see it that way.

This is usually used as a passage for guilty sinners, for the unconverted. It's an evangelism passage for the unsaved, and you can certainly see a glorious gospel invitation there for those who are burdened down with guilt and sin. Boy, how God has used this through the years to call sinners to Himself, and call the unsaved to find rest and salvation in Him! What I'm about to do, I don't want you to misinterpret. In no way do I want to undermine this passage as a great passage to reach the sinner. But I believe that's not why God put it in here. He's talking to the Christian in this passage, and not talking to the unconverted.

If you read this in its context, and see how it ties in with the great responses in chapter 11, I believe great light is thrown upon this passage. It includes the sinner, the unsaved, but it's bigger than that, and far greater than that. One reason I want to underscore this is because many dear Christians have turned over passages like this to the drunkard and to the slave in sin, "Here's a verse for you. That applies to you. You need this." They've given it away to the unconverted. It's too beautiful to give away. Praise God, let them use it, but don't let

them keep it. Part of it belongs to you and me. We want to look at it in its setting and context. I think it will be precious to us.

The only way to know God is through revelation

Let me show you how it fits into the big context first of chapters 5-11, and then we'll narrow it down to its immediate context in chapter 11. In chapter 5-7 Jesus said something. In chapters 8-10 He did something. Now Jesus didn't just say something in order to hear Himself talk, just because there was an opportunity. He had something to say. He had a burden, a message and a passion. He was telling people how to know God. That's all He ever talked about. He came to reveal the Father, to make God known to men. When He spoke He said, "You can have a kingdom of heaven on the earth, and the same way His will is being done in heaven, it can be done on the earth now. You can know God." When He did something, He had a purpose. We call them redemptive miracles, miracles that pictured redemptive truth, spiritual truths. Everything Jesus did was designed to show them God, and reveal God, so that they might know God.

Try to catch the context of these words from Matthew 11:25-30. He hadn't changed. He's still talking about knowing God. Matthew 11:27, *"All things have been handed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father. No one knows the Father except the Son."* He's talking about the knowledge of God. The backdrop of all that Jesus said and did lies in this very deepest of all of man's needs. Man's soul was created to know God, and when He's not knowing God, he's frustrated, weary and burdened, and carries a heavy yoke. Life's purpose for our existence is to know God. The Lord Jesus went deep. He didn't just deal in a surface way chopping off a few weeds, sympathizing with them saying, "I understand." He saw down deep into the heart of man, and the cry was, "I need to know God. I want to know God. I was created to know God.

Jesus was walking, as you saw in chapter 11, in the middle of a people who were ignorant of God. They didn't know God, and they didn't want to know God. They were rebellious. They had ears but they didn't hear. They had eyes to see but they didn't see. They were blind as pitch. They were rebellious. They were dead to the very purpose for which they were created. When Jesus moved in their midst, He was

walking among a people who, because they did not want to know God, were weary and heavy laden. If you are going to understand this passage you've got to see that its main topic is the knowledge of God. That applies to the unsaved, but boy does that also apply to the Christian. The unsaved need to come to know God, and the Christian needs to follow on to know God.

How can I know God, and what will happen if I come to know Him? No questions you'll ever face in life are more basic than that, "How can I know God?" This passage answers it; by revelation. "What will happen if I know God?" This passage answers it; rest. Revelation and rest—that's what this passage is talking about. There's only one way to know God; for the unsaved and for the saved, and that's by revelation. If God doesn't reveal Himself, He's not known. When God is made known to the heart of man, it results in revelation and rest; two of the most important words you could ever learn.

Let's back up, and take those questions. Look again at Matthew 11:25, *"At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise Thee oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent, and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."* How can I know God? The answer is, "By the revelation of Jesus Christ." Listen to these verses, Proverbs 25:1&2, *"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."* Matthew 11:25, *"Thou didst hide these things."* Colossians 2:3, *"All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden."* Amazing! 2 Corinthians 2:14, *"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them."* Jesus said to Nicodemus, *"Except a man is born again, he can't see the kingdom of God."* The word "see" is "perceived"; can't understand. That was Nicodemus' question, "I don't understand." Jesus said, "No, you can't." It's a truth taught all through the Bible. God hides Himself.

The truth about Himself, this verse calls "these things". Look at Matthew 11:25, *"Thou didst hide these things."* If God hides something, is there any chance that man is going to find it, if He really is trying, and not playing a game? There's a verse that says, *"He let us*

find Him." But say that He doesn't want us to find Him, and He hides Himself. There would be no chance at all, none whatsoever, unless He revealed Himself. When God hides something, it's gone forever. In this passage the Lord Jesus is thanking God the Father that He has hidden something. In verse 25 it's called *"these things"*. What things? Well, read the context. These things; the things of God; the truth of God; the knowledge of God; these things are hidden.

Much is written on, "Who are the wise, the intelligent and the prudent? Who are the babes?" Some people think if you did a word study for the Greek word for "wise" and for "prudent" and for "intelligent" and for "babe" and for "weary" and for "heavy laden", then you can get into the passage. Well, you can go too deep, and miss the very heart of this thing. Are they the Scribes, Pharisees, priests and the Jews? Maybe; it might apply to them. According to this passage, the wise, the prudent, and the intelligent are those who are trying to know God by any other method other than by revelation. You can never find Him, not at all. I used to think this was a passage against brains, against being smart. God isn't saying, "If you are educated, and happen to have a degree, you are in trouble, and there's no hope for you." He's not glorifying stupid people. His point is that if you use those things to know God, you'll never find Him that way. It's not wrong to have those things. He's just saying, "You can't figure or reason it out. He's not saying you need to sit under a tree and meditate, and like the gold at the end of the rainbow, God is going to come at the end of your meditation. You'll never meditate God, and never conclude God.

It's amazing how many ways people try to know God. Nobody ever knew God by studying. Nobody ever knew God by words, or by gifts, or by nature, or by experience, "Oh, I suffered a lot, and really came to know God." No you don't. Nobody knows God by observation, and by looking in the lives of others. You don't know God that way. There's one way to know God, and only one way, and that's by revelation. He's got to show you. If you try any other way, and are wise and prudent, God has hidden it from you, and you won't get it. Just so, the wise and the prudent are those who come any other way than by revelation.

The babes are those that have recognized that they can't come any other way than by revelation. They can't trust their wisdom or their works.

The babes are the humble ones. They can be very smart, but they aren't trusting in nature, or what the eyes have seen, and the ears have heard, and what has entered into the heart of man. They come saying, "Lord, I know unless You reveal it, I will not learn it. I need to have you teach me." Those are the ones who are open to His revelation. They don't try to figure it out, reason it out, earn God, deduct God, or to conclude God. They come humbly confessing, "Lord, I know you've hidden Yourself from the wise and the prudent, and I don't want to come trusting education, or brains, or wisdom, or Greek, or commentators, or other men, or people or gifts. I need you to show Yourself, and if you don't show Yourself, I won't have rest. If you don't reveal Yourself, then I'm going to carry the load, and I'm going to be weary and heavy laden." Babes are the ones that say, "Open my eyes; feed me, teach me, show me, anoint me with eye salve that I might see—illumine me, take the veil away, instruct me, teach me, conform me; those are babes. Those who come in helpless dependence upon God's Holy Spirit to give a heart knowledge of God by a revelation of Jesus Christ through the book; those are babes.

See what I mean when I say that the main point of this passage is not primarily evangelism? It applies to evangelism but, I tell you, Christians need this as much as the unsaved need this, because thousands of Christians are studying God's word every day, and they are not knowing God by revelation, and therefore they aren't knowing God. Therefore, it's an endless Christ-less struggle in their life, and it's fruitless, and leads to barrenness. In verse 29 in the KJV it says, *"Learn of Me."* The NAS has changed that to, *"Learn from Me."* The Greek is, "Learn from." "Learn of" is accurate in one sense but you might get the idea that it means to learn about Me, learn of Me. It's not to learn about Me. It says to learn from Me; I'm the teacher. In other words, how am I going to learn? It's from Christ, my teacher and there is no other way to learn. He's the one that has to show me, and the one that has to illumine me, and open it up. He's the instructor. It takes a mighty miracle of God to know God.

Let's look at the second question. The first question is, "How can I know God?" The answer is, "By revelation." The second question, "If I do come to know God the right way, if I come in as a babe, and I wait upon God to reveal God to me, what will be true in my life, and what will happen?" In one word the answer is rest. You were created to

know God, and as Augustine said, "Man was created to know God, and he has a God sized vacuum inside, and he cannot rest until he rests in God. We were made for that."

Rest is available to all those open to the revelation of Jesus

Look at Matthew 11:28-30, *"Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My load is light."* Some look at the rest in verse 28 and say, "That's different from the rest in verse 29; *'I will give you rest, and you will find rest unto your souls."*" They say that there are two different kinds of rest. The first is the rest you get when you get saved, and God lifts the burden of sin, and the second is a rest that has to do with maturity in the Lord, and resting in Christ. Some say, "No, it's just two aspects of the same rest."

What is the rest that He has promised you? It's so easy to say, "Oh, yes, know God, and you'll have rest." What exactly is the rest? There is a lot of talking about rest. I was amused today as I went through some of the commentators about rest. What does it mean to rest in the Lord, and to have rest? Some people talk about it as if it's some kind of a feeling that you go through; a mystical experience of union with your soul and God. One commentator called it "a passionate and rapturous love for Jesus". Another says it's a disinterested love, the undisturbed peace of the soul. Then there were expressions like these; "drowned in the Fatherhood of God," "melting in the fire of His love," "intoxicated with the Godhead," "The endless rapture of insatiable contentment." What is rest?

Christians ask you with a gleam in their eye, "Are you resting in Jesus. Did you enter His rest?" You look around and think you've missed something. You say, "Well, I guess so. I know Jesus. He's come into my heart." "Yes, but are you resting?" "I don't know. What is it?" To many, the idea of resting is some high mountain some place that only the strong and the brave and the initiated few can climb, some height with God where nothing bothers them anymore, and they can just live in this insatiable rapture of delight in God.

I'm glad to read that the rest that is promised here is not some unattainable height for theology students. Whatever it is, it's promised to babes. I'll tell you, it's a tremendous thing. It's a shame that people have taken rest, this marvelous promise, and given it only to some super saints who live secluded lives, separated and isolated unto God. Then the average Joe, the average Christian who faces life every day says, "Well, that's not for me. That's for somebody else." This is God's promise for every babe, to everyone who is open to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Rest is not difficult. It's easy. Let's trust God together to nail it down. It's not a formula, "I'll listen carefully and I'll never have another problem with it." It doesn't work that way. It's a revelation.

Study the truth of God in fully developed form in the epistles

In order to delve in a little deeper to the question, "What is the rest that He offers, and of what does it consist?" let me give you a principle of Bible study, and then I'll work it out in this passage. The principle of Bible Study can be stated in these words, "Study the truth of God in fully developed form." Certain parts of the Bible are designed to introduce you to truth. Other parts of the Bible are designed to develop that truth. In a general way this is true. The Old Testament is the truth in seed form; it's the acorn. It's all there in the acorn. You don't get anything in Romans that you don't have Genesis. You don't get anything in Revelation that you don't have Genesis. If you only had Genesis you'd have the whole Bible. Every part of the Bible is a whole Bible. The whole law was given to Abraham when God said, *"Walk before Me, and be perfect."* It's all there. The gospels in the New Testament give the same truth in bud form. It's still not developed. We're getting closer, and it's more developed. God has given it to the epistles to give you the truth in fully developed form. The epistles are your full explanation of truth.

When we study rest in Matthew 11, we have the truth in bud form. You don't have the truth in fully developed form until you read Hebrews 3 & 4. That's the full explanation of rest. You are going to see that all the time in the Bible. For example, is love mentioned in the Old Testament? Is love mentioned in the gospels? But if you want to study

"love" where do you have to read? It's in 1 Corinthians 13. Is the resurrection mentioned in the Old Testament? Is the resurrection mentioned in the gospels? But if want to study the resurrection, where do you have to read. It's either in Thessalonians or 1 Corinthians 15. In the epistles God has given the full explanation of all of these things. In the epistles every truth of God is dealt with in a complete way. That's the truth of Bible study. We're going to see it hinted at in Matthew but then it will be developed in Hebrews 3 & 4.

Rest means fellowship with God

Let's look at it back in Matthew 11 in bud form. In the context, the Lord Jesus was standing in a circle of people who did not know God, and who were burdened and heavy laden. Those who were trying to know God were wise and prudent, so they weren't knowing God either. He hid it from the wise and the prudent. They were a people from whom God had hidden the truth. They were ignorant, deaf and blind, and they were dead. The result was, of course, that they were burdened, heavy laden and weighed down, and their souls were frustrated. Many were confused and in a frenzy. Jesus was standing in a circle of a people who did not know God. Picture this, because this is exactly what it is. As He stood in the circle—I speak as a man and as a fool—of a world that didn't know God, this generation who are like children in a marketplace, cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and these people, who were burdened down , He decided to give His testimony. As far as I know, this is the only place in the Bible that Jesus gives a testimony.

He says, "I want to share a testimony, a principle with you." There were two parts to this testimony, and they stood in contrast to everything around them. The first part was in verse 27. Now picture it as a testimony. *"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."* The first part is so amazing. He stands up in the middle of a sermon and says, "I want to give a testimony." "Okay, go ahead. What's Your testimony?" "I know God. Nobody knows God like I know God. Nobody knows the Father except the Son." He not only said, "I know God," but He said, "I know all there is to know about God." What a testimony! How would you like to stand and give a

testimony, "I know God perfectly"? Would you give that testimony? That's what Jesus did. He stood in a circle of people who didn't know God, were seeking Him in wisdom and prudence, and they were ignorant and burdened down because they didn't know God, and he said, "I know God, oh do I know God! I know all there is to know about God. I know the depths of God, and the heights of God, and the lengths of God, and breadths of God. I was with Him in the beginning. I know His eternity, and I know His years, and I know His wisdom and mind, and I know God."

Then He gave another part of the testimony that has been misinterpreted. Read it as He gave it. Matthew 11:30, *"My yoke is easy. My load is light."* You usually read that to say, "The yoke He gives us will be easy, and the yoke He gives us will be light. Follow Christ and take His yoke, for it's easy and it's light." He's not saying that. He's not saying, "I'm giving you a light yoke." He's saying, "I have a testimony. I know God, and My yoke is easy." What a slap in the face to those who were standing there who were burdened down, and weary, and heavy laden. They didn't know God, and their yoke was heavy. He stood up in the midst of them and said, "I want to share a testimony. I know God and My burden is light. I'm at rest and at peace and I have it easy. There is nothing hard about My yoke at all."

If you don't see Him standing there in shocking contrast to those He addressed, you will miss the point of this. The world on one side was burdened, weary and heavy laden. They were dragging a heavy yoke. It was all darkness and bondage on the other side. See the dear Lord Jesus in adorable complacency as He announces, "I know God. My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Jesus becomes the illustration of one who knows God, and one who is at rest. In order to make this intensely practical, let's go back over these verses. Let me make three observations of the life of the Lord Jesus that sheds great light on the truth of rest. Even though it is not fully developed, and it's the truth in bud form, there is still much we can see in the beautiful bud.

Matthew 11:25, *"At that time Jesus answered and said…"* I am amazed at how the commentators try to wiggle out of this or explain it away with some human explanation. Proverbs 18:13 says, *"He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him."* Right! Who is Jesus answering? Did the cities speak to Him? Did the

disciples speak to Him? Did the Jews, gentiles, scribes, priests or Pharisees speak to Him? Yet we read, "Jesus answered…" Answered who? The answer is simple. Who is He talking to? He is speaking to God. He is answering God! God the Father and Jesus the Son were having a wonderful fellowship together. This was His testimony, "I know God. I have rest." Whatever that "rest" means, it includes this wonderful fellowship, communion and companionship. They were friends. They enjoyed each other's company, and they spoke together. Rest means fellowship with God.

Rest means continual praise and worship to the Lord

Hold that a moment. Read Matthew 11:25, *"I praise Thee."* Here is an amazing thing. In the first response to what He said and did, John doubted. This generation willfully and stubbornly rebelled. The cities where He had done most of His miracles outright rejected Him in spite of the great light and privilege they had. As far as His ministry was concerned, on the level of earth, He was a big flop!! He had every reason to be discouraged. The context of this, *"I praise Thee,"* is the context of scorching condemnation. He had just delivered His "woe". He had said it would be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom than for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. He had just announced the Day of Judgment. But it didn't upset His praise or His worship. First, rest means fellowship with God. Second, it also means a life of continual praise and worship.

In this connection I love the title of God the Lord Jesus uses, *"Oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth."* If God reveals that title to your heart, and if you entered into all it meant to call Him *"Father",* and all it meant to call Him *"Lord of heaven and earth",* then you would know what rest was. Jesus didn't get discouraged when the circumstances went against Him. Why? It's because God was His Father, and He was also Lord of heaven and earth. His rest was not broken by rejection. His rest was not broken by opposition. His rest was not broken by distraction. He knew God. He didn't worry about results, or response, or rejection. He wasn't looking for numbers, and to get so many members in a year, or to baptize so many. He just walked in fellowship with God. He just praised and worshipped the Lord. He knew God was Lord of heaven and earth, and He was sovereign, and was ruling

and over-ruling. His purposes never miscarry. All that takes place in our lives is right and sensible. Oh, if we could only know God! Then we would know rest. But we go after rest, and not the knowledge of God. If we could pray in reality, *"Oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth,"* then we could praise Him. The heart knowledge of God is sooo necessary to our peace. Jesus' yoke was sooo easy and His burden was so light. He just praised God even in the opposition.

Rest says "yes" to everything that pleases God

There is a third thing we see in the life of the Lord Jesus. Matthew 11:25, Jesus states the principle of distinguishing grace, *"He has hid it from the wise and prudent. He has revealed it unto babes."* Then He adds Matthew 11:26, *"Yes, Father, for thus it was well pleasing in Thy sight."* Here is another characteristic of the life of rest. It is set on the pleasure of God. It says, "Yes," to everything that pleases God. It is surrendered. It is yielded. It only wants Him happy and satisfied.

The Lord's testimony is, "I know God, and I have rest, and My yoke is easy." His life shows it: He is in fellowship with God; nothing breaks up His praise and worship; His heart is set upon the sweet will and pleasure of God. To the will of God He says, "Yes Father, yes Father, yes Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight." That's the truth in bud form. In Matthew 11:28 we have the expression, *"I will give you rest."* That is not translated accurately from the Greek. The translation can lead us astray a little bit. Here rest looks like a gift God gives us; something we don't have, then He gives it, and then we have it. Literally, the verse reads, "I will rest you!"

Hebrews 3 & 4 sheds full light on the subject, and explains what He means. Jesus knows God. Jesus is at rest. I must come to Him, and then He rests me. He doesn't give me a rest of my own. I enter into His rest. It is the rest He has. As I know God by revelation, I see myself in Christ, and I share what is His. I share His rest. He rests me. There is a Christmas carol I never understood until recently, "God rest ye Merry Gentlemen," but it's very spiritual. We say, "God guide you, and God keep you, and God watch over you, and God bless you." Well, Matthew 11:28 says, "God rest you merry gentlemen. Let nothing you dismay." In the context, in Matthew 11:30 the yoke is not yours. It is His. The load is not yours. It is His. The rest is not yours. It is His.

When you take His yoke, and sit at His feet to learn from Him, and come as a babe, helplessly dependent upon Him, He rests you, and you enter His rest. Those things that are true of Him become true of those that are in Him; #1 We have fellowship with God; #2 We worship and praise in spite of every negative circumstance; #3 We say, "Yes, Father," to everything we know is well-pleasing to Him. It's a marvelous passage.

Let me close by underscoring the infinite simplicity of this passage. There are three words that the Spirit of God uses to drive it home. The first is Matthew 11:25, *"babes"* trusting Him for revelation in helpless dependency. The second is Matthew 11:28, *"Come."* The third is Mathew 11:30, *"Easy."* Your employers, neighbors, friends, family and Christian family are hard to please, but not the Lord. He is the easiest person in the universe to please.

4

THE FIRST RESPONSE OF THE PHARISEES

Matthew 12:1-14, *"At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry, and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. Now when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath!" But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions— how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath, and yet are innocent? But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. But if you know what this means: 'I desire compassion rather than sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent."*

Context – The Sabbath

Around what do all of the arguments and the facts in this chapter revolve? I believe that the context of this passage can be summarized in one word: Sabbath. Verse 1, *"Sabbath,"* verse 2, *"Sabbath,"* verse

5, *"Sabbath,"* verse 8, *"Sabbath,"* verse 10, *"Sabbath,"* verse 11, *"Sabbath,"* verse 12, *"Sabbath."* He's talking about the Sabbath. In Matthew's account it looks like these two events, walking in the corn field, and the healing of the man with the withered hand, took place on the same day. But if you look at Luke 6:6 which records the same account, it says, *"It came about on another Sabbath Day that He entered a synagogue, and there was a man with a withered hand."* It didn't happen right after the corn field. It was a different Sabbath Day, but the Spirit of God is not trying to give us a chronology. He's trying to give us spiritual truth. For His purposes He just groups them together. Logically they belong together.

I believe this passage will not make much sense unless we understand and get a feel for what the Sabbath meant in that day to those to whom the Lord was talking. Look at chapter 12:8 as the key to this entire section. Matthew 12:8, *"For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*." Mark 3 tells the same story, and adds this verse, Mark 2:27&28, *"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."* Some think that as Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus had the right to change the laws of the Sabbath anytime He wanted to, because He was Lord of the Sabbath. Since He made the Sabbath He could change it or abolish it. They point out that nine out of the Ten Commandments are moral laws; that is, that they are sin in themselves; *"Thou shalt not kill."* It's a sin to kill. Even if God hadn't given a precept, even if He hadn't given a command, and never said, *"Thou shalt not kill,"* it would be wrong to kill because that's wrong in itself. It's inherently wrong. So, nine out of the ten could be broken two ways. Just by doing it you broke it because it's sin in itself, or you could disobey God Who said not to do it; by precept. You could break it two ways.

So, some say that's not true of the fourth commandment. Keeping the Sabbath is not morally wrong in itself. The only way you could disobey that is to disobey God, and break what He said. He said to do it, but there was nothing wrong in that day in and of itself, like murder, stealing or hurting somebody. So, they say He's Lord of the Sabbath; since all of these commandments were based on His character, He couldn't change those because those are holy. But the fourth commandment, they say, is based on His pleasure and not on His character. He wanted it that way. So, if He wanted to change His mind,

He is Lord of the Sabbath, it's only based on His pleasure, and He could change His mind.

I don't deny that's true, but I don't think that's the point here. I know He's Lord of the Sabbath, and has the prerogative to change His pleasure. I don't think the Lord was changing this commandment, lowering any of its standards, or trying to justify Himself because He broke a few of the laws. I think Mark explains the words when he says, *"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."* It's like the trees of the field and the flowers were made for man, and fish were made for man, and all the works of His hands were made for man, and that man has dominion. Man was created as the crown of God's creation. He created us to be lord over the works of His hand.

When Jesus called Himself the Son of Man, all through the ninety or so times it's mentioned, He is standing in the shoes of man, and speaking as a representative man, and speaking for the race. That's man as God intended man to be. Jesus Christ was true man, and He said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. And representing all mankind, He said that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. You could put your own name in there, and I don't think you'd violate what He was saying. "Ed Miller is the lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not lord of Ed Miller."

In order to get that more into your heart, I think it's helpful to understand what God intended in the Sabbath. God created the Sabbath for man—for his benefit and for his purposes. God gave us the Sabbath to minister unto us. He never intended that it would put men in bondage. Something very terrible happened. That day that God designed to be the very best became the worse and the most dreaded. It was secretly hated in New Testament times. It was full of bondage, and everybody hated to see the Sabbath Day come, and were happy when it was over. That's not what God originally intended. I think it will help to get a big panorama before your eyes, and the heart of the Sabbath. Trust the Holy Spirit, and try to feel the heart of God to watch how He wrote this.

When God instituted the Sabbath at the beginning, the word "Sabbath" meant "rest". It's one of God's favorite words in the Old Testament. It

was the thing that was heaviest on His heart. When He created the earth, He labored for six days with no help from man. Man didn't lift a finger, nor did man help Him with a drop of water, or grain of sand, or blade of grass. I know I'm right on that because man wasn't around. God created everything, and did all of His work when man wasn't around to help Him. Then at the end of the sixth day when it was all finished, He created man. So, man's first day became God's seventh day, and all He said to man was, "The work is all finished, and all you have to do is begin by entering into rest; begin by entering into Sabbath; enjoy a finished work."

You know the story. By sin man lost his rest, and somehow his mind got twisted, and he thought he was a "doer", and that he had a work to do. It grieved the heart of God, so in order to celebrate His finished work in creation He named this seventh day Sabbath; He called it "rest". He said, "I'll keep the truth of rest before my people. I'll illustrate before them all the time what's on my heart. I want them to know that I will finish a work, and then they can just enter into rest." So, He instituted the Sabbath. He said, "One day out of seven, every week we'll have a Sabbath Day; one week out of seven I'm going to forbid you to work, whether you are Jews, or whether you are gentiles, or whether you have servants working for you, or if you have an oxen, or you have a horse. I don't want the animals to work, and I don't want you to work, and I don't even want the ground to work. Everything in creation is going to rest on that seventh day. Every week we'll go over and over it, so you get the idea of rest, rest, rest and not working at all."

However, God knew that man was rather dull and slow, so He said, "Well, I'm going to have to remind him more than once a week because he is thick." So, he established a monthly feast which He called "The New Moon". Every month it was a special day, and He called it "Sabbath". It wasn't on the Sabbath, but a new moon was called "rest". He said, "Every month now, on a special day, in addition to every week, I want you to celebrate the New Moon, and they were called "Sabbaths". But He knew that man wouldn't get the point, so He said, "Just as I've taken one day out of seven, and just as I've given them every month, I'll take a week of months, and every seven months we'll have another feast called "the Feast of Trumpets", "the feast of Sabbaths", and He called it "Sabbath" , a holy convocation, and now

they can remember it every week and every month, and in a special way we'll have a party every seven months, and we'll call it Sabbath."

Then God said, "Oh, they are dull. Every year, four times a year, we should have special parties." So, He instituted the Day of Atonement, and He named it "A Sabbath of Rest" unto Israel. And then He instituted the "Feast of Pentecost", and He called it "The Feast of Sabbath" or "the Feast of Weeks", "the Day of Fruit". Then He instituted the Passover, and He said, "What we'll do on the Passover, so that they can remember it, is that we'll hold it for seven days, and that will help them remember." Then what He said was, "I think what we'll do is we'll top off the year with a great feast, and we'll call it "the Feast of the Tabernacles", and we'll have it eight days, and it will begin on the Sabbath Day, and it will end on the Sabbath Day. That way they'll get the idea of rest before them."

So, once a week and once every month and every seven months and four times a year God made known His heart; Sabbath, Sabbath, Sabbath, rest, rest, rest, rest. He wanted man to know it. And He said, "But I know them; they're going to forget." And as you read through your Bible He says, "I think I'll institute what's called 'A sabbatical Year'; every seven years I'll let them take the whole year off, and they won't have to do anything. In the sixth year I'll command My blessing from heaven, and that will provide the harvest for the sixth year, the seventh year until the harvest of the eighth year, and they'll know that I'll provide." So, He instituted the "Sabbatical Year".

And God said, "We better top this thing off with a great jubilee. And so, every fifty years we're really going to have a party, because the fiftieth year follows the forty ninth year, and the forty ninth year is made up of sevens, and that's a Sabbatical year. So, in the forty eighth year you are going to have a super duper prize, because in the forty eighth year I'm going to command My blessing, so that you'll have enough food for the forty eighth year and the forty ninth year which was a Sabbatical year and for the fiftieth year, which was the year of Jubilee until the harvest of the fifty first year, in order that you might know that it's not by what you do but what I do." And all through the Old Testament, God kept saying, "Sabbath, Sabbath, Sabbath, rest, rest,

rest; I've finished the work, and there's nothing for you to do except to enter into My rest."

You read about all these Old Testament ceremonies, and say "la, la, la", but do you catch the spirit of the heart of God as He gives all of these festivals and all of these ceremonies and all of these rituals? He wasn't trying to make it hard on men, and give them a bunch of restricted rules and regulations, and stand over them with a club saying, "You better do this or you are going to be in trouble." The Sabbath was made for man; it was made for you and me. It was God's object lesson as a reminder that rest was on His heart, and that He wanted man to enter into His finished work. He created man physically to need rest in order to illustrate the need for spiritual rest. He created the land to need rest in order to illustrate the deep need of rest.

It's not an accident that chapter 12 follows chapter 11. Do you see how chapter 11 ends? Verse 28, *"I will give you rest."* Verse 29, *"You shall find Sabbath rest unto your soul."* It's the word Sabbath, "I will give you Sabbath; I will give you rest." That's why I suggest that 12:8 is the key to the understanding of the passage, *"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."* You see, the Pharisees in that day had turned everything around. Their view of the Sabbath was that it was a club over the head of man; "If you violate any part of the Sabbath, God is going to kick your teeth in. God is watching you, and you better watch all of those rules and regulations."

Let me give a few illustrations of how the Pharisees interpreted this. By the time of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, the Jews had many traditions which they had added to the word of God. These oral traditions were written down in a law book called "The Talmud", and these were the traditions of the Pharisees. Let me give you some illustrations. God had rest on His mind, and in the Old Testament He said, "Rest on the Sabbath Day; don't plow." So, they went to work on the Talmud, and they said, "We can't plow because God is going to be mad if we plow." So, they wrote a law warning people about wearing open toed sandals, especially if they had long toes because if your toe brushed along the soil, and you made a furrow with your toe, then you plowed, and you broke the Sabbath. They had many rules like that.

God said, “Rest on the Sabbath and don’t harvest.” This gives the background of this particular passage we’re reading. They taught you can’t harvest on the Sabbath Day, so if you reach out and pluck an ear of corn, you are reaping, and if you roll it in your hand in order to loosen the husk, you are sifting, and if you rub it together in your hand in order to break the shell, then you are threshing. If you actually break the shell, then you are grinding. If you throw the shell away when you are done, then you are winnowing. They had many thousands of laws like that; laws of tithing where they would take their carrots, and divide them up into ten parts, and give one tenth. They would take all of their peas and count them, and then put a tenth into the temple. They were under this law, and they wanted to obey God.

They had a law about healing on the Sabbath. No work is to be done on the Sabbath Day. So, if you had a tooth ache or a sore throat, according to the Talmud you couldn’t gargle on the Sabbath Day, because that was work. They used to take an ointment, and rub it on their teeth, a spice in order to help with the toothache. You couldn’t do that, but if you just drank the oil, and your throat happened to clear up, that was okay. Or if you just used the spice as a breath mint, and it helped your tooth, then that was okay. But if it was for the intention of helping your throat or tooth, you couldn’t do it. That’s why Jesus said in another place, *“You strain at a gnat, and you swallow a camel.”*

They did have one over-riding principle in the Talmud. I have to give them credit for that one. They worded it this way, “Danger of life drives away the Sabbath.” What they meant by that was that if someone was sick unto death, then you could violate the Sabbath, and you wouldn’t be guilty. Let’s say someone was wounded, and they needed to be bound up, or there was some emergency, and someone was ready to freeze to death, it would be alright to chop wood, and start a fire for them on the Sabbath. But that was the only exception. See, that was the point here with this guy with the withered hand. He could be healed on Monday or Wednesday; “What’s he doing here now? You don’t have to do that on the Sabbath. That wasn’t a matter of life and death.”

Man is Lord of the Sabbath

The context is clearly the Sabbath. The key to the passage, I believe, is that man is the lord, the Son of Man is Lord, who is representing all of mankind, of the Sabbath. What made the Pharisees turn this thing around so badly? What was the problem? In order to see their response you'll have to see what caused their response. I believe that it's suggested in these words. It's amazing as I read this; these blind Pharisees trying to teach the Lord Jesus Christ how to sanctify the Sabbath Day. What a paradox! I want to call attention to a couple of phrases. Notice Matthew 12:3, *"Have you not read",* and verse 5, *"Have you not read.."* Now think of who He was speaking to. It was the Pharisees. Well, great honk in the morning, they were the greatest readers of all time! They poured over every page, every word and every letter. If you read some of the writings that the Pharisees handed down to us, they tell us what the middle verse of the Bible is, and the verse that is half way to the middle. They tell us how many words are used on every page and how many letters. They actually measured the size of the letters so that they could copy it down. "Have you not read? What an insult! You know we've read it; we're the lawyers and scholars of this; we're the scribes."

Notice verse 7, *"If you had known what this means."* Yes, they read it, but they didn't read it. They read it, but they didn't know what it meant. Therefore, they didn't read it. He nails down the problem. They read the words, but they missed the point. They had the shell but not the kernel. They had the bark but not the pith. They didn't get to the heart of it. It's what the Holy Spirit calls in another place *"the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law".* 2 Cor. 3:6 says, *"The letter kills but the Spirit gives life."* The letter kills; it always does. They read it, but they didn't understand it. In 2 Thess. 3:1, the Apostle Paul says, *"Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word would spread rapidly."* I don't think he meant so rapidly as these Pharisees let it spread—in one ear and out the other.

Get the principles, God's living truths underneath the Bible facts

They might as well have read it in Greek or Hebrew or in Latin or Chinese. If you read something, and you don't understand it, you might as well turn the words upside down. It's not going to make any difference if you don't understand what you are reading. The error of the Pharisees is one of the most common errors among God's people today. This is not just some old thing. I'll tell you, the letter kills and the Spirit makes alive. If you don't have the Spirit, then you are going to have death. I've stressed it hundreds of times, and if the Lord lets me live and keep on teaching, I'm going to stress it thousands of more times; don't settle for the facts. Get the principles; get those living truths that God has put underneath the facts.

See, they had the facts of the Sabbath. When Jesus was walking in the grain field with His disciples, I can just see those Pharisees looking over all of their facts. "Oh, they are walking in the grain fields. Let's see how long that is. I guess they aren't going to violate the two thousand cubit limit. Alright, they are safe there. And since they aren't really the proprietors of those fields, because the law forbids anybody to go down and check his grapevines or his crop to see what he's going to do on the next day when he's going to work. Since it's not their field that's okay. And Deut. 23:25 does say that you can walk in someone else's field, and eat from it if you don't load up a basket, or put any in your shirt or in your pocket, and if you eat it all there you can eat until you are full, but you can't take any with you except what you carry in your belly. So, that's okay."

The thing that bothered them was when they took the grain, according to Mark, and they rubbed it together, and began to thresh, and they knew it was the Sabbath Day. Now they had an occasion; they were working on the Sabbath Day. They were reaping, threshing and grinding on the Sabbath Day, and that was forbidden. So, Christ must be against Moses and against the law. There's an interesting principle. Underneath the facts there are principles. If you only have the facts

and not the principles, those facts will become a weapon against the principles. It will go in the other direction.

The disciples in this passage (and I'll show you in a moment how), were keeping the Sabbath; the spirit of the Sabbath. The Pharisees were keeping the letter of the Sabbath, and that's why there was a tremendous conflict. There always will be. Thousands and thousands have embraced the facts, rules, regulations, ceremonies, rituals and the forms, and they are strangers to the truth, the heart of it. *"Have you not read?"* The Sabbath is rest, refreshment, relief, and freedom—not bondage. God gave everything about the Sabbath in order to keep the principle of rest before the eyes, heart and minds of His people.

Let me give a couple of other Old Testament illustrations just to illustrate this fact and principle thing. God is for us; He's not against us. Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Did you ever wonder why in the Old Testament they weren't allowed to mix wool and linen? If you got up in the morning, and put on a wool shirt, then you couldn't put on anything linen. You might say that God was getting pretty picky. If you went out in the field, and you were going to plant corn, you couldn't plant beans in the same field. Every field had its own crop; peas in one field, corn in another field, broccoli in another. You couldn't put them together. Why? Did God just want to be mean and strict and hard? Every time you got dressed in the morning He said, "I want you to remember that you are a separated people. Don't mix wool with linen." And every time you got dressed you remembered, "God has called me to be separated." Every time you went out in your field, God reminded you that you were to be separated, just like the beans and the corn can't go together. He was trying to illustrate great age abiding truths and principles.

Well, the Pharisees read and read and read, but they never read. They had all the facts and all the figures, and they knew all the words, and they studied it, and they were great scholars, but they never got beyond the facts. Like a pastor I once knew in a very liberal church, every week he'd kiss the Bible, but unless things have changed in his life, he never knew the author. I hope God changed his heart on that. A lot of people can kiss the word, and not know the Word of God.

Sabbath rest is ministering unto Him

Jesus used two Old Testament passages that the Pharisees had read over and over again, but they didn't understand. In Matthew 12:3&4 David broke the letter of the law. He ate the shewbread in the house of God, and satisfied his hunger. There is evidence to believe that was on the Sabbath day, too. Verse 5, the priests worked their head off every Sabbath Day. They have to kill the animals, and gather the wood, and kindle fires, and sprinkle blood, and grind incense. As far as the letter is concerned, all they did is work, work, work. They broke the Sabbath all day. The Pharisees said, "Well, they are holy priests, ministering to God's holy temple, and it's okay if holy priests minister to God's holy temple." Jesus said, "Really? Those holy priests and that holy temple were just a little picture; they were shadows and types. They look forward to something else."

Look at Matthew 12: 6, *"Something greater than the temple is here."* The "something" is in the neuter. King James says, *"One greater than the temple.."* He's talking about Himself, the Messiah. In other words, "If it's alright for the priests to work and work and work in order to minister to the temple, then how about the reality that my disciples are ministering to me? I'm greater than the temple; much greater than the temple. The temple pictures Me; all of its ceremonies and all of its forms and all of its furniture and all of the priests and garments and everything." This is the first principle of the real Sabbath; ministering to Christ, the One that is greater than the temple.

How do I minister to Christ? Now get this in principle. How do I minister to Christ, the One greater than the temple? Look at the facts of the story as I give you the principle. They walked with Him in the grain fields, and satisfied their hunger, and they ministered unto Him. How do I minister unto Christ? By walking with Him and being fed. That ministers unto Him. See, that's Sabbath; that's Sabbath rest. When I walk with Him and I'm being fed, I'm not breaking the Sabbath, no matter what I do. Do you follow that? If you are walking with Him and being fed, you are not breaking the Sabbath; you are ministering to the heart of Christ.

The poor Pharisees, all concerned about grinding one shuck of corn while the disciples are walking with the son of God and being fed, and they said, "Oh, you're breaking the Sabbath." They were keeping the Sabbath; that's how you keep the Sabbath; by walking with the Son of God, and being fed. It makes your heart grieve with how critical some people are when other people embrace the heart of the thing. That's the first principle; minister unto Him; minister unto the One Who is greater than the temple by walking with Him, and by being fed.

His second illustration is in Matthew 12:9–13; the healing of the man with the withered hand. Of course, in verses 11 & 12 He's dealing with the heart of the Pharisees, but He's doing more than that. He is contrasting the infinite value of a man created in the image of God, with the relative value of a sheep who is temporal, and soon will pass away. In all of this He's going to the heart of the question. It's interesting that after this incident they wrote a new chapter in the Talmud. They said, "From now on if your sheep falls in a hole, you are allowed to feed him, but you can't pull him out on the Sabbath."

God's grace enables man to do what He commands

The Pharisees had all the rules down, but they didn't understand about ministering to the heart of God; walking with Him and being fed. Now watch; here's the second part. The spirit of the Sabbath is to allow Him to minister to us. You not only minister to Him, but you let Him minister to you. Look at Matthew 12:13, *"And He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.'"* Do you realize how ridiculous and impossible that is? The man had a withered hand. You don't tell a man with a withered hand to move it. You are mocking him if you do. Here's a picture. God intended it; it's not an accident. It's a picture of the grace of God enabling man to do what God commands him to do. It's a wonderful picture of the grace of God. How am I going to obey God? Nothing in this Bible that God ever told me to do is possible for me to do on my own. I'm a withered man. You are withered. There's nothing that you can do that God tells you to do. You can't love your neighbor, nor love your wife, nor raise your children, nor be generous, nor be forgiving; you can't do anything. You can't be patient; you are a withered person.

The second part of this Sabbath is allowing God to minister to you by giving you the message of grace; the message of enabling power; the word that comes from Him to you that tells you to do something, and gives you the power to do it. That's God ministering to you. What did it take for that man to stretch out his hand? The answer is it took a mighty miracle of God. The first time the expression "go forward" is used in the Bible, Israel was standing at the Red Sea, and God gave the word "go forward". What did it take to go forward? The answer is it took a mighty miracle of God. What does it always take to go forward? The answer is that it takes a mighty miracle of God. *"Stretch forth your withered hand."* See, the Pharisees missed the thrill of Sabbath. They missed the thrill of rest; ministering unto the heart of God by walking with Him, and being fed, and letting Him minister unto you by meeting you in a helpless condition, and empowering you to do the sweet will of God. They missed all of that. They were concerned about rubbing their toes in the ground, and about picking a piece of corn, and breaking the shell, and winnowing it by throwing it in the air. To them the Sabbath meant to just sit there in your need, and if you want help, get it Thursday but not on the Sabbath. You can almost laugh out loud if it weren't so prevalent today.

The heart of the Sabbath, the core of the Sabbath is rest and it's refreshment. That's what was on God's heart right from the beginning. One day out of seven, and one day out of every month, and every seven months, and four times a year, and every seven years, and then in a Jubilee, He just wanted you to remember rest. "I've done it all, and you don't have anything to do but just enter into My finished work; just rest, rest, rest." How do I rest? "Just walk with Me and feed." "Oh, that's not bad. How do I rest?" "Just let Me minister to you and give the word of grace which will enable you to move your withered hand." That's Sabbath; that's rest.

Sabbath has been changed to the Sunday Lord's Day

Before we leave this, in almost a simplistic way (because I don't want to get into all the arguments of the proof texts on whether or not the Sabbath has changed to Sunday and all of that), let me just state it. I think with all of my heart that the Christian's Lord's Day, the

Christian's Sunday is patterned after the Jewish Sabbath. As a matter of fact, there's a prophesy in the Old Testament in Psalms 118:24 that actually says that it's going to be changed. You sing the verse and probably have not seen it in its context, *"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."* In the context there, that's a prophecy that it would be changed from Saturday to Sunday.

The reason it was changed to Sunday was because God had a more all-inclusive principle for rest, and that is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The celebration of resurrection life includes rest and fellowship with God, walking with the Son of God, and being ministered unto and being fed, and having the ministry of grace enabling us to do impossible things. It's all included in the expression "resurrection life". Some people get all hung up on what we are allowed to do on Sundays, and what are the rules and laws, and what would please God. Some have come to this chapter and said, "Well, look at 1 -3; you can do any act of need." Because they were hungry, that was a need. Or if you look at 4 & 5, "You can do any act of Christian service." God won't be mad if you do that. Or if you look at verses 9 – 11, "You can do any act of mercy." That's okay. And so, by these principles people are allowed to work who need to make a living; people like doctors and nurses and ambulance drivers and firemen and policemen. It's okay for them to work on Sundays, because they fit either this act of need, act of service or act of mercy.

That's too vague, and you know I like to be clear. You may not agree with me, but you'll know right well what I'm saying. The reason I'm even going to stretch this a little more is because there is so much bondage in this area concerning Sundays, concerning the Lord's Day, and we miss so often the great principles of the Lord's Day. Let me get this before your heart. I'll give it to you as a principle so you can't blame me later and say, "Ed said this." I'll give you the principle, and then on the application everybody is different.

The Lord's Day is for anything consistent with rest

What can I do on Sunday? Now, here's the answer; anything consistent with resurrection life. That's broad enough, isn't it? Anything

consistent with resurrection life; anything consistent with rest. It's a day of refreshment; a day to minister unto Him, and to let Him minister unto you. Now let's be honest. In most places (they may not say it but they'll think it) Christians hate Sundays. They really do. Christians hate Sundays because they are given all of the rules; you've got to go to church, make sure that you bring a friend, make sure you come early because there is going to be bread breaking, and you've got to go to Sunday School. If you don't go to Sunday school, and bring your kids, then you are in trouble. When you get there, you've got to minister in some way; get involved. You ought to drive a bus or teach or sing a choir or be an usher; you've got to do something. Get involved! Pass out donuts or serve the coffee. Do something. Don't forget to exercise your stewardship because this is a rule of the Lord's Day.

The average Christian way down in his heart hates it. The reason he hates it is because he is no longer Lord of the Sabbath; the Sabbath is Lord of him. God never intended it that way. The Sabbath rules him, and sits very hard with him. He sits there in a pew, and his head is bobbing, and he can't wait until the thing is over—he hates it. It's nothing but a bondage and a struggle. The kids hate it. They get all fidgety, and don't know what to do. When it's all over it's like the Indianapolis 500, the wheels begin to spin, and the dirt begins to fly, and the parking lot is cleared out in thirty three seconds. This is a great day! Everybody loves it! But the rules are binding. If you don't go, and you don't do it, you are back sliding. You are sinning against God, and you are dishonoring him. Everybody has got to do it. And it's all measured by the letter.

But down the street and around the corner in a hovel some place where nobody knows, there's a little humble saint, and that person is walking with Jesus, and is being fed, and they are understanding the principles of grace, and they are ministering unto the heart of God, and God is ministering unto them. Those are Sabbath keepers. The others, those who do it by the letter (I don't care what it looks like on the outside), are Sabbath breakers. They are not Sabbath keepers. If the Sabbath rules you, you are a Sabbath breaker. If you are Lord of the Sabbath, then you are a Sabbath keeper, and are honoring the Lord.

This might sound like I'm saying, "Don't go to church." Can you go to church, and not violate the principle of resurrection? Can you walk with Jesus, and be fed there? Can you learn the principles of grace; then do it. I'm not saying don't go to church. I'm saying to enter into the Sabbath. You are the Lord of the Sabbath. The Son of Man, representing all mankind, is the Lord of the Sabbath. All I'm saying is, "Don't let it rule you. Don't be in bondage to that thing." God created it to be the greatest time of your life; an opportunity to express sweet fellowship, and to minister unto Him, and have Him minister unto you. If that's not happening, and it's all bondage, and it's all for your own soul sake, ask God to set you free, and deliver you. That was the Pharisees' response to all Jesus said, and all Jesus did; legalism—just the top, just the veneer, just the letter of the thing. They read it but they never understood. There's one way to enjoy Sunday; just misspell it! Sonday —where the Son is in the center, and He is Lord of the Sabbath. They had their eyes on the Sabbath, and not the Lord of the Sabbath. Keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus. The Sabbath was made for you; you were not made for the Sabbath.

Let me give you this caution as we close. If you are ministering unto Him, walking with Him in the grain fields, and being fed, and you are letting Him minister unto you, enabling you by grace to stretch forth that withered hand, and you are resting, and are enjoying resurrection life, don't be surprised if those who hold the letter criticize you. They are going to do it. They did it here, and they are going to do it forever. Just rule the day, and don't let the day rule you.

5

RESPONSE OF GOD THE FATHER

SECOND RESPONSE OF PHARISEES

RESPONSE OF GOD THE FATHER

Matthew 12:15-21, *"But Jesus, aware of this, that is, that the Pharisees counseled together to destroy Him, withdrew from there. And many followed Him, and He healed them all. And He warned them not to make Him known, in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Behold My servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim justice to the gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out until He leads justice to victory, and in His name the gentiles will hope.'"*

Context

Verses 18-21 is quoting from the Old Testament and the book of Isaiah 42:15 where the Spirit of God gives to Isaiah the inspired words of God

the Father. This is God the Father's responses to the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Did you ever think about or did it ever bother you that the Lord Jesus said to many people, "Make sure you don't tell anybody; don't spread it around." For example, in Matthew 8:4, when He cleansed the leper, He said, *"See that you tell no one."* And then in Matthew 9:30 when He healed the blind man, we read, *"Jesus sternly warned them saying, 'See here; let no one know about this.'"* Mark 1:34 says, *"And He was not permitting the demons to speak because they knew who He was."* After the transfiguration in Matthew 17:9, Jesus said, *"Tell this vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead*." There are other times, to be fair, that He said the opposite. For example in Mark 5:19 after He healed the demonic, He said, *"Go home to your people, and report to them, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy upon you."*

Why did the Lord Jesus in some cases try to keep it still, and other cases He told them to go out and tell somebody? Some people say that He's just afraid. In the verse before, it says that they were making plans to counsel together how they might destroy Him. He was causing waves without trying to cause waves. Some people say that He just didn't want a premature death, and invite danger. They were already plotting to kill Him. So, He just said, "Keep this under your belt because I don't want to die before the cross."

Others say, "That's charging God with infirmity. He wasn't afraid of dying. The reason He told them not to tell was because He was living by God's time table and God's clock. Over and over again He said, 'My hour has not come.' It wasn't the hour for Him to be known. If it was the hour, He would have it public. Because He was on a divine schedule, it wasn't His time to be public or arrested or imprisoned or killed. So, for safety and in order to submit to God's timetable, He said not to tell anybody."

I read one commentator, and I chuckle a little bit, that said, "The Lord Jesus was just a good psychologist. He knew how to get things done. He said don't tell because He knew that was exactly the way to get people to tell. What He really wanted was people to spread His name and His fame all over the land, so He used psychology. What better

way to accomplish something than to forbid it. If you tell somebody not to do something, that's what will happen. Or if you want to have it done, "Don't surprise Mommy by cleaning your room," then they'll probably clean their room. "Don't tickle Daddy," when Daddy really wants to get tickled. Then that's exactly what is going to happen. They say that's what happened with Jesus. He was using psychology on those He healed, and He said, "Don't tell anyone," when what He really meant was that He wanted everyone to know. In Matthew 12:16&17 you have the Holy Spirit's inspired reason why He told people not to tell anyone, *"He warned them not to make Him known, in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled."* Whatever it was that the Spirit of God inspired Isaiah to say was the reason that the Lord Jesus said, *"Don't make me known."*

In verses 18-21, God the Father is speaking and He's describing His adorable Son, the Lord Jesus. He's giving His opinion of Him; of His person and His worth. He calls Him His servant, His chosen, His elect, His beloved, the One that pleases His soul, the One that has the Holy Spirit, the One who proclaims justice, the One that is the hope and salvation of the gentiles. But there is one big teaching, one principle and truth in these verses, and I believe it's the burden of God the Father. It's the big response. I know this, it wasn't because He thought publicity would interfere with God's plans. Matthew's explanation was this, "Don't tell anybody because Christ was a humble Savior." It's as simple as that. That's why He said, "Don't tell anybody. Don't blast it around and don't toot the horn." It's because Christ was humble, and He wasn't looking for fame; He didn't want to put Himself on display. There was no boastful exhibition of the Lord Jesus. He was just a humble Savior, wasn't ambitious and He wasn't pretentious.

I heard a man use chapter Matthew 12:19 I think in a very dangerous way, *"He will not quarrel or cry, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets."* This man interpreted that to mean that it's wrong to have street meetings. The Lord Jesus didn't preach in the streets. So, a group like Open Air Campaigners would be wrong because the Lord Jesus was humble, and He didn't go out on the street corners and preach. I used to work with the Open Air Campaigners a little bit. They'd have these gospel vans, and would go onto different street corners or into the factories when folks were having lunch, or some

busy intersection, and they'd give a gospel message, and hand out gospel literature.

This passage isn't saying that Jesus never preached in the streets. He did all the time! He's talking about what He said in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:5, *"When you pray you are not to stand as the hypocrites. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners in order to be seen of men."* The whole context is that Jesus is a humble Savior, and He wasn't looking for a fan club, or trying to be noticed by men. In that sense He was silent in the streets. The Open Air Campaigners and other folks who have street meetings were given the benefit of the doubt. They aren't out there because they are proud, and want to make themselves known. In most cases they have a burden to get the gospel of Jesus Christ to the masses; to those who need the Savior. In Jesus' day the Jews were expecting a sensational Messiah; a Caesar and not a Savior. They expected the Messiah to come with great charisma and personality, and order an army, and overthrow the government of Rome. God the Father responded to the life and ministry of His Son, "The Lord Jesus is a gentle Savior; a humble lowly Savior."

A battered reed and smoldering wick: God's gentleness will never bruise or break us

In this prophesy there are two word pictures that describe the tender nature of this gentle Savior and they are both in Matthew 12:20, *"A battered reed and smoldering wick."* What is a battered reed? KJV calls it a *"bruised reed"*. Wuest in his expanded translation of the New Testament translates it this way, *"A reed that has become completely crushed, He will not break."* This expression, "a battered reed, a crushed reed, a broken reed", just shows the tenderness of the Lord Jesus. An ordinary reed is one of the most fragile things in the vegetable kingdom. It has no flowers on it that you could put on your kitchen table, and has no fruit that you could eat to satisfy. You can't use a reed as timber for building anything. It can't be used for a staff to lean upon, and it can't be used for a weapon. The only thing they ever used a reed for was a shepherd could cut one off for a shepherd's pipe, and make an instrument out of it. That didn't last too long because

then it would fall apart. A reed was one of the most fragile, useless things in the whole vegetable kingdom.

If a reed is so useless, what would a crushed reed be, a broken reed, a bent reed? If a reed is one of the most fragile things in all the vegetable kingdom, then a bruised reed was the weakest of the most fragile things in all of the vegetable kingdom. When the Father gave His response to the Lord Jesus, He said, "This is My Son, my servant, and this is My chosen One, and this is My elect, and this is the One that thrills My heart. My soul is pleased in Him. He's so gentle that He wouldn't hurt a bruised reed."

Let's look at the next figure. Matthew 12:20, *"Smoldering wick."* KJV says *"smoking flax"*. It's a picture of His gentleness. A smoldering wick is wax in which the fire is just about to go out. There's nothing left but a spark. The Father was responding to the Sermon on the Mount in those two chapters of miracles; all that He said and all that He did. He said, "What I see is a gentle Savior." Everything about the Lord Jesus was a humble Messiah. He didn't cater to the rich or the powerful or the smart or those who had some kind of influence. He always had his eye open for the bruised reed and the smoking flax.

Psalm 18:35 is the psalm that David wrote at the end of his life. He looked back over his long years, and he summarized it in the great hymn, *"Thy gentleness hath made me great."* Just think about that. The gentleness of Jesus, the gentleness of the Messiah, the humility of Christ, was not only true in His day as He ministered. For example, the leper was a bruised reed that Jesus would not break. Other men would step all over him, and ignore him, and not give him the time of day. But he was a bruised reed, and Jesus was a gentle Shepherd. Same thing with the woman taken in adultery. She was a bruised reed! They wanted to crush and stone her, "She's worthless and she doesn't deserve to live." Though they were bruised and frail, He always had a heart for the weak.

It's also true in our day. I'm a bruised reed and you are a bruised reed. I'm smoking flax, and you are smoking flax, and that's our hope with the Lord. Smoking flax and smoldering wick, and there's only one spark left, and it's about to die out, is a picture of those poor people who have come to the end, and have been tempted to say, "What is the

use? What good is it anyway?" It's those who are ready to throw in the towel, and are ready to die out, "This is the end of my flame."

What is your single hope when you are a broken reed, and are bent over and wounded, and everybody just steps on you, crushes you and could care less about you? When your reed is ruined by sin, by people and their attitudes, and by trials, temptations, personal weakness, by your own stupidity and foolishness, and your ignorance, what is our single hope? The answer is and always will be the gentleness of Jesus. May God burn it into your heart and into my heart; the tenderness of the humble Lord. He will never break a bruised reed. That is tremendous!

Just so, what is my one hope when I want to give it all up, when my flame is about to go out, and I want to throw everything overboard, and wash my hands of the whole stupid thing? Did you ever feel that way? Did you ever feel like smoking flax, that all you have left is one spark, and that's just about ready to die out? What is your hope when you feel like that? It's the gentleness of Jesus. He'll not snuff you out. I don't care how small that spark is, and I don't care how bruised that reed is, this is God's estimate of God the Son. He's a gentle Savior. I can see putting a splint on a storm broken bow of a fruit tree, but who is going to splint up a broken reed? Only Jesus. He binds up the broken hearted. Isn't that tremendous? I can picture binding up a bone, wrapping up a wrist, and putting an arm in a sling, but how do you bind up a broken heart? Only Jesus knows how to do that. He does it all the time. He's the gentle Savior.

I picture the wick of a candle with that slender stream of smoke about as thick as a piece of silk, just ready to die out; just a red dot left. He will not snuff that out. This passage is loaded with comfort because it presents Christ as the gentle Savior, and also because it's the Father's response. I'm glad it's not John the Baptist's response, because then you might say it's just one man's opinion; "That's how he responded to that ministry." This isn't one man's opinion. This is God the Father's inspired response to the life and ministry of His Son; of all that He said and all that He did. It's fact and it's true. It's not just an educated guess or observation. It's fact from the Father's heart.

This has a lot more meaning when you remember that this is the response of the Father. The Lord Jesus as a gentle Messiah is in

between the two responses of the Pharisees. Later on at the second response of the Pharisees, you'll see what I'm talking about, because the Pharisees, with their legal system, were very oppressive. They had no heart for the bruised reed, and no heart for the smoking flax. Their legalism crushed the reed, and snuffed out the flame all the time. But when you read there's comfort for the lowly, not only does it present Jesus as the gentle one, and not only presents the inspired response of God the Father, but look at Matthew 12:20, "*Until He leads justice to victory."*

How long will the Lord be gentle with a bruised reed and smoking flax? How many times will He tolerate me when I come as a bruised reed? Matthew 12: 20 says, *"Until,"* until what? *"Until He leads justice to victory."* I think it means at least this, and probably more—the Lord will always deal justly with you. It depends on how your reed got broken. He'll never violate His principles, He will not lower His standard, He will not force your will, and He's not going to make it easy for you. He didn't spare the angels when they sinned, and He didn't spare His own Son, and He's not about to spare you, either. He'll deal justly with the bruised reed until… Until what? Until victory, until the reed is strong and the flame is bright again. That's full of comfort, especially if you see yourself as God wants us to see ourselves, as the bruised reed or the smoking flax. He has guaranteed that He'll deal with you until He takes you to victory. That's a tremendous passage. No wonder it ends in Matthew 12:21, *"In Him the gentiles hope; hope in His name."* I find as much hope in these four verses as any four verses in the entire Bible.

That's the Father's response of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus; a gentle Savior, a humble Messiah. Matthew 12:22-45 gives us the second response of the Pharisees. There are several reasons why this is a difficult passage. First is that it's so long. There are twenty four verses in this section. The second reason is that it contains the passage on the unpardonable sin. Commentators have tried to plow through there with their combat boots for many years, and muddied up this scripture calling it profound. That's another reason it's tough. The third is verses 43-45; it closed with a very strange story about the unclean spirit leaving a man, and seeking rest in a waterless place, returning again, and finding the house all swept out. Because the house was unoccupied, he moved in with seven of his friends, and the end

was worse than the beginning. What does it mean and how does it tie in?

I gave a couple of reasons why you can't just jump right in. We've got to take our time, and start with what is absolutely clear, and move toward that which is thorny. We're going to deal with the unpardonable sin just as an introduction. We've got a few principles to get the section before you.

THE SECOND RESPONSE OF THE PHARISEES

Matthew 12:22-32, *"Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, 'This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?' But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.' And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, 'Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house, and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an*

accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.'"

The unpardonable sin

It seems rather strange to have such a supportive passage on the tenderness of Christ followed by the passage on the unforgiveable sin against the Holy Spirit. It's a solemn passage. Of course, no idle words were ever uttered from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. I don't believe any words that He ever said were more calculated to make men fear than what He writes in this particular passage. They are full of startling things. Have you ever met anyone who thought or claimed that they had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit; the unpardonable sin? I have, and it's heart rending to the nth degree.

Let me get before you a couple of the chief interpretations of this passage, and I trust we'll get to the heart of it. The first is from verse 24, *"When the Pharisees heard it they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."* See what they did? Jesus did a mighty work by the power of the Holy Spirit. They said He did it by Satan. Therefore, the sin against the Holy Spirit is attributing to Satan what God does. If God does something, and you say Satan did it, then that's the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Strange statements trying to explain what this unpardonable sin is! There are some Christians, if that is what it is, and I don't believe that's what it is, who are in a lot of trouble. I know some prominent Christian leaders who are in public positions doing platform work, and I've heard Christians say, "That guy is of the devil. He's done more harm to Christianity than any other Christian." Well, if that's the sin against the Holy Spirit, they are in trouble saying things like that. Sometimes we can misjudge paradoxes in our lives, "Boy, Satan really allowed that accident in my life, and brought that accident and sickness and trial." Well, what if it was God that brought it in and you say it was Satan? Did you commit the unpardonable sin?

I had a man come to me one time and said, "There is no work for me and I know why; because one time in anger I said, 'God damn the Holy Spirit and I meant it. I committed the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." Is that unforgivable? Is that the sin against the Holy Spirit?

Some people say, "I hate God," and other blasphemy, and just speak out against God. Is that the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?

This last Wednesday morning I had fellowship and breakfast with a Christian brother in this town, and he was telling me about a jail visitation he went on. The man he visited had sold his soul to Satan, and wrote a contract to Satan for a color TV, a wife, and a house, and he signed it in his blood. He said, "I'm selling my soul and I'm serving Satan." Is that unforgivable, the sin against the Holy Spirit?

Let me give you the second view. The first is that they say it's attributing the work of God to Satan. The second view is really the traditional view of church history. God's people have believed this through the years, and I believe it's the accurate view. It's what the Bible teaches. The sin against the Holy Spirit is when you say your final "no" to the Lord Jesus Christ; rejecting Jesus Christ finally. It's not saying "no" along the way. It's when you have finally said your "no". If it's just saying "no" we'd all burn in hell because we've all said "no". It's that final "no".

Scripture never contradicts scripture. One scripture can never undermine another scripture. Whatever the sin against the Holy Spirit is, it can never contradict John 6:37, *"He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."* Calling God the devil does not rule out a later coming to Him in repentance and faith. Of course, every "no" leads closer and closer to the final "no" and there's a tremendous warning here. If I don't say "yes" I might lose the desire to say "yes", and find myself being hardened.

Why is it called the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? The answer is because of John 16:8-11 and other verses. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to present Christ to the sinner, to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. In other words, it's the Holy Spirit's job to come to the sinner and say, "Wilt thou have this Jesus to be thy only Savior?" If they say, "no," then on another occasion the Holy Spirit, faithfully striving, does it again, "Will you take this Christ, this Jesus?" That's His ministry; always to present Christ, always to present the Lord Jesus to the sinner. So, people can say, "no, no, no," and a final "no". What is the final "no"? The answer is death. There's no final "no" before death. If someone dies saying "no" to Christ, to the Holy

Spirit's presentation of Christ, it's clear there is no hope for him or her. While there is life there is hope. It's the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, because it's the Spirit's ministry to present Christ.

We're talking about an attitude; the whole ministry of Christ. We're not just talking about a sin against the Holy Spirit. We sin against the Holy Spirit every day, but it's not unforgivable. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, *"We do not quench the Spirit."* Ephesians 4:30, *"We grieve the Holy Spirit."* Acts 7:51, *"We resist the Spirit."* Isaiah 63:10, *"We vex the Holy Spirit of God."* But it's all forgivable. It's possible to sin against the Holy Spirit, and be forgiven. That unforgivable blasphemy is a final "no" to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why is it unforgivable? Some people read verse 32, and try to read purgatory into it because it says, *"It shall not be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come."* They say, "See, implied in that is that there is forgiveness in the age to come but not for this sin. For other sins there is forgiveness." He's not saying there is not forgiveness in the age to come. He's underscoring the fact that this will never be forgiven; not now, not in death and not in the age to come—never to be forgiven.

I used to think that, I speak as a fool, eternal damnation was a little severe for the petty little things we do against God here. He said, *"An eye for an eye."* I didn't say that. *"A tooth for a tooth."* If I had five years of sinning, why not five years of punishment in hell? That sounded fair to me. It didn't seem right; five years of sinning and an eternity of punishment. It's sort of like overkill. If I sin for twenty five years, then why couldn't I just go to hell for twenty five years, and pay for all of that sin? Why forever?

Mark 3:29 is the sister passage to this same truth. In the KJV it says, *"Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is in danger of eternal damnation."* That's not really what Jesus said about eternal damnation. In the NAS and other revised versions they changed it to what it ought to be. Jesus said a far more searching and solemn thing than that. Mark 3:29, *"Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, because he is guilty of an eternal sin."* Five years of sinning for five years of punishment; twenty five years of sinning for twenty give years of punishment—an eternal sin gets an eternity for punishment; for ever and ever.

When a finite being sins against an infinite God it has infinite wages. That's why the infinite God could in three hours pay an eternity of sin. In three hours Christ crushed what all mankind would have paid forever, and He exhausted it on the cross. The Bible says that those who say their final "no" say it forever. They suffer eternally because they sin eternally. They are hardened in their final "no". For ever and ever they are going to say "no". That's why the Lord Jesus was so intent. Some people have the idea that after a million years, if the Savior visited hell, everyone would jump at the chance, and trust Him and get out. That's against the Bible. If a Savior did visit hell after a million years, there is not one sinner in hell that would accept Him.

I used to think that the gnashing of teeth is what I do in the dentist's office. I grit my teeth for pain. That's not what gnashing of teeth is. It's hate. When they stoned Stephen, they gnashed at him with their teeth. For all the ages of eternity people in hell will hate the Lord for putting them there. They are not going to get any softer. Pain doesn't make them softer. It's a tragedy thinking that affliction on the earth makes you pure. Only a miracle of God can make affliction make you pure. Trouble on earth makes you bitter. If affliction made you pure, the purest people in the universe would be those in hell. Affliction makes you hard, apart from the grace of God. God uses it for good.

Every other sin against the Holy Spirit is forgivable

How do I know for sure that I haven't committed the unpardonable sin? There are a couple of simple answers. First, accept Christ because accepting Jesus Christ is the exact opposite of a final "no". It's a final "yes". That's one way. The second is this. You'll never deal with a sinner who thinks he has committed this sin; an unsaved person. You'll only deal with Christians. Fear, being afraid that you've committed it, is proof positive that you have not committed it. How so? Because your heart can not be soft toward God and hard at the same time. You can't be saying a final "no", and still be tender toward the Lord, and afraid that you've committed it.

I've met people who were obsessed with the idea that they had committed this sin. I don't believe that Satan has ever tried to destroy an unsaved person with this text. He only uses it to harass the children of God; only those who are tender and sensitive toward God. If you

find a man or woman who is hard and rebellious and determined in their sin, they aren't afraid of this. It's only the sensitive child of God, a trembling saint that Satan wants to harass. If you meet anybody who is afraid they committed this, it's a dead giveaway that they haven't. If you said your final "no" you wouldn't care anything about this threat. You wouldn't believe it anyway.

The third way I know I haven't committed it is to take the simple step of faith, and just thank the Lord Jesus for the blood of Christ**.** Do you realize that on the level of earth all sin is unforgivable? I don't care how slight it is. All sin is unforgiveable on the level of earth. Every sin needs the precious blood of Jesus Christ to be forgiven. There is no question in this passage that the Lord Jesus issued a great warning through these verses. Proverbs 29:1, *"He that hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be reproved, and that without remedy."* If you keep saying "no, no, no", no", one day your mind is gone, or you find yourself in that other world for which you were made, and it's all over. I think we need a caution here. Don't ever view a person as having said his final "no". We don't know that, and we can't see hearts.

Even though the unpardonable sin is here, the theme of the tenderness of God reigns all the way through this section. Matthew 12:31. If you look at that you'll say, "That's a powerful verse." *"Therefore I say to you any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven."* Do you see the hope in that verse? You might say, "I haven't committed the last part. I haven't said my final 'no'." Look at the first part, *"Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven."* I tell you that there is hope in that! That's a tremendous verse. You might say, "I've abused my body so badly." *"Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven."* "I cheated on my wife or husband, abused children, am a murderer, a drunkard, a cheat, a liar, a curser and unthankful, an arsonist, and an embezzler." *"Any sin and any blasphemy shall be forgiven."* I say that's full of hope. Tremendous! There's a "Hallelujah" in this whole section on the tenderness of Christ. No matter how ugly and wicked my life or yours is, any sin and any blasphemy shall be forgiven. So, the very verses that scare the tar out of you, also whisper sweet peace to your heart.

Matthew 12:28&29 is one other illustration of the tenderness of the Lord. *"If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of*

God has come upon you. But how can anyone enter the strong man's house, and carry off his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he'll plunder his goods." In this passage and in the context, the Spirit of God presents the strong man as Satan. All you have to do is look over your own history and life or the scripture, and it's well proven that he is the strong man in the world and in our own hearts. He has perplexed us, and seduced us, and embroiled us, and dismayed us, and discouraged us, and uprooted us, and split us, and done everything against us. He's the god of this world, and the prince of the power of the air, and the accuser. He is the dragon and the murderer and a liar, and he's legion; he's the strong man. We can't begin to tangle with the strong man, and estimate his power or his command, or how many demons are under his control. We don't know his cruelty, his cunning, his daring, his activity, his knowledge; he's the strong man.

In this passage there's someone else mentioned called *"the stronger than the strong"*. Guess who that is? Take all the scriptures you want to see how strong Satan is, and here's the stronger than the strong who ties him up, spoils his goods, and robs his house. I think there's comfort here, that the Lord Jesus is stronger than the strong man. 1 John 4:4, *"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."* How much greater? Ten times greater? A hundred times greater? A thousand times greater? A million times greater? I could go on forever, and I'd keep saying, "More than that." Infinitely greater is He that's in you than he that's in the world. I'm not afraid of the strong man because I have the stronger than the strong man, the lion tamer in my heart.

I'm going to read two verses from Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress", as he should have written them. I re-arranged the verses. He wrote verse 2 and then verse 3. He should have written 3 and then 2, "I know this world with devils filled should threaten to undue us. We will not fear for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim; we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure. One little word will fell him. Did we in our own strength confide? Our striving would be losing, were not the right man on our side. The man of God's own choosing. Dost that ask who that may be? Christ Jesus; it is He. Lord Sabbath is His name from age to age the same, and He must win the battle."

6

CONTINUATION OF SECOND RESPONSE OF THE PHARISEES

Two stories of demon possession

That brings us to a fuller discussion of verses 22-45. One way to show you the great unity in this passage is to watch how something starts, and then look at how it ends. Bible commentators call this "studying the terminal points". Look at Matthew 12:22&23, *"And there was brought to Him a demon possessed man who was blind and dumb, and He healed him so that the dumb man spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and began to say, 'This man cannot be the son of David, can He?'"* It begins with a miracle. A demon possessed man who was also blind and dumb is healed by the compassionate Lord Jesus. That was the occasion of the great conversation that took place within those verses.

Then look at Mathew 12:43 and how it ends, *"Now, when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I'll return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes it finds it unoccupied, swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits, more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That's the way it will be with this evil generation."* It closes with another story of a demon possessed

man, a story that Jesus told in order to wake up the evil and wicked generation.

In between those terminal points is a most solemn conversation of the Lord Jesus; probably some of the most awesome words that ever fell from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ; serious words, solemn words, sober words, words of warning, words of danger, words that are designed to penetrate into the heart; terrible words. There are two things He talked about between those terminal points. In Matthew 12:24-32 He warns them about the fearful possibility of saying a final "no", what will happen if they die without Jesus—terrible words. Then in verses 33-42 He actually goes beyond the scene called "time" into the realm called "eternity" to the judgment, the horrible but certain judgment that is going to come. It will be a day that God judges inside the heart, and it will be a day where there will be no excuses allowed. Every mouth will be stopped, and every reason that man can give for saying a final "no", and every plea and rationalization, and every ground of argumentation and vindication is swept away: no excuse for saying a final "no".

If we follow the thread of wisdom in the words of the Lord Jesus, and follow how He answers the Pharisees, by catching the spirit of what He says, and getting the intent of what the Holy Spirit records, I think it will be clear why He closes with that climactic story about the demon possessed man. He is building up to that, and He uses it as a clincher to His conversation. What the Lord said in this passage, as is true in everything He ever said, has no bottom to it. It's profound and deep. We can only touch a little bit of it. He covered a lot of ground. So, in a special way, I'm going to deliberately try not to go deep. I want to just pick up the surface ideas, just to catch the spirit of this conversation. We'll fly over it, and get the big things. Obviously, you could spend a lot of time on any one of these phrases or particular words, because there is so much here.

The occasion of this conversation was that the Lord Jesus healed a man with compound problems; a demon possessed man who was blind and dumb. The Lord Jesus with just a word heals him. When He did that two things happened. First in Matthew 12:23 the multitudes were amazed and began to say, *"This man cannot be the son of David, can He?"* It made the common people wonder. When they saw that man

heal, they began to wonder, "Is this Messiah? This couldn't be the One that was promised in the Old Testament, could it?" Matthew 12:24, *"But when the Pharisees heard it they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.'"* The Pharisees, the religious leaders, were afraid of losing their congregation. They had to discredit the Lord Jesus, and bad mouth Him. The Pharisees did not want the common people entertaining thoughts that Jesus might be the Messiah, the son of David. It was this attempt to discredit the Lord Jesus that brought out that flood tide of warnings from His sacred lips.

The Pharisees offered their explanation as to how the Lord Jesus cast out that demon. Matthew 12:24, *"This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."* Understand how the Spirit records this. That answer pierced the heart of the Lord Jesus, not because they said a bad thing about Him, or because they lifted Him up with Satan. He was never hurt by what people said about Him. His sensitivity was toward God, and not toward men. He was concerned and hurt by God's opinion, and not man's opinion. That statement hurt the Lord Jesus because it revealed the very serious condition of the heart of those Pharisees. They were in a bad spot, and in danger. They were resisting the truth, and they were blind to the work of the Spirit of God, were hardened in their hearts, and refused to believe. They were becoming harder and harder, and were in danger of saying a final "no", and going to hell forever. That's what hurt Him. If you read this carefully, even though He uses some of the strongest language anywhere in the New Testament, it's full of love and full of compassion. His heart went out for those Pharisees. He wasn't trying to cut them to shreds. He had a burden for them.

One of the things the Lord Jesus did, and He did it often, is that He reduced everything to its simplest form. He went right down to bedrock. He traced it back and back, and then when He got back as far as you can go, He reduced it to its simplest state. There are two absolutes; God, representing all that is good and right and honest and just and merciful, and Satan, representing everything that is bad and wicked and evil and cruel and merciless. Jesus explained that these two are always at absolute antagonism toward each other. They are always in conflict, they never agree, and are always against each other at sword's points. He drew a sharp line of demarcation. He said, in effect,

that it's just that simple. Satan never agrees with God and God never agrees with Satan**.**

The Pharisees liked to argue long arguments, confuse everything, and muddy up all the rational thinking, and call it profound. Jesus didn't allow that. He traced it right back to God and to Satan. In Matthew 12:30 He lays down a principle, *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me, scatters*." He would not allow a neutral gray zone; an in between. He said, "There is no in between. There's only an absolute antagonism. There's no neutrality. Satan is a scatterer. God is a gatherer. Those who line up with Satan, also are scatterers. Those who line up with God are gatherers."

By reducing something to that simple form, truth and error, light and darkness, right and wrong, God and Satan, He is able to lay down the logic that He uses with them. Matthew 12:25, *"Knowing their thoughts, He said to them, 'Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and any city or house that is divided against itself shall not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How, then, shall his kingdom stand? If I, by Beelzebub, cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently, they shall be your judges."* He said that there are two kingdoms, and they are in absolute antagonism to each other, so now line it up. Who is cast out? And they said, "Over here a demon was cast out." Jesus: "Well, who cast him out?" The Pharisees: "Well, Satan." Jesus: "Well, he'd have to cross the wire. He wouldn't fight against himself. They aren't in antagonism with each other. Satan can't cast out Satan, just like these people on this side aren't going to fight each other, or the house will fall down." He reduced it to that simplicity, gives them that logic, and He brings them to this point; if Satan would not cast out Satan, then somebody else must have. If somebody else did, who was it?

Matthew 12:28, *"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* It's the Spirit of God. And then the sister passage in Luke 11:20, where it records the same story, *"If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* The Spirit of God is called the *"finger of God"*. In the Old Testament the finger of God was a picture of His power. *"The heavens are the work of His fingers."* Remember in Exodus 7&8, the magicians in Egypt were imitating the mighty power of God, the

miracles He was doing through Moses? Moses, by the mighty power of God, threw his staff down, and it became a serpent. The magicians, either by their own craft or by demon power, imitated that. Moses, by the mighty power of God, turned the water into blood. The magicians, by some trick or by demons, imitated that. Moses, by the might power of God, multiplied frogs. The magicians, through their own craft or through demons, imitated that. Moses, by the mighty power of God, turned all the dust of the earth into gnats and lice. The magicians tried to do that, too. They tried, and they tried, and they couldn't do it by trickery, or by demon power. In Exodus 8:19 they went to Pharaoh and said, *"This is the finger of God. This is the power of God."*

The Pharisees were resisting, and were fighting against the finger of God, the power of God. They were saying, "No," to the Spirit of God. At this point Jesus utters Matthew 12:31-32, *"Therefore, I say to you that any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven, and whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man shall be forgiven him, but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or the age to come."* From verses 33-42 He tells them about the judgment that is going to come if they die saying "no".

As believers we can expect to be misrepresented and lied about

Matthew 10:24&25 is our key verse, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, and a slave is not above his master. It's enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master."* And here's the part, *"If they call the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household?"* Do you see the principle? We can expect as followers of the Lord Jesus for the enemies of Christ to be very irrational with us. They are going to call good evil, and they're going to call right wrong. They may come right out and say you are a devil, or have the devil. We shouldn't be shocked, and we shouldn't even be surprised when we're maligned, lied about, and accused of wickedness, even when right and purity is on our mind. No matter how cautious you are, and no matter what precautions you take to avoid misrepresentation, you are still going to be put in a place where you are going to be misrepresented and lied about.

Let me give a couple of practical examples. When a Christian man councils a woman, or a Christian woman councils a man, their hearts might be as clean as the snow on a polar cap. They may have innocence and be pure before God, and yet put themselves in a place where the world can harbor insinuations and suspicions about them. The same thing is true when Christians have to deal in matters of money. Over and over again people are going to look at that, and are going to impugn motives that are not really there.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying in any way that Christian men and women are above such things. They're not, and I'm sure that many Christians use Christian service as a cover-up for their own wicked heart and sin. But I also know this is true, that sometimes their hearts are right and pure for the glory of God. Even then, someone is going to come along and say, "They do this by the power of Beelzebub, and because they're proud," or, "They are visiting that widow because when she dies they are trying to get the house," or something like that. Don't be surprised, if they call the master of the house Beelzebub, when how much more the members of the household will be. Sometimes we have pure motives, and we're honest and righteous for good reasons. Very often at those times we're accused of the ugliest and most vicious things. It's amazing but it's not surprising.

Don't argue with sinners—Use absolutes

The second suggestion I'd make is, as the Lord Jesus did, use absolutes. Don't try to argue with the sinner, because chances are that he's smarter than you are, and if you start reasoning with him, you're dead. Or maybe you are a little smarter, and you'll be able to reason with him, but then maybe one of his friends can reason you away. When you do what the Lord Jesus did, they can't answer that. Deal with absolutes; go right to the point; Christ or Satan; with me or against Me; scattering or gathering; heaven or hell; right or wrong; light or darkness; yes or no. That's how Jesus dealt. He never left a gray area. It appeals to the will, and it puts a demand on them, and they've got to make a decision. Which side are you on? Over and over again the prophets did that. They drew a line on the ground, *"Choose this day who you are going to serve."* I suggest that the simplest way to deal with Pharisees is to just use absolutes like the Lord Jesus did.

How would you feel if someone came up to you and said, "You've got a devil."? You might just want to flare up and say, "Do you want to rumble?" The Lord Jesus dealt very lovingly with them. *"Can Satan cast out Satan?"* If someone said you had a devil you might say, "What right do you have to say I have a devil?" He didn't do that. He just was gentle and loving, and He knew that they were in danger, and their souls were in danger, and they were going to die saying "no", and His heart was broken. He didn't hate them. He used strong language, and He was firm, but He didn't have an attitude, "No skin off my nose. Go to hell, then, if that's how you feel." Some Christians have that attitude. The Lord Jesus becomes our example, and God, of course, has to work that in us. Don't be shocked, whatever they say about you. Use plain language, and don't give them a neutral ground. Everybody tries to straddle a couple of worlds. Don't let them do that. Make it clear, as the Lord Jesus did, and then when you warn them, warn them in love.

In Matthew 12:33-42 He tells them about the judgment that's down the road. Verse 36, *"I say to you that every careless word that man shall speak, they shall render account for it in the Day of Judgment; for by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."* Verse 41, *"The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. Behold, something greater than Jonah is here."* Verse 42, *"The queen of the south shall rise up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and, behold, something greater than Solomon is here."* Verse 36, *"the Day of Judgment,"* verse 41, *"at the judgment,"* verse 42, *"at the judgment,"* verse 45, *"the last state of that man."* Jesus is not trying, as one commentator I read said, to scare the hell out of them. Hell was in His mind but He wasn't using a scare tactic. He's loving, and longs for them to get saved.

Matthew 12:33, *"Either make the tree good, then its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit."* I used to think He was saying, "You Pharisees are like trees. Now, get it together; either make the tree good, or make the tree bad. Don't be neutral, and don't be in between." That's not what He's saying. He's not comparing the Pharisees to the tree. The tree is the Lord Jesus. Here's what He's saying, "Make a decision about the tree. You've seen

My works, and you've seen Me cast out a demon. Now, bad can't produce good, and good can't produce bad. You've seen My fruits, my miracles. Now make a decision about the tree. It's either good with good fruits, or it's bad with bad fruits." He's calling them to make a decision because they are in danger of saying a final "no". He's asking, "Make another decision about Me. Look at Me as a tree. You saw My fruits. I cast out a demon of a blind and dumb man. I did it by the finger of God, and power and Spirit of God. Make a decision about that tree. You can't have a good tree and bad fruit, and you can't have rotten fruit from a good tree."

In Matthew12:25, *"Knowing their thoughts…"* He knew their attitude toward the tree because they stated it with their own lips, and that was the dead giveaway, Matthew 12:24, *"This man casts out devils by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons."* Now Jesus lets them in on the first great truth of the judgment, that God is going to judge hearts at the judgment, and words are the index of the heart. He heard their words. And their words were that He had cast out demons by a demon. That gave them away. He knew their hearts were in trouble. He said that there is coming a day when God is going to judge hearts, and the mouth and words we say are an index of the heart.

We will be judged by our words spoken and the words/thoughts of our heart.

Matthew 12:34, *"You brood of vipers! How can you being evil speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of what fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good. The evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. I say to you that every careless word that man shall speak, they shall render account for it in the Day of Judgment, for by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned."* Matthew 15:18, *"The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile a man. Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, false witness and slanders. These are things which defile the man."* The heart is a reservoir, and the mouth is like a dam. We can't see the heart, but we can hear the words, and words communicate character.

In verse 34 the Lord Jesus looked at the Pharisees like a tree. He said, "I've heard your words, and I've seen your fruit, just like you've seen mine. You accuse Me of being in compliance with Satan. Well, I accuse you of being in compliance with Satan. You are the ones." And He calls them *"a brood of vipers"*. A brood of vipers is the offspring of a snake; the serpent at war with the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. He's saying, "You are a child of the devil. I've heard your words, and they indicate your heart, and you are in trouble, because the judgment is coming, and you are going to be judged by your heart, and your words express what your heart is."

In our legal system we have a statement that the police use, "The words you say can and will be used against you." That's what the Lord Jesus is saying here. The words are the index of the heart. In verse 36 He calls them *"careless words"* and He says that we'll all render an account for careless words. "What if I hold my tongue, and don't say those words, and I restrain my passion, and hold it all in, and I don't use strong, passionate words, then will I be exempt in the Day of Judgment?" You know the answer. Speech is words spoken. Thoughts are words unspoken, but they're words. You can't think without words. That's why a little baby can't think. You need words to think, and you are going to be judged by your words. It doesn't matter if they are spoken. You are going to be judged by the words that you say, and the words that you think in your heart. They become the thermometer of the heart.

What's wrong with over statements, over praising someone, condemning someone, exaggerating a little in order to drive a point home, giving a sweeping approval or sweeping censor of something? People are discussing things, and great principles are in conflict, and great interests are at stake, and great prospects begin to open before you, and you begin to think fast, and you blurt out words. You might say, "Well, I didn't really mean it. It just sort of came out; careless words." Sometimes in anger or in passion we use sharp words, strong words, and words that are really designed to hurt and injure. I'll tell you what's wrong with it. You're dealing with the heart to tell you what you are really like. You aren't what you think you are— but what you think, you are. God says that there is a day coming when He is going to judge the heart, and He's going to recall all the thoughts and all the intents and all the words. He was longing for these Pharisees. He said

that judgment is based on the communication of the heart. There is such a thing as lying lips. Someone can say, "I love Jesus; all to Jesus I surrender," and not mean that. That's why the judgment is the judgment of the heart.

To get back into the flow of the passage, the Pharisees looked at Jesus, and they saw the tree, they saw the fruit, and they said, "He is of Satan." Jesus looked at them, and He saw the tree, He saw their fruit, and He said, "Generation of vipers." Then He saw the light of certain judgment and said, "You better make another decision about the tree." In Matthew 12:38 they said, *"We want a sign."* All through this chapter He's presenting Himself. Make note of Matthew 12:6, *"Something greater than the temple is here,"* Matthew 12:41, *"Something greater than Jonah is here,"* Matthew 12:42, *"Something greater than Solomon is here."* Of course, the temple stands for that whole system of worship; the priesthood, the prophets, the kings. And in this whole passage the Spirit of God is just presenting Christ to these Pharisees as prophet, priest and King.

The only sign that He'll ever give to this wicked generation is a resurrection life

He gives two big truths in Matthew 39-42. *"He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulteress generation craves a sign. No sign shall be given but the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*." The sign that He's going to give a wicked generation is the sign of Jonah. We better know that because Jesus said that He will never give another sign to a wicked generation but the sign of Jonah. In the context it's clear. It's resurrection. It says, *"Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish."* Christ is going to come back from the dead, and that will be a sign for them. In John 2:18&19 the Jews asked, *"What sign will you give us?"* And Jesus answered, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I'll raise it up."* He was speaking of the temple of His body; resurrection. He only ever gave one sign.

Jonah preached as one alive from the dead. He was left for dead out to sea. I'm certain those mariners, when they came back to shore had quite

a story to tell about a stranger who came running down to the boat just before they shoved off, about a violent storm, about casting lots, about throwing all of their wares overboard, about the strange confession from that weird prophet who said he was running from the living God, about throwing him overboard, about the supernatural calm that came over the sea, and about the big sea monster that came up and gobbled up the prophet. I imagine when they went back they said, "You aren't going to believe this. What a time we had out at sea!" Three days later, here comes Jonah, and he's preaching, and has a Bible in his hand. I can imagine that those people were quite shocked after hearing the story from the mariners.

Luke 11:30, *"And Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites*." What sign? Resurrection. He was not only talking about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He was talking about the only sign He'll ever give to this generation; resurrection life. He was talking about the credentials that the Christian has as he goes out. He said, *"I'm going to give you one sign, and I'll never give you another sign to this wicked generation."* The only credentials you are going to have, and the only commission you are going to have, and the only authority you are ever going to have is a resurrected life. That's the only sign they are going to get. What are my credentials when I go out into the world that hates God? What is the sign that you are a woman or man of God? It's resurrection life; the sign of Jonah. That's the sign that God gives to this generation, and they are looking for it.

It's not a degree from some Bible school or seminary. It's not acceptance from a board. It's not a letter of recommendation or commendation from some group or some author or some famous speaker. No endorsement in the world can give one drop of authority. You get a man that has been brought to life by the Lord Jesus, who has come back from the dead, who knows something about fellowship and union with the life of God, someone like Jonah who has come back, and who was dead, and is alive, and who was blind and now sees, and that person, walking on water and living a resurrection life, is the sign that God gives to this wicked generation. Let me apply it very pointedly. If you have not yet understood what it means to live a resurrected life, don't preach the gospel. You have no power. Nothing will ever be done. You are hurting the cause of Christ. The only sign

that is ever going to work, the only credential that's anything is resurrection and an exchanged life with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It doesn't matter what version of the Bible you use, and it doesn't matter how fancy your charts are, or how sound and orthodox your doctrine is. Do you have the sign of Jonah? If you don't have the sign of Jonah, the wicked are not going to be impressed. They are looking for that sign. The appeal is in Matthew 12:41, *"The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah."* In Jonah's day they had less light, less opportunity and less chance, and He said, "You Pharisees, you have all this light and all this opportunity." Christ Himself is in their midst living a resurrection life, doing miracles, and they are stubbornly rejecting Him. Matthew 12:42, *"She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon."* It's recorded in 1 Kings 10, the Queen of Sheba heard of King Solomon, of his name and fame, and travelled over a thousand miles to hear for herself. She sought him out, sat at his feet, and listened to him; no excuse.

No excuses for not seeking His will, walking in His way or neglecting His words

1Kings 10:6-8, the Queen of Sheba is talking, *"It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and wisdom and, alas, I did not believe the reports until I came myself, and my eyes have seen it and, behold, the half has not been told. How blessed are your men, and how blessed are your servants who stand before you continually."* Do you see what the Lord Jesus is saying? "You Pharisees, you are in danger of dying, and saying a final 'no', and you have no excuse. In the Old Testament a gentile woman from a far country heard rumors about a king, and she didn't let anything stop her. She began to seek, and nothing stood in the way—no danger, no hardship, no time, no money, no responsibility, no expense; nothing stood in the way." And Solomon was only a shadow of Christ. *"One greater than Solomon is here."* What words! No excuses! She came from the ends of the earth. "You Pharisees have no excuses."

If you really want something bad enough, nothing is going to stand in the way. It's true in every realm of life. That drunkard knows how to

get a drink. Those who are hungry for education or success, they go after it. When we began the ministry here we didn't know anything about tapes or duplicators, so we asked some questions, and we inquired a little bit. I'm not saying we know a whole bunch now, but we learned some information, and got a few addresses, and learned how to order tapes. Many of the books in my library are old, and I wanted to know how to rebind books, so I wouldn't lose them. So, I began to talk to people, and enrolled in a course, and bought a press. If you want something, you go after it, and you find it, if you want it bad enough.

The Queen of Sheba heard about Solomon, and she went to the ends of the earth because she was seeking. Jesus says that you are without excuse. Get the big picture. He heals the demon possessed man, they accuse Him of being in league with Satan, and Jesus turned the accusation around and said, "No, you're the ones in league with Satan. I'm concerned for you. You are in danger of saying a final 'no', and the judgment is coming, and you can't escape. God is going to look inside your heart, and you won't have an excuse in that day." He said, "I've given you the only sign any wicked generation ever is going to have; resurrection life; living men, in your midst before your eyes with that life."

Don't settle for the unreality of being swept out if you're still empty and unoccupied

Then He comes to this clincher, Matthew 12:43-45. The key, I believe, is the last sentence of the chapter, *"That is the way it will be with this evil generation."* The key to understanding this puzzling story is that He's talking about a group; that is how it will be with this evil generation. He's not talking about an individual. Of course, principles apply to groups and to individuals. He's talking about a group, and probably that whole group of Pharisees. Here is what He says, "This whole group of Pharisees is like a demon possessed man." He's drawing a parallel.

He turns the table on these Pharisees. They accuse Him in verse 24 of casting out demons by the ruler of demons, and Jesus said, "You are the ones in compliance with Satan, the ones who are a brood of vipers, the ones who are in danger dying, and saying a final 'no' to the Spirit's

testimony concerning Christ. You are the ones rejecting great light, and the ones not seeking. You are like a demon possessed man." If you are going to follow the wisdom of the Lord Jesus here, you are going to have to understand what He's done. It's a marvelous thing. He said, "You accused Me of casting out demons by the prince of demons. Let's turn that around. I'm going to accuse you of casting demons by the prince of demons. You Pharisees are like a demon possessed man, and the demon leaves, and there are some changes in your life. The house is swept, and is put in order; you live by your rules now, and by your regulations, and by laws, and everything looks pretty good—cleaned and swept out." Verse 44 says, "You are still unoccupied and empty. You tithe, memorize scripture, go to temple, keep the holidays, fast and pray, and many other things. You're all swept out, but you've never said 'yes' to Jesus, and you are still unoccupied. You are in danger of saying a final 'no'."

Then Jesus jumps to the day in the future, judgment after death, the death of eternity. All the way through He kept saying, *"At the judgment," "At the judgment," "At the judgment."* Now in verse 45 He says, *"The last state at the judgment, in eternity, the last state of this man."* I believe the number seven in verse 45 is that symbolic use of perfection. The Pharisees cast out that demon by the power of Satan. That was just a reformation. Nothing really took place in his life, just a sweeping out; an arrangement in their lives. They said, "We're not living for Satan. We're living holy men of God. We're the truth." Then came the day of reckoning, and they are standing there laden with unpardoned sin. Their plea was, "We're swept. We're in order. We're free from the demon." Jesus said, "You only thought you were. You never said 'yes' to Jesus. You thought you were free from the demon, but you aren't." Then He gives the most graphic picture of hell; the lake of fire prepared for the demons and his angels. Jesus said that you better look to the last end, that state. "Free from them? No, you're filled to the brim with them, and seven more will come in. You thought you were free because you were swept out a little bit, got a few things in order, followed a few rules, and did some nice things on the outside. You are in great danger. You are not free, and then seven more demons will come in." He said, *"That's the way it will be with this evil generation."* Powerful words! Jesus was tough on the Pharisees because He knew they were on the broad road that led to hell.

Jesus' warnings about unreality are for believers and unbelievers alike

One of the dangers of studying a passage like this is to have that attitude that it doesn't apply to me; I already accepted Christ, I'm not a Pharisee, and I'm not in danger of saying a final "no". For years I used to prepare my messages that way, "These are for sinners, so I'll preach this for sinners. This one is for the Christian, so I'll preach it for the Christian. These are for young people, so I'll prepare this one for young people. This is for old people. This is for prisoners." I used to try to prepare the message in terms of my audience, until God began to open my eyes to the fact that He didn't write His Bible that way. God has only one audience; people created in the image of God. He doesn't address the unsaved or the saved. He addresses everybody. And His Bible is written in principles, equally applicable to both the saved and the unsaved.

This passage has a very strong warning for Christians. True, the application is different; we're not going to be in danger of dying and going to hell, because of the merits and finished work of our lovely Lord Jesus. But in principle we can sin against the Holy Spirit. There is a sin that Christians can do that is unforgivable in this life, and in the life to come. What was the unforgivable sin in this context? It was saying a final "no" to the Holy Spirit's revelation of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit revealed Christ and they said, "No, no, no." They finally died saying "no" and because they died saying "no", to the revelation of God's substitute, they had to go to hell forever, guilty of an eternal sin.

There are unlimited revelations of the Lord Jesus that the Spirit of God longs to give to us. Let's say that the Lord allows for a reason that He only knows, a bitter thing in your life, at least in your estimation. Let's say that He gives you a retarded or handicapped child, or you lose a loved one, or your earthly health or wealth begins to crumble. In through all of that hardship the Holy Spirit wants to show you the Lord Jesus as the One who sustains you in trouble, who comforts you. Let's say that you don't respond to that, and that you have a controversy with God, get bitter and say, "That's not fair. All the unsaved are having it easy and never have all of this trouble." And He says, "I want you to

know Christ as the One who gives you great grace and sustains you," and your heart says, "No, I'd rather complain and be bitter." And then the next day in His great grace He prevails with you again, and He reveals Christ, and you say, "No." Let's say that you kept saying "no", and you never did surrender that thing to Him, and then you died saying a final "no". You wouldn't go to hell for that, but you'd be unforgiven forever. How so?

In this sense, through all the ages of eternity, as one age rolls upon another age, you will never be able to say "yes" to that revelation of Christ that you said your final "no" to on the earth, because in heaven there is no way He can show Himself as the Sustainer in trouble. There's no trouble up there. You will never know Him that way, ever. If you are in heaven for ten billion years, if you said a final "no" to a revelation of Christ on the earth, you've lost it. Even heaven with its endless ages will never reveal it to you. This is application to the Christian. Do you realize that this Bible does not contain all the revelation of Christ? This Bible only contains the revelation of Christ for time; He's the rock, He's the fortress, He's the vine, He's the door, He's the bridegroom, He's the shepherd, He's the priest, He's the advocate, He's the smelter, He's the potter, He's your sun, He's your shield, He's your stronghold, He's your defense, He's a strong arm, He's a high tower. Every revelation in this book is for this life only.

You are not alive because you've got a job to do on earth, but because you've got a God to know on the earth, a God to know in such a way that He can't reveal Himself in heaven. The Holy Spirit is doing one of two things in your life; either preparing you for the next revelation, or showing you Christ. All He calls you to do is one thing; to say "yes, yes, yes." There's a big warning here. If you say "no" to the revelation of Christ, and you keep saying "no" until you die saying a final "no", you've lost it forever. Even the ages of eternity can't reveal Christ the way earth reveals Him. We need to see Him here. We need to have a heart attitude that says, "Yes, yes, Yes." It does apply to us.

7

THE RESPONSE OF THE FAMILY

Matthew 12:46-50, *"While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. And someone said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You. 'But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers? And stretching out His hand toward His disciple, He said, 'Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.'"*

Did the Lord Jesus have literal brothers and sisters?

In order to enter into the heart of this wonderful passage, let me make two preliminary comments about the background, and then we'll look at the great principle of the story. The first issue I want to deal with is the question, "Did the Lord Jesus have literal brothers and sisters when He was on the earth?" There are no other references besides these; Matthew, chapter 1:18, 24 and 25; chapter 12:46-50, chapter 13:55&56; the gospel of Mark, chapter 2:31; chapter 4:3; the gospel of Luke chapter 2:7; chapter 8:19; the gospel of John 2:12; chapter 7:3, 5&10; the book of Acts, chapter 1:14.

Let me give you three chief interpretations, and then a very important principle which is why I'm dealing with this at all in the first place. In Matthew 13:55&56, *"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called 'Mary' and his brothers James, and Joseph and Simon and Judas and his sisters, are they not with us?"* Matthew 13 mentions the names of those called his brothers. James is the same one that wrote the book of James, and then Joseph, Simon and Judas. Then it makes a reference to his sisters. The first interpretation is this; that these are not the children of Joseph and Mary, but that these are the children of Joseph by a previous marriage, a marriage before he married Mary. One commentator went so far as to name his previous wife Escha. Many Hebrew scholars call attention to that history, and refer to that name. That interpretation would make these brothers and sisters older half-brothers and half-sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ. Others say it was what was called a "liberate marriage", that is that his brother died and left no seed, so he took the wife, then, of his brother in order to raise up seed (according to the book of Deuteronomy). That's the first interpretation.

The second interpretation says, "Don't be afraid of words. Take it literally. If it says brother, then it's brother. If it says sister, then it's sister. These are the children of Mary and Joseph. Jesus, they say, was the firstborn of Mary but was not the only born of Mary. Then they appeal, for example, to Matthew 1:25, *"Joseph took her as his wife, and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to her son."* They put a lot of weight on the "until". They say that after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph enjoyed the intimacies of the marriage bond. Of course, the Roman Catholic Church cannot accept that interpretation because they don't only believe that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born, but they also hold the doctrine called "perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary". That is that she remained a virgin all of her life. Those who hold the second interpretation would believe that the brothers and sisters were not half-brothers and half-sisters by a previous marriage of Joseph, but that that they were full blooded brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus. They often use these verses to mock the Roman Catholic doctrine of perpetual virginity.

There's a third interpretation, and that is that these children are not Mary's children at all, but they are children of Mary's sister. In John 19:25, Mary had a sister named Mary, and she was married to Cleopas.

They say that you can't tell from the Greek if these are children or adopted children or half-brothers and sisters or the word "cousin" because it's the same word in the Greek, like our English word "brother" can be used in a number of ways. We use the word "brother" for half-brother or for brother by adoption or Christian brothers or brother man or a family member. You might have aunts and uncles, and say, "These are our brethren, our kin, and are related to us." Those are the three interpretations; as an older half-brother and sister by Joseph's previous marriage or Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born or this is not even talking about that relationship but the relationship of Mary's sister.

What can be said for certain is that nothing can be said for certain. I call attention to that so that Christians will stop being dogmatic on that which is not 100% clear in the Bible. No matter how you interpret the brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ, it doesn't make an iota of difference when it comes to the principles that are involved in this. It's amazing to me how often Christians argue and fight, and are so dogmatic. It doesn't matter, and when you come to the principle, it won't make any practical difference. The Roman Catholics can't prove that these are half-brothers or cousins, and the Protestants can't prove they are literal brothers and sisters. They've been fighting over that for two thousand years. If the Lord Jesus wanted us to know, He would have made it clear.

I would suggest that we just not get involved in those things that can divide the body of Christ over things that we're not sure about. When you come to the study of scripture, if something is clear, take a rugged stand on it. But if it's not clear, don't spend a lot of time arguing about it or trying to prove a point. If you try to use an argument with a weak scripture, you weaken your argument. You would be better off trying not to prove it at all, than to use a weak scripture to force an argument.

Why did Jesus' family come to speak to Him

There's a second point of background that sheds light on the principle, and that's what we want to look at. Matthew 12:46, *"While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mothers and brothers were standing outside seeking to speak to Him."* Did you ever wonder what they wanted to speak to Him about? Did they have some kind of a

problem, or was it some kind of enthusiasm? Jesus is their relative, however you interpret those verses, and now He is reaching a high water mark in His ministry, and He's getting crowds around Him, and not all are friendly. Some are hostile. Why did they come; to hear Him speak and tell them about some problem, or ask Him a question, or just to share in His fame and His ministry? The Holy Spirit tells us why. That's why I'm calling attention to this. At first it's a rather surprising reason when you hear it. When you see why they came, the first temptation is to not to believe it. "You've got to be kidding me. That's not why they came, is it?" And yet the Spirit of God records it for us, so that we might know.

The Galilean ministry of the Lord Jesus had come to a critical point. The Lord Jesus was becoming bolder in His antagonism with the Pharisees and Jews of Capernaum and Jerusalem. They used very strong language against Him. In Matthew 12:34 He had just called them a brood of vipers. He had warned them about the judgment to come, and He had called them an evil and adulterous generation. In effect He said they were called demon possessed. He had publicly confronted their legalism, and He had mocked their regimented religion. He deliberately healed a man on the Sabbath Day, and seemed to praise His disciples for annoying them by picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath Day. The upshot of all of this was Matthew 12:14, *"The Pharisees went out and counseled together how they might destroy Him."* He had a lot of people He was preaching to. On the other side His murder was being plotted.

John 7:1 tells about this time and what was going on in the hearts of His family, *"The Jews were seeking to kill Him."* And then it talks about His brothers coming to see Him. His brothers were encouraging Him to leave, or to show who He was. John 7:5, *"Not even His brothers were believing on Him."* All His family came to see Him. It was a wonderful time, and Jesus was getting popular. Maybe His family was very proud of Him, and were coming to share in His success. But that's not so, because the Bible says that they were having an awful struggle in their hearts. At this time they did not believe that He was Messiah, the Christ. What they saw was a dear relative who was going to get himself killed if He didn't shut his big mouth. I've used funny words so you could get into the scene, and what they were feeling. People were plotting to have Him killed. Jesus had gone too far. He spoke too

plainly with strong words against the religious and political leaders. He was daring them to the uttermost, and they wanted to kill Him. His brothers, sisters, mother and family were afraid of the big boys, and that He was going to die.

Mark gives us a little background that Matthew omits. Mark 3:20, *"And He came home, and the multitude gathered again to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. And when His own people heard of this, they went out,"* and here's the reason they came to Him, *"to take custody of Him, for they were saying, 'He has lost His senses.'"* The expression *"take custody of Him"* in Wuest's Expanded Translation of the New Testament, translates that Greek word, *"They came to take Him by force."* That expression in verse 21, *"He has lost His senses,"* KJV says, *"He's besides Himself."* The NIV says, *"He's out of His mind*." The Amplified says, *"He's deranged."*

His family was confused. They didn't believe Him, as yet. They had heard strange things; that He was casting out demons by the prince of demons. His schedule was so busy that He didn't have room to move around, didn't take time to eat, and was getting more bold all the time, and people were talking about killing Him. That was their relative, and they didn't know what to do. Don't tone down the Greek in Mark 21. His family believed at that time that He was losing His mind, and was going crazy. Literally, the Greek word is "knowledge is snatched away". It's the word that's used for a mentally deranged person. His family at this time didn't believe in Him, but He was still their family, and they loved Him. I believe they wanted to protect Him and His health. He needed rest, He needed food, and He need privacy. His zeal had gone too far. He had become a fanatic in their point of view. He wasn't taking care of Himself. He prayed all night and preached all day, and He didn't eat, He didn't sleep, and He lost His mental capacity, in their opinion.

If you are going to understand the wonderful words that Jesus said in Matthew 12, then you've got to understand the mentality of His family, and understand His background because it sheds great light on what the Lord Jesus said. They weren't coming to hear Him, and they weren't coming to share a blessing or to see how good He was doing, and how great a following He had. If He could not be reasoned with, they would take Him by force, and drag Him away. It was a time of family

misunderstanding. It's one thing to be rejected by your enemies, but He's opposed by people who love Him. They were acting out of that deep love for Him and for His own good and interests.

Let me make a bypass, and make this suggestion, that the path of the King is the path of the King's servant. To the degree we follow Him, to that degree we'll taste what He tasted, and experience what He experienced. We, also, will not only face hostility from those who are in open rebellion, but there will be times when we'll have to stand before a family who are confused, don't understand us, and who, in love, try to stop us, for our own good and for our own interests. It's going to look all wrong, and they're going to sound right, but you'll know in your heart that they aren't right. But all of their suggestions will sound right. They are motivated by love, and are acting in your interest. That was the response of His family; the response of mistaken love; the response of misunderstanding.

Let me show you how the reply of the Lord Jesus shed light on what He intends to be the true response. Try to project yourself into the spot in which the Lord Jesus found Himself. John 2:24&25, *"He knew all men. He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning men. He Himself knew what was in men."* When He received the word in verse 47, *"Behold, Your mother and brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You,"* He knew why they had come. He knew what was in man. Nobody had to tell Him. He knew they were going to drag Him away, and that they didn't understand, and out of their mistaken love for Him, they were going to force Him away. On the level of earth He was in quite a spot. You are preaching to a crowd, and claiming authority from God in heaven, and along comes your mother, and drags you away. That doesn't exactly enforce your authority. That's exactly what was going to happen. His family was there to take custody of Him. They thought He lost His mind. They came to save Him. What was He going to do? If He allowed Himself to be dragged away by His family, He would have lost some authority. If He refused to respond to His family, especially His mother, then He would have been in a position of disrespect for His parents. If ever the Pharisees could have jumped on anything, they could have leached onto that. He couldn't ignore them and couldn't go with them, unless He could finish His discourse quickly.

What is a mother, a sister and a brother?

What He did, and what He said was so brilliant and full of the wisdom of God. In a real sense there is a sadness to it, a pathos to it. Let me try to lay down what I believe the Spirit of God is writing here. He laid a glorious principle of the kind of response He longed for in the true disciple. Before I give you the principle, I want you to catch the feeling of three words that are used in this passage. I don't want to read anything into those words that isn't there, but I really believe that the blessed Spirit of God intended to convey what I'm about to give you. These three words; the word "brother", the word "sister" and the word "mother". The Bible is full of those words, and uses all of them in a spiritual way. For example, what is a brother? Many verses tell you what a brother is, but I think Proverbs 17:14 is about the best, *"A brother is born for adversity*." In the Hebrew literally it's, *"A brother is born for a tight place."* In other words, a brother is one who is always there; no matter how difficult the spot, a brother is always there. No matter how you blow it, a brother is born for adversity.

What's a sister? Proverbs 7:14*, "Say of wisdom, you are my sister, my intimate friend."* I don't know how it is with other brothers and sisters, but I think the Bible follows this through. A sister is just one you can confide in, and somebody you can tell it to. You just go to your sister and say, "Hey, let me share this with you," and just pour it all out, and she's not going to tell anybody because she's your sister. What's a mother? Isaiah 66:12&13, *"You shall be nursed, you shall be carried in the hip, and fondled on the knee, as one whom the mother comforts. So will I comfort you."* A mother just represents comfort, sympathy, hugging and encouragement. Sometimes you just need to be hugged. Three principles, as well as three words; brother, sister, mother—courage, confidence, comfort. They're tied together.

The Lord Jesus was a rejected Savior. His heart was set on the will of His Holy Father God, and because of that He was rejected. It seemed like nobody else had their heart on the will of the Father. So, he was criticized and was misunderstood and was doubted. In fact, He was accused of being evil and working with the power of Satan. His own family accused Him of being crazy and losing His mind. I don't want

to charge the Lord with weakness or with infirmity or frailty, but in order to get this point across, I'm going to use the weak words of earth. Jesus stood there that day, and He was alone. Very few understood Him or caught the passion of His heart. He stood there as One that was a stranger to all the earth. He was one with His Father, and that's all. Nobody understood Him. His meat and drink, His food, burden, zeal and the passion that was eating Him up was to do the will of His Father. Even those closest to Him in blood, His family of brothers, sisters, and mother, however you interpret those, did not understand. He was a stranger to all the earth; one with Holy Father God.

As He stood there at that moment alone, united only to God the Father, someone came up to Him and said, "Your mother is outside." I think a shaft went through His heart as He thought, "Mother, one who comforts Me, one who lines up with Me, one who understands what is going on in My life; mother. My mother is out there? Are you kidding?" "Your brothers are out there." "Brothers? Are they really? Brothers, one born for adversity, one who will stick with you in a tight spot? Do you know who is out there? They want to drag me away, they think I'm deranged. My sisters are out there. Someone I can confide in and share My deep heart, and pour out all of the confidential intimacies of My own soul?" I think thoughts like that went through His mind. The gospel of Mark said, *"He looked all around."* And then Matthew 12:49, "*He stretched out His hand toward His disciples."* That's marvelous. What a glorious revelation and how it must have thrilled their hearts, *"My mother, my brothers."* And then He adds in verse 50, *"Whoever does the will of My Father Who is in heaven, He is my Brother and My sister and My mother."*

A wonderful union relationship is available to us when our hearts are set on God's will

There are two great principles that the Lord Jesus taught by this statement. The first, of course, is on the surface. It's that wonderful union and deep relationship that is possible with the Lord Jesus Christ when our hearts are set on the will of God. Spiritual ties are always closer than blood ties. By faith in Jesus Christ I can be closer to Jesus Christ than His own mother, Mary, when she held Him in her bosom.

Let me give a quote from Matthew Henry as he develops this intimacy. I couldn't word it better than this, so listen to him. "All obedient Christians are near kin to Christ Jesus. They wear His name and bear His image. They have His nature, and are all of His family. He loves them, and converses with them as His relatives. He bids them welcome at His table, and takes care of them, and provides for them. He sees that they lack nothing that is fit for them. When He died, He left them rich legacies. Now He is in heaven, and He keeps up a correspondence with them, and will have them all to be with Him at last, and will in nothing fail the Kinsman's part, nor will He ever be ashamed of His poor relatives, but will confess them before men and angels and before His Father. Behold, my brothers, my sisters and my mother." It's a wonderful contrast of heavenly ties and earthly ties. Who can believe that it's possible to be closer to the Lord Jesus than His own family?

A wonderful union relationship is available to the Lord when our hearts are set on God's will

Yet I don't believe that's the main point of this passage. That emphasizes what He is to us, and I don't think that's what the Spirit had in mind in this chapter. The idea that He's our brother, and He's our relative, and I can be one with Him, and He's our kin is not the main point. The emphasis of the Spirit of God seems to my heart to be this; not what He is to us, but what we can be to Him. Jesus was stating the response of the true disciple is one who ministers to His heart. I speak as a fool. As He stood there that day rejected, He needed a brother, and He needed a sister, and He needed a mother, and His disciples met that need. They became to Him that brother born for adversity. They became to Him, that sister to whom He could share the intimacies of His heart. I believe they comforted Him that day. As He looked out and saw those disciples lined up with the same will of God that He was lined up with, He was comforted, *"Behold, my mother. Behold, my brothers and my sisters."* They served Him that day.

That day the Lord Jesus had His heart set on the will of God, and nobody shared that passion with Him. Nobody was his mother or sister or brother, and no one shared His goals and aims, His conceptions, His compulsions and His drives; that same vision, zeal and passion. He was ready to die for it, and nobody saw it; not the priest, not the scribes,

not the Pharisees and not the family—but His disciples saw it, those humble fishermen. The disciples understood the spiritual, and by the grace of God they ministered to Him that day. They were His family, and were his brothers and sisters and mother. They shared His passion and His burden because they, also, lived to please the Father. They had embraced the same burden that was on His heart; to do the will of God. Anyone that has embraced that passion, ministers to the heart of Christ. Jesus said, "Those are My next of kin, and are My nearest relatives; those who have a passion for the will of God."

If this is the true response that He desires, when everyone else is misunderstanding Him, when He stands alone, and they ask this question, "Will you be His brother?" When He's in a tight spot (I speak as a fool because He's never in a tight spot), and no one is understanding the ways of God and the profound mysteries of the kingdom, will you be His brother, will you be His sister, and will you be His mother? Will you minister unto Him? I believe that's what the passage is saying. This makes the will of God, in my thinking, very glorious. All that enter into the will of God, enter into the sacred possibilities of ministering unto Him, and of being His family. You can stand up for Him in a tight place, and you can receive His confidences, and actually comfort the sorrowing heart of our Lord Jesus. I believe that's the purpose of the record. His invitation, of course, is Matthew 12:50, *"Whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven,"* that relationship with Him that transcends all physical relationships is what ministers to His heart.

It's impossible for us to realize how obedience puts us close to the King, and how embracing the will of His Father allows us to minister to Him, yet it's true. I don't know a greater privilege on the earth than being a brother, sister and mother to Jesus. If you help me out of a tight spot I say, "What a brother! What a sister! What a mother! Comfort when I needed it badly!" You can do that to Him. I don't know how, but it's marvelous.

Section IV

(Jesus Says Something

Chapters 13-14:12)

The Kingdom of Heaven Parables

Beheading of John the Baptist

1

INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (MORE APTLY NAMED: THE PARABLE OF THE SOIL)

INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES

Parables in general

We begin now through chapter 13, commonly known as the kingdom of heaven parables of the Lord Jesus. In this chapter the Lord gives us eight great parables on the kingdom of heaven; the parable of the sword, of the wheat and tares, of the mustard seed, of the leaven, of the hidden treasures, of the pearl of great price, of the dragnet and of the treasure chest.

Before looking at these eight parables, since parables are a great part of His teaching, let me make a couple of observations about parables as a whole. We'll introduce it, and then we'll actually begin our study of Matthew 13. There are between thirty and thirty five parables in the gospel record. Nobody can nail it down because some of the short sayings of Christ can also be regarded as parables. In the gospel of Matthew you have eight parables that are nowhere else but Matthew.

In the gospel of Luke you have eighteen that are unique to the gospel of Luke. Let me recommend for you a book on parables. I believe, as far as my own knowledge is concerned, that this is one of the greatest books on parables written in the English language. It's called "Notes on the Parables of Our Lord" by R. C. Trench. It's a classic. Almost all of my commentators use him as their reference and authority. It would be an addition to your library to get that.

What is a parable? What is the purpose of using parables in teaching? In addition to the indispensable principle, total reliance upon God's Holy Spirit, what other principle is especially helpful in interpreting and understanding the parables? Let's look at those three questions. What is a parable? You've heard that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. That's pretty close to the truth. The word "parable" literally means "to place alongside in order to compare". It's a story that did not happen. It's a made-up story. If it really happened, it's not a parable. It's a story that did not happen, but could have happened. It was true to life. It's not a fable. You've got trees talking and frogs getting married in a fable. I'm not talking about that. In a parable, you have a true to life story; something that happened regularly every day. A sower went out to sow, and that kind of thing. That true to life story is told to illustrate a heavenly principle, a principle of God and spiritual truth. It doesn't have to be long.

The Old Testament has another word for "parable", called Proverbs. Proverbs and parables are the same thing. Proverbs are a short parable. In Matthew 15:15, when Jesus said, *"That which entereth a man does not defileth a man,"* it's a parable. In Luke 6:39, *"If the blind lead the blind, they'll both fall in a ditch,"* that's one sentence, and it's a parable. It doesn't have to be a long story. Fact is, *"the lilies of the field",* the *"light under the bushel",* the *"reeds shaking in the wind"*, the *"living waters"*, the *"fields white unto harvest"*, *"the woman travailing in pain"* are all parables. They are stories that are true to life illustrating heavenly truths. The earthly story is laid alongside the heavenly story.

One of the things that the Lord Jesus revealed in His parables is that the whole physical universe is the outward expression of a spiritual world. The laws of nature illustrate the laws of the Spirit of God. The whole universe is a giant parable; all of nature is a parable. The physical

creation is a parable. In Trench's book, in his introductory remarks he shows how God has hidden his spiritual truths in the physical creation. Here is a quote by him, "They are not arbitrarily chosen illustrations. They belong to one another. It is not a happy accident that they are analogous. The entire moral and visible world with its kings and subjects, its sun and its moon, it's sleeping and it's waking, and all the variety of operation is one mighty parable."

When Jesus told about the mustard seed or the poor soil or the fish in the sea, He wasn't just saying, "Ah, here's a good illustration. I think I'll use the poor soil." No, when He created the soils, He had in mind that it would picture the heart of man. When we created the mustard tree, He created it on purpose in order to illustrate a spiritual truth. He's not just choosing it and saying, "This would be a great illustration." Spiritual birth came first, and later women had babies. They had babies in order to illustrate spiritual birth. He created it deliberately that way. The whole universe is nothing but a parable. All the spiritual laws are hidden inside.

Matthew 13 gives two purposes for a parable. A parable is to reveal and to conceal; it's to show and to hide**.** It's the purpose of a parable to teach, to illumine, to turn a light on, and to help you to understand. Matthew 13:10&11, *"And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do you speak in parables?' And He answered and said, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.'"* Verse 16, *"Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears because they hear. Truly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desire to see what you see, and did not see it, to hear what you hear, and did not hear it*." Verse 11, *"It has been granted to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom."* The word "mystery" is not that which can't be known, but that which can't be known without a revelation from God. It can be revealed.

If you trace the etymology of this word, it's very beautiful. I like to paraphrase it this way. The mysteries of the kingdom are the confidential whisperings of the Savior. The parables are like the personal diary of the Lord Jesus, His most precious truths and hidden secrets and most treasured principles. He said, "I'm going to hide My most valuable principles inside these stories, the confidential whisperings." Psalm 25:14, *"The secret of the Lord is for those who*

fear Him." He won't tell everybody His secrets, or whisper His confidential whispering in everybody's ear. He won't open his diary, His personal intimate diary, for everyone to see. I used to think that it wasn't quite fair that the Lord Jesus hid His truth in these stories, and only His disciples understood, and those poor average people couldn't understand it. You see, the disciples didn't understand one word more than the average person understood; they drew the disciples to the Lord Jesus for an explanation.

Matthew 13:36, *"And He left the multitudes and went into the house, and His disciples came to Him saying, 'Explain to us the parables of the tares.'"* His disciples never understood the parables. The parables were designed to draw them to Jesus for an explanation. At any time anyone could have come to the Lord Jesus for an explanation. All who came, He explained it to them, and He never turned anybody away. All of His sacred secrets are for those who come to His feet for revelation. He won't deny anybody who comes and says, "Teach me that, show me that, and explain that to me. I don't understand it." Man is on probation, and he's got to seek it, and come after it, and learn it. Astronomical truths lie in this great universe. All its physical laws illustrate spiritual laws. But if you want to have it, it's by desire and effort, and you've got to go after it. The gold is in the mountains, but you are going to have to dig for it, and desire it, and work for it. Truth is in the book, but you are going to have to dig and go after it. The parables are for revelation for those who come to Him, and seek it.

The second purpose is to conceal, Matthew 13:11, *"To them it has not been granted."* The Lord Jesus concealed His truth to drive away unreal people, those who didn't come for an explanation. One illustration is in John 6, after the feeding of the five thousand, He spoke in obscurity and said, *"You must eat My flesh and drink My blood."* People were scratching their heads, "What did He mean by that?" Some came for an explanation. John 6:66, *"But many disciples withdrew and walked with Him no more."* They didn't come; it drives away unreal people. I think this is one of the methods that is neglected by teachers and those who share the word of God. I don't say that you should aim the truth over people's heads by using fancy words, but don't be afraid to use obscurity, or to not explain something. It might drive away the unreal. That's what Jesus did.

There's a second reason for concealing it. It was a great mercy, because as He laid down the principle earlier, judgment is in terms of light; the more light, the more responsibility. Jesus has deliberately hid the light because He knew they would reject the light. They weren't ready, so He put it in a story that they couldn't forget, because it was so true to life, so that when they were ready, they could come to Him for an explanation. It was the great mercy of God to hide these things. Verses 12-15 illustrate how He hides them.

In addition to the indispensable principles of trusting God to open it to your heart, (if you forget everything else, stick with that one – the Holy Spirit teaches you the Bible), there is a principle that is unusually helpful in understanding the parables. I think it will save you a lot of problems if you learn this one principle; every parable has one point and not many points. Every parable has one main teaching and one main point. There is an awful danger in trying to press a spiritual meaning out of every detail in a parable. There is one point, and all of the details must be understood in terms of that one point. The details are drapery, and are just part of the scenery. A knife is not all edge, and a harp is not all strings. So, we've got to separate the picture from the scenery. I believe this will become clearer as we get into the sacred secrets of the Lord!

I think one of the greatest statements I've ever read on how to interpret the Bible, came from Bishop Butler. He said, "The meaning of the book is the meaning of the author." Well, of course! That's the way to interpret it. Look back at what He wrote when he wrote it. If you can get back to what He meant when He wrote it, that's good hermeneutics; that is, that's good principles of interpreting. So, we want to get back to what Jesus meant when He said these parables. We don't want to read in a whole bunch of doctrine. If we interpret the details aside from the main point, we can end up with a lot of squirrely ideas, and a lot of things the author didn't intend.

In the parable of the unmerciful servant, if you just took one of the details there you could come up with a doctrine that you don't need the blood of Christ for forgiveness, because in that parable one got forgiven without sacrifice, just by petition, just by prayer. And from the parable of the unjust steward, if you just take one of the details, you can conclude that Satan is the chief steward in God's house. When Jesus

told the parable of the Prodigal Son, did He intend that every detail be interpreted? What did the robe mean, the ring, the shoes, and the fatted calf? What does the music and dancing mean? Does any one of those have a spiritual counterpart? If you tie it in with the main point it's easy. The main point of that parable is the joy in the father's heart when the prodigal returns. It's not a hard point to grasp but it's extremely important.

In the parable, the ornaments, the details are just for decoration. They hold the story together, and we've got to understand it that way. It gives it flavor, and makes it interesting. *"The Lord will come as a thief in the night."* It doesn't mean He's going to break the window, and pop you on the head, and ransack your house. But yet some could interpret it that way. The point is that He's going to come suddenly and unexpectedly. If you get the main point, then the details make a lot of sense.

I read one commentator that said, "Some of these parables have a primary meaning and then a secondary meaning. First you must get the immediate meaning which might apply to the Jews, or something like that, and then later on you get the other meanings." I think that's nonsense. Jesus meant one thing, and the primary sense is the only sense. There are not two senses. He meant one thing, and He said one thing, and He illustrated it. We want to find that one thing. Anything you grab beyond that I would say is just man's idea, and it's not worth too much. If we affix a sense of what Jesus said beyond what He said, where are we going to stop with that kind of thing? There's no end to it, and there's no principles by which we can stop. I think we dishonor the word of the Lord when we say that it has two or three meanings. It doesn't. It has one meaning. If we can't find it, let's be honest and say, "I don't know," and maybe someday God will show us. If we see the one thing, let's say that, and then interpret the details in terms of that.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER
(More aptly named "The Parable of the Soil")

General observations

Let's begin our new study. For those who like logical connections, let me give a little outline of what I'd like to cover. First, I'd like to say a word or two about these particular parables in chapter 13 as a whole. Then I'd like to look at each parable. We'll look at each parable as a unit in itself, and then we'll do the sower. Finally, I'd like to take some broad, general principles from each parable, and find application to life, the Lord giving grace. Let me say something about this parable as a whole, and then we'll get into chapter 13.

As you know, the message of Matthew and the life of the Lord Jesus was a life of rejection. All the way through, especially through His three and a half year ministry, He was being increasingly rejected. As you go through the book of Matthew, especially, the rejection on the earth deepens, and as it does, the acceptance in heaven also deepens, and God says, *"This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased."* There were three big stages of rejection in the ministry of Christ, and in every stage it came to a climax, like right here, where the Pharisees had come to a point to say, "You have a demon." They said, *"You are casting out the devil by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons."* It was just an outright rejection. Then He started speaking in parables.

Then He went on in His life, and there was another heated time of tremendous rejection, and then you have a second group of parables. And then, just before the cross, He spoke in judicial parables; His parables took on another flavor, full of judgment, and He poured out a whole third set of parables. In the Bible, that's what you have. You have three sets of parables. We're studying the first set. This set of parables was by the lake of Galilee, and it was in the light of the Pharisees first rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second set was uttered after the Mount of Transfiguration when, again in Luke 1-18, tremendous rejection took place, and this time they even went beyond. They not only said you have a demon, but they almost accused Him of being the incarnation of Satan himself; a terrible opposition and rejection. The third set of parables in Matthew's gospel starts in chapter 18-25 when He gives the awful *"Whoa, whoa, whitewashed*

sepulchers," and all the rest; very heated and He begins to speak in parables—the parable of the wise and foolish virgins and all of that; very full of judgment.

The parable in Matthew 13:11 I call "Kingdom of heaven parables", *"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."* So, you don't think I'm reading this in, glance at these verses; verse 19, *"the word of the kingdom,"* verse 24, *"the kingdom of heaven may be compared",* verse 31, *"the kingdom of heaven is like",* verse 33, *"the kingdom of heaven is like*", verse 38, *"these are the sons of the kingdom",* verse 41, *"they will gather out of his kingdom all stumbling blocks",* verse 43, *"then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father";* verse 44, *"the kingdom of heaven is like",* verse 45, *"the kingdom of heaven is like",* verse 47, *"the kingdom of heaven is like",* verse 52, *"therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like,"* and He goes on to give another description. I don't think it's unreasonable to say that these are parables about the kingdom of heaven.

In our discussion of the Sermon on the Mount we spent an awful lot of time nailing down what God meant by the expression *"kingdom of heaven".* Let me summarize it now by telling you what it's not, and what it is. The kingdom of heaven is not the visible church on the earth, the blending of the good and the bad, Christian government as we know it with both the good and the bad, the wheat and the tares growing together, the good fish and the bad fish in the same net, the evil birds coming to the mustard tree as well as the good birds. Some people say that's what the kingdom of heaven is—Christianity with all of its good and all of its bad, permeated with leaven, so that it's not all good now, and a lot of it is bad, and it embraces both spiritual Christians and nominal Christians. That's not the kingdom of heaven, or what He's talking about.

The kingdom of heaven is the rule of heaven, and is where the King rules. It's the principles by which the place called "heaven" is governed. I'm talking about when you die, if you know Jesus, where you'll go. You'll go to heaven. What is that kingdom like up there? How is it ruled? By what principles does it operate? What is the kingdom of heaven like in heaven? There the inhabitants, glorified saints, angels, cherubim, seraphim do the will of God without bondage.

They delight to do the will of God; they worship, adore and praise Him. It's not a mixture in heaven. It's pure and it's holy.

How do they live up there—by what principles and by what rules, and what motivates them? Those spirits of just men made perfect quite literally free from the flesh, and in their spiritual beings, quite literally living in heavenly places, on what principles do they live? The kingdom of heaven in heaven was announced by the Lord Jesus, and that was the excitement of the Sermon on the Mount, that there is now a way that the kingdom of heaven can come to earth, and all those who live on the earth can live by kingdom of heaven principles. We can do the will of God with the same freedom and deliberateness as all those who are in heaven do it. We may now have a heaven on the earth, and He taught us to pray Matthew 6:10, *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it's done in heaven."* The same way things are done up there, He says is now possible to be done on the earth. It doesn't have to be a bondage to obey God, and there doesn't have to be a heaviness and a struggle in your spirit to do the will of God. There's a kingdom of heaven on the earth. The kingdom of heaven is that spiritual life, the principles of grace, the principles of the gospel, the good news that Christ can rule your life, and you can now have the same principles that they have in heaven. It's the laws of grace.

Back to the parables. All of these parables are parables on the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of grace, every one of them. They are parables on the spiritual walk, the spiritual life, and how to do the will of God without a bondage, and how to be excited, and never be in any kind of a struggle or effort in worshipping God, and bowing before and adoring Him. These are kingdom of heaven parables.

One commentator said that these parables actually cover all of church history, and they compare them to the seven churches in the Revelation; so that the sower is a picture of the church of Ephesus, the backslidden church; and the wheat and the tares is a picture of Smyrna, the persecuted church; and the mustard seed is a picture of Pergamus, the licentious church, and so on. Some interpret the parables, and say, "This parable carries you from the first century to the third century, and then the next parable of the wheat and tares goes from the third century to the middle of the fifth," and they do it that way.

Others go through history, and the truth gradually increases as the day approaches. So, for example I can expect rejection. That was true of Jesus' time, and that's true in the first century and third century, fifteenth century, and is true today. I can expect rejection, or I can expect the kingdom to grow like a mustard seed, or to spread like the weather. That was true in Jesus' day, and it was true in the first century, and that was true later on, and is always true. What we're going to do is take it one at a time just to look at the kingdom of heaven. If you get those principles, they'll apply in every age and generation.

Matthew 13:1, *"On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea. And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, 'Behold, the sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. And others fell upon the rocky places where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out, and others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.'"*

Matthew 13:18-23, *"Listen then to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one sown with seed beside the road. The one sown with seed on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution occurs because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one sown with seed among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, and the anxiety of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But the one sown with seed on the good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces, some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times as much."*

In Luke 8:18 where He records the same parable we read, *"Take care how you listen."* I think that is the heart of the parable of the sower; how you listen. In this parable the Lord Jesus compares the heart to four different types of soil; the wayside soil, the rocky soil, the thorny soil and then good soil. The work of the sower, the hope that the seed has for surviving, depends upon what kind of soil it falls in. The Lord Jesus said that the seed was the word of the kingdom. It's a word about the realm of grace, about spiritual life, about the truth of God. This is a parable about how you receive the word, what kind of soil it falls into. How is the message received? The four soils are pictures of four possibilities of the condition of the heart. They proceed from total rejection to total acceptance, and are progressive. His main point is that the kingdom of heaven can only bloom in the heart that is receptive.

I realize great books have been written on the will of the man, what part man has, and what part God has, and how much God influences what part man has. There are some people who say that man has no part, and God has 100% every part; God does it all, and man does nothing. There are others that leave God out altogether, and say that man does everything. In this parable, even though it wasn't written to answer this question, I think it gives a good illustration of the truth of God. The soil is a picture of man; the heart of man. Some people say everybody has a divine spark within, and all you have to do is discover it, and develop it, and it will grow. You don't have a divine spark within. The seed had to be brought to the soil. The soil had nothing. The seed had to be brought to the soil. If the sower never sowed the seed, then the soil would never get the seed. The seed comes from without. It's the seed that has the life, and not the soil. It's God's part to sow the seed. It's man's part to receive the seed.

This is not a parable on God's part. This is a parable on man's part. He illustrates God's part. God will sow the seed. He'll get it to you. Don't worry about that. God will get the seed to your heart. No matter where you are or where you live in the whole universe of God, God will get the seed to you. Now the question comes, and here's the parable, how you receive it. What is your reception like? What kind of soil do you offer God? I think that's the main point of the parable.

We know that God is the first cause of all things in the whole universe, and yet I don't need to clear my throat to say that God has created man

with a heart that is free to receive everything that He gives. Over against the instinct He put in animals where they obey instinctively, He gave man a free will. When He gave man a will, He made man a cause in His universe, so we can't lay sin at God's door, and we can't say that He's the cause of sin. He gave man a will, and man has the power to reject, and the power to fail. He's got the sovereign power to destroy himself, if he wants to. It's an awesome thing. God is going to influence the will on both sides. He's going to repulse it, and He's going to attract it. He'll always work in man's heart to make him fear or hope, but the bottom line is that man has got to give Him a soil, and has got to give Him a reception, or the seed is not going to do him any good, no matter how much He sows. Man has a choice what kind of soil he offers to the Lord. God is not going to fail on His part, and this parable appeals to man not to fail on his part; to be open and receptive; to offer God good ground. Preaching the kingdom of heaven is like scattering sparks. If it finds tinder, it will attract itself to that tinder and it will kindle itself into a flame; no tinder, no fire.

The wayside soil

First of all, Matthew 13:19 calls it *"the wayside soil", "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it…"* Matthew is the only one that adds that key, *"does not understand it."* It's very graphic. This is a hard packed down foot path in the field. This is where the donkeys walked, and the wagons rolled, and the workers walked in between the rows of crops. It was hard and impenetrable. The seed could only get to the outside of this soil because it was hard. There was not even an inch of penetration. It was hard, packed down ground. What kind of a reception did this first soil give? The answer is none. The seed laid on the top. It didn't have a chance, and therefore illustrated by the birds, the devil came and took it away.

The Greek word for understanding is, "They understood not." According to Robertson, it's a "comprehended not"; they didn't put it together. He said that it comes from the idea that they gave it no attention. You might get the idea just by saying that they understood it not, that it wasn't the soil's fault. "Isn't that God's fault? He's the One that's supposed to turn on the lights. He's the One that's to make me understand it. It's not their fault that they didn't comprehend it. They

heard it, and they didn't understand it. Isn't He the Illuminator? Isn't He the One that is supposed to show me?" That's not the point here.

The point is this. It's not a lack of light, but it's a lack of attention. He's hard, and he doesn't want to know. He doesn't pay attention to it. That's the idea. This hard ground just doesn't care. I believe that's why it's first. Attention is the first claim of the gospel. The truth of God, and the understanding of man can never be brought together unless first there is attention. If you don't give God your attention, if you don't listen, then the seed can never grow. I believe man's highest obligation toward God is attention. In the context here, attention is voluntary. I can choose the things I want to be attentive to. That first soil, the wayside soil, the trodden path, if it had a tongue or a big sign on it, it would say this, "Free passage here for everything but Christ." That's why it was so hard. The first soil is hard; outward rejection, and no penetration at all. Satan takes it out of his mind as soon as it lands there because nobody spends time thinking about it.

The rocky soil

The second soil is the rocky soil. Don't think, as I did for years, that this is soil with rocks in it. That's not what He means by rocky soil. Plants will grow in rocky soil. The roots will just grow right around the rocks. This is not rocky soil. The Greek helps us out. It's a thin layer of earth with a bedrock pavement under it. It's not rocky; it's bedrock. It's a cement slab. It's not little rocks in the soil that you can take out. This is bedrock, with a hard base. That's the second picture of the human heart. It looks a little bit better on the surface than that packed down soil, but it's just as bad because this is just as hard; it's hard under the soft. It looks good. It has an early promise but it also has early failure. This is the one who wants the kingdom of God, now watch. He wants the kingdom of God as long as God doesn't go too far. Matthew 13:20&21, *"The one on whom the seed is sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no firm root in himself but is only temporary. When affliction and persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away."* The rocky soil has no moral courage. I'm not saying we should be indifferent to trials and troubles, and pretend that they don't bother us, but if we're open to the truth of

the kingdom of heaven, then our goal will not be our own safety, comfort and happiness, but we'll lay hold of principles that are higher than that, and overrule those dangers.

If you ever have the privilege of sowing seed, sharing the grace of God with anybody, individually or in a group, don't put too much stock in first receptions. This rocky soil received it with joy. I used to come home from a conference all excited, "Boy, they just received it with great joy." The years tell the story. It's not the first reception. Let's follow ten or twenty years, and then you'll see if there was soil there. Maybe it's a shallow reception. The test of all reality is fruit. That's not only from this chapter, but it's from the whole New Testament. As long as there is no price to pay, this soil says, "Okay," but if the sun comes up, and it gets hot, or there is any trouble with it, forget it. Those who meet the Son of God in reality are going to quickly see that He is not of this world, and this world is not of Him. To receive the good seed you are going to go outside the camp, and you are going to walk in a narrow path, and you are going to be a peculiar people, and you are going to be crucified to the world, and the world is going to be crucified to you, and through tribulation you are going to enter the kingdom of heaven. No wonder Jesus said, *"Take heed how you hear, and let him who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

The thorny soil

The third soil is the thorny soil. The thorns are described in Matthew 13:22, *"The one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man that hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the word, and it becomes unfruitful."* I used to picture intertwining vines choking out the poor stalk, getting all wrapped around with a weed, and being choked to death. That's not the point at all. The answer is that the soil can't bear both the plant and weeds. It chokes it out by the weeds eating up all the nutrients. It takes all of the nourishment. That's why you weed your garden; not that the weeds are going to jump up and take all your eggplants or tomato plants. They aren't going to do that. They are just going to sap out of the soil all the necessary nutrients that your good plant needs. The soil can't support both.

This is a picture of the crowded, preoccupied and divided heart. He wants both; he wants the world, the kingdom of the earth, but he doesn't want to throw the kingdom of heaven out the window, either. He wants gold and God; he wants mammon and the Lord. But he can only feed one. Jesus said*, "No man can serve two masters."* There can only be one, so the Lord is the one that gets choked out. The love of the world always neutralizes the gospel; it always does. This third soil wants position and power in the world, and wants wealth, wants comfort, wants pleasure, wants security, wants influence, wants authority, wants approval, wants fame, and feeds those things, and gives all his energy to those things, and lives for those things, and throws the Lord in on the side, and He is choked out, and the principles of the kingdom are choked out. The parable asks, "How do you receive?" The third soil says, "I receive it conditionally; on the condition I can keep all the other stuff. I still want the pleasures of this world. I don't want to have to give it up. If I accept Christ, and I give myself to Him, I'm going to have to give up too much. It's going to cost me. I still want to think about my houses, about my lands and about my pleasure and about my money and about my success, my attainments, my dreams, my ambitions, my education and about going to the top. If I can still do that, I'll be glad to be a Christian. I receive it conditionally."

The good soil

The fourth soil says, "I receive it unreservedly. I'll give it my full attention. There will be no reservations and no conditions." Look at Matthew 13:23, *"The one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth some one hundred fold, and some sixty, and some thirty."* Mark 4:20 says, *"They hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit thirty, sixty, a hundred fold."* The basic ingredient of good soil is reception. They accept it. Luke 8:15, *"The seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word with an honest and good heart, who hold it fast, and who bear fruit with perseverance."* This one is unreservedly open to receive the seed of the kingdom.

The good soil also has birds flying around it trying to get the seed, and it also has the hot sun shining upon it, and also has the potential of

noxious weeds growing up all around it, and choking it out. But this good soil, by an act of volition, of the will, has offered to God an unreserved reception. It gives all of its attention, come what may. There is no line at which it says, "Okay, Lord, you can grow in me, but if it comes this far, I'm not giving up my family, I'm not giving up my car, I'm not giving up my job." There's no reserves, and there is no bedrock. It's just the soil that gives itself unto God, "No matter what, Lord; let the sun shine, let the persecution come, let the trials come, let the cares of this world come, let all the pleasures of life come. It's not going to choke it out. I'm going to hold it fast, with perseverance. I'm going to embrace it." That's good soil. The proof, the evidence, the test of good soil is always fruit. Where there is an unreserved reception of the seed, the living seed of the word of the King of all heaven, there will always, and there is never an exception to this, be fruit.

Some people make a big deal out of the fact that Matthew says 100, 60 and 30 and Luke says 30, 60 and 100, and reverses the order. I think God did that to show you that the order is not important. I don't think God is comparing that some good ground Christians produce more than other good ground Christians. I don't think He's contrasting fruit with fruit. I think He's contrasting fruit with no fruit. The point of 30, 60 and 100 is capacity. In good ground we all produce fruit. But the 100% is not to be desired over the 60% or the 60% over the 30%. He's talking about capacity. Good ground is good ground, and all you can ever give God is good ground. You can't give Him anything else. You can't do better than giving Him an unreserved reception of His word as it comes to your heart. But we're not all going to produce the same way. We all have different capacities, we all have different mentalities, and we all have different gifts of the Spirit of God. He's not condemning someone for only bringing forth 30%. If you had a roomful of thirty percenters, equal capacity, you'd have a roomful of one hundred percenters. The thirty percent is 100%, if you produce to full capacity. The whole purpose of comparing 30, 60 and 100 is just to say that we're not going to produce the same. There is going to be differences among us, but we are all going to bring forth fruit unto the Lord.

The appeal of the parable is how do you hear; how do you listen? What do you give God as a receiver? The wayside soil says, "I don't give it any attention. I'm hard." The rocky soil says, "I'm shallow. I accept, but with reservations. Don't go too far." The thorny soil says, "I'm a

little bit preoccupied. I accept it with conditions. Let me feed my own pleasures, and I'll be glad to throw a little in toward the Lord." And the fourth soil answers back, "I receive it unqualifiedly and without any reservations—come what may, hell or high water, as they say. I've given myself over to it. I want the seed of the kingdom."

Don't be discouraged if three quarters of people reject it

Before leaving this, let me state for you five general principles of application. I won't develop it a lot, but you'll see that it can be easily developed. Principle #1: If you are modelled after this sower, if you have the privilege of sharing the message of the grace of God with anybody, don't be discouraged if three quarters of the people you speak to reject it. Three fourths of these soils were rejected. If the Master Sower, the one who did it always right, had that kind of reception, I have an idea that we who are not Master sowers may increase that percentage a little bit on rejection. Don't be discouraged if people don't listen. There is always going to be those who are hard and shallow and divided.

Don't blame the sower or the seed for non-reception

Since God lays full responsibility upon us as the soil to receive the seed, don't blame and pass the buck when you are not receptive. It's not the Sower's fault because He's not drawing me, "He didn't convict me of that yet." Don't blame the Sower. And certainly don't blame the seed. The seed has life. Don't say, "The word of God is so dry, and so boring; they'll never get anything out of it." The word of God is alive, because the Bible is the shell, and Christ is the life. The only thing more precious than the Bible is what it contains; the revelation, the Living Word of Christ Himself. It's alive. Don't blame the seed. Don't blame the birds, "It's not my fault. Satan came along and took it." Don't blame the sun, "I'm going through all these problems and trials and difficulties, and I can't turn to the Lord now. I'm pretty busy." And don't blame the thorns, "I didn't mean to get involved in all of this, and get so busy that I didn't have time for the Lord. I didn't mean to get swallowed up with all of this fiscal irresponsibility, and snowed by all of this debt. I didn't mean to get lured away into these places of bad relationships and unholy alliances with unholy people." Don't blame

the thorns, don't blame the sun, don't blame the birds, don't blame the seed and don't blame the sower. You're responsible before God to give Him a soil that will receive the truth of God, and there are no excuses.

Praise God for being a liberal sower

We have reason and cause to praise God for what kind of a sower He is. "He's very sloppy throwing that seed all over the place, and getting it out of the farm, and onto the hard ground, onto the path." Praise God for the kind of a sower we have who will throw that seed all over the place, even though the ground is not receptive. He still throws it on the ground, leaving man without excuse. Glorious sower we have!

The condition of the soils is not permanently fixed

You are not locked into one particular soil. That's why He said, "Take heed how you hear." Don't think, "Well, I'm good soil, and I'll never be anything else." At any moment in your life you can be any one of those soils. Every time the word of God goes out, you have an opportunity to be one of those four soils, and you are every time. There are plenty of times that I did not give my attention to the word of God. It just laid on the top. I'm not fooling anybody. There's plenty of times that I buckled under the pressures of persecution and trouble. I was a rocky soil, reserved, "Come this far, Lord, but no further." There's also plenty of times when the cares of this world, and deceitfulness of riches choked out the good word of God. And there's also been some good soil. You are not locked in. That's what is so glorious about this. It's not once and for all, "The first three are unsaved and are going to hell." The first three did reject in that sowing, but I know the Lord sowed again and again. How many times? When the Lord first sowed His seed upon me, I'll tell you, I was not in church with my head bowed. When God first sowed His seed on me, I was a well-trodden path, and God was so good. We have much reason to rejoice. At any moment in your life you can be any one of these four soils, and so can I.

The evidence of good soil is fruit

The test, the evidence, of good soil is fruit. The fruit is like the seed, and the seed is the word of the kingdom, so the fruit will be the blossoms of the kingdom, the evidence that the kingdom of heaven is

increasing in your life, and you are being enculturated in the ways and principles of God, and you are being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, being made like Him and being made fully.

Let me give you a clincher verse to wrap all this up. In the book of Kings God told Solomon to ask anything he wanted, and God would give it. 1 Kings 3:9 KJV says that he asked for wisdom. But he didn't ask for wisdom. That's what I like about the New American Standard. In the margin it gives the literal. This is Solomon's prayer, *"Give Thy servant a hearing heart."* Isn't that something! Can you pray in your heart to the Lord 1 Kings 3:9, *"Give Thy servant a hearing heart."*? Oh, that we might be the good soil that gives unreservedly an openness to receive the seed of the kingdom!

2

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES

(more aptly named "The Parable of the Sower")

Summary and theme

Matthew 13:24, *"He presented another parable to them saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in His field, but while men were sleeping his enemy came and sowed tares, also, among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also, and the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How, then, does it have tares?' And He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' And the slave said to Him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' He said, 'No, lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I'll say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them up, but gather the wheat into My barn.'"*

Matthew 13:36-43, *"Then He left the multitudes and went into the house, and His disciples came to Him saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.' He answered and said, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world, and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom, and the tares are the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest*

is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore, just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness, and He'll cast them into the furnace of fire. In that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"

There is one main thing that He's saying here, and I believe if we don't get that main thing, then we're going to miss some of the points and direction of the parable. Let me remind you again that these are kingdom of heaven parables. I call attention to that in order that you might know the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of grace, and of spiritual principles, and rules by which heaven works and operates. Whatever this parable means, it's describing the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is like something. This parable begins with the words, *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to…"* He's likening something on the earth to a spiritual truth of the kingdom of heaven.

I call this the "so-called" parable of the wheat and the tares. Many people interpret this parable, that the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a field that is sown with both wheat and tares, and there's good and bad in the field, and they are growing together until the end of the age. The enemy who sowed the field with tares is the devil, Satan. It was a very common form of malice in those days, if you had an enemy who was a farmer, and you wanted to destroy his crop, you would wait until night when people slept, and then you snuck onto his field, and sowed it with wild oats or some other weed. It made it almost impossible to exterminate the damage done, especially when you use the word that He uses here in this parable—*"tares"*. The margin of the New American Standard says "darnels"; a weed resembling wheat. One commentary, French, calls it "bastard wheat". Another calls it "degenerate wheat". The point is this; in the early stages of wheat and tares, there is no way to distinguish the difference between them. They look alike to the human eye. Their stalks are the same, their leaves are the same, and everything about them are the same. But there are two differences.

In Mark 4:28, the wheat is described in three stages, *"First the blade, and then then the ear, and then the full or mature grain in the ear*." First in the blade the wheat and the tares look alike. Then in the ear, the wheat and the tares looks alike. Then in the full grain in the ear, that's where the tares abort. They don't give you the full grain; they just peter out. They were different because it didn't bring forth fruit**.** It failed in the mature grain. Look at verse 26 and you'll see that, *"When the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also."* Quoting from Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, "The seeds of the tares are poisonous to men and animals, producing sleepiness, vertigo, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, convulsions and sometimes death. It was not only indistinguishable to the human eye, those tares were poisonous; you could die or at least get very sick."

There are those who say, "Isn't that exactly right? You don't have to be a theologian; just turn your head around. Isn't that what the church is like today? There is some true wheat in the church, but there is also a lot of tares, too. Christianity is like a big field with wheat and tares in it, no matter which denomination you look at. There's no church that is all wheat. If you find one that is all wheat, don't join it or it won't be all wheat anymore." So, they say it accurately describes Christiandom and life as we know it; good and evil.

Now, I would call it the parable of the wheat and tares if the Lord were trying to describe churches, or if He was trying to describe Christiandom. But listen to what He said, *"The kingdom of heaven is like…"* That's why I'm so determined to get this main point, because in no way is the kingdom of heaven like a field mixed with tares and wheat. Jesus never intended it, and if you could ever go to heaven for ten minutes, you'd come back and say, "You're right, Ed. There's no tares up there. There are no imitators up there, and there is no poison up there. You are right." The tares and the wheat of this parable are the details, they aren't the point.

There's a principle of Bible study that is so important as you study any part of the Bible. We've used it on other occasions. It can be stated in these words, "Read your Bible carefully." It's unbelievable how many problems can be avoided if you read your Bible carefully. I'm going to misread read verse 24, and you follow along as I misread it deliberately, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a field, a

mixed field of imitation wheat." Isn't that what He says; a mixed field? The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a field? Is that what He's saying? He never said it was compared to a field. Man did. He is not! According to the Bible, it's compared to a man sowing grain, sowing seed; compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. That's the kingdom of heaven. According to verse 38, the field is the world, and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom. The mixed field is not the Lord Jesus' illustration of the kingdom of heaven. Those are the details that lend color and flavor to the story. Verse 24, *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field."*

If we really went through these parables I think that out of the eight of them we'd have to rename six of them. The one we did last week was not the parable of the sower. It was the parable of the soil. This is the parable of the sower. The kingdom of heaven is compared to a man who sowed. So, for our own purposes we'll call this, instead of the parable of the wheat and the tares, the parable of the sower. I realize we've heard so much of the other so long that it might sound a little strange but, I'm not trying to be clever or novel, but trying to get the point across what the Lord Jesus had in mind when He gave this wonderful parable. In verse 24 He comes right out and tells you what He's likening the kingdom of heaven to and, of course, we have His own interpretation of that.

The Lord Jesus is the sower, and He sows good seed, and Matthew 13:38 says, *"The good seed are the sons of the kingdom."* The details are going to enforce this main point. Before looking at the details, let me nail down the point that He's making here. The kingdom of heaven is not like a field but it's like a man, and not like any man, but the Son of Man; the Lord Jesus Himself, sowing good seed, and not doctrine like last week, but the children of the kingdom; the children who have received the doctrine; His own; children of His sowing; children of His planting. They are the sons of the kingdom.

I'd like to interpret the details of this particular parable in the light of that main point: that Jesus is the Sower, and He's the One that plants His children in the field, the world. There is no question that the kingdom of heaven is like what Jesus plants. Then we'll apply it to life as we go along. The Lord Jesus in His explanation drew nine parallels;

the sower is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the sons of the kingdom; the tares are the sons of the evil one; the enemy is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age; the reapers are the angels; the binding and burning is the judgment, and the barn is the place of glory – heaven. Because He drew all of those parallels, you can expect there will be many principles and applications to life, and there are, but they are all tied into that main point.

I'll give you the two main truths, and then I'm going to give you four great principles of life that are illustrated by the details. The two main truths have to do with verse 24 & 37, that the Sower is the Son of Man and verse 25 & 39. Verse 25, *"While men were sleeping, His enemy came."* Whose enemy? The Sower's enemy. Who is the Sower? It's the Son of Man. Who is the Son of Man? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is His enemy? It's the devil, Satan. His enemy came. The whole parable revolves around those two truths. #1 Jesus is the Sower and #2 the enemy is His enemy; and not the enemy of the wheat. It's the enemy of the Sower. That's a BIG difference! It's His enemy.

Let me drive those two points home, and then we'll get those details. There's many ways to state it. The Sower is the Son of Man. This summarizes it, Psalm 127:1, *"Unless the Lord builds a house, they labor in vain that build it."* The Sower is the Son of Man, and unless He sows, unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain. Let me bring it down to earth, so that we really get the impact of what He's saying. The Lord Jesus is the Sower. The Lord Jesus is the soul winner. The Lord Jesus is the evangelist. The Lord Jesus is the missionary. He's the One that plants good seed; His children on the earth. The kingdom of heaven is made up of the children of His sowing. The kingdom of heaven is spiritual, is holy, is good, is pure, and it's right.

God is the only One who does the planting in His kingdom

One of the chief principles of heaven is that it's God. It's always God. He starts it, He finishes it, and He's everywhere in between. Everywhere in the whole world where there are sons of the kingdom, it's because the Son of Man has planted them there. That's why they are there. That's the only reason that they are there. It's always that He has planted. It's not because some group came up with a good program on how to evangelize the neighborhood. That's not how

they're sown. The Son of Man is always the Sower. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying He doesn't use instruments, and doesn't use means. He often does. He uses men, and instruments, and programs, and means, but in back of it all, the kingdom of heaven is His sowing. This is a principle which is easy to applaud theologically. People would say, "Oh, I agree with you on that. No problem. Of course!" But it's hard to apply evangelically and practically.

Somewhere along the line man has gotten into his head that he, the son of the Son of Man, is the sower. We're not the sowers. He's is. Somehow we misread the Great Commission, and think that He changed things around, and He's turned the task of evangelism over to His children. He never has, and never will. Any witnessing, any program, any missionary effort, any outreach, whether tape or radio or literature or visitation or teaching or driving or singing or distribution of literature or whatever you do, that does not allow the Son of Man to be the soul winner will be rooted up. It's unscriptural, and has no legitimate reason for existence. It will be destroyed. It's easy to accept the doctrine of it and yet, practically, we seem sometimes to run in the other direction.

Only God can separate the tares from the wheat

The second truth is in verse 25, *"His enemy came."* His enemy that sowed the tares is called the devil, Satan. This fact is rooted in the whole Bible. The seed of the serpent is at war with the seed of the woman. It's always between God and Satan. It's His enemy. In verse 28 the slave of the landowner said to Him, *"Do you want us then to go and gather them up?"* In verse 29 and 30 He gives His answer, *"No."* Verse 30, *"Allow both to grow together until the harvest."* And then later, *"I will say to the reapers, 'Don't gather them up. I have My own spiritual reapers.'"* There are many applications to this, and we're going to look at a few but it goes back to this; the devil is the enemy of the Son of Man, and only the Son of Man can deal with Him. Nobody else can. It's not the slaves of the landowner, and it's not the wheat that has to deal with the tares.

Let's look at some of the details in terms of these two main points; the Sower is the Son of Man, and the enemy is His enemy, the devil. It's called the parable of the tares and the wheat because that's such a big

point in this whole story. According to that detail, the teaching is simply this; that the wheat, that is, that which He plants, is going to grow side by side with the tares. The mixture is NOT part of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is only the part that He sows; the work that He does. He does His work slowly, and does His work gradually, and a lot of the field is sown by the enemy.

Let me give you three illustrations of this horrible mixture of good and bad. You'll recognize it because it's true to life. The first is the mixture of the saved and the unsaved. It would be nice if the Lord would just divide the earth into spiritual hemispheres, and once you are saved you are thrown over the line, and told, "That's the side you live on, and all the unsaved, all of the tares are going to live on the other side." That would be good. However, it doesn't work that way. They are side by side. They grow up together. There's no fence and no boundary between them. The Christian and the non-Christian grows up side by side; the pure, right alongside the vile; the courageous, right alongside the coward; the false, right next to the truth; the wheat, right next to the tares. They grow together. They are all mixed up and confused. They work together, they live in the same neighborhood, they shop in the same stores, they ride on the same buses, and in some cases they live under the same roof, and eat at the same table, and sleep in the same bed; the wheat and the tares are mixed up.

It's not surprising to hear the sinner's excuse, "I don't want to go to church. There are hypocrites in the church." Yeah, there are a lot of them. It's all mixed up, but the mixture is more profound than that. Not only is there a mixture among men, but the wheat and the tare principle is also in men; a strange mixture. I think every Christian man and woman have recognized (they might not have expressed that way) that in their own Christian lives there is an awful lot that is not of the Lord's planting. There's an awful lot that you've got to say, "The enemy has done this. This is not of His hand, and not of His sowing." There are areas of our lives that we grieve over.

I know when Lillian found me she thought that she had found her field of wheat. A few months of married life had shown her that there were a few tares along with the wheat; bitter, harsh, hard and terrible tares, and unfruitful. The kingdom of heaven is that part of our life that the Son of Man has sown. That's the kingdom of heaven part of our life,

but the field of our life is not yet all wheat, as you know. Sadly, there's even a more subtle mixture than that. It's not bad enough that individuals have to grow side by side, tares and wheat, and it's not bad enough that in my life there has to be both tares and wheat, but you are going to find that in your individual actions, and in your very individual beings, you are going to have a strange mixture of tares and wheat. The action might look like true wheat, but then if you go down a little bit, and get to the spirit of it and the motive of it, you begin to ask yourself, "I wonder if this is really wheat, and is of the Lord's sowing? I wonder, looking at the motive, if there is not some self-indulgence here; a little bit of pride, ego." So, that detail of the mixture takes on a lot of meaning, but it doesn't take away the big point. The wheat is what the Son of Man has done in our life. He's doing much, but it's gradual, and it's not all done; there's a lot of tares in our lives.

The second detail has to do with the command that the Lord gave to the slave, the workers, concerning the tares. Verse 28, *"He said, 'An enemy has done this." The slaves said, 'Do you want us to, then, go and gather them up?' And He said, 'No, less while you are gathering up the tares you might root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow until the harvest.'"* In the light of the truth that the kingdom of heaven is like the Lord Jesus sowing good seed, how do you explain this detail of our responsibility? The responsibility, as it's expressed to these slaves of the landowner, are twofold. They are stated negatively and positively. Let me give you the negative statement first. The negative statement can be summarized in this word, Matthew 13:29, *"No. Let the tares alone. Don't try to gather them up. They are His enemy and He'll deal with them."* It's not our responsibility ever to deal with the tares. That's an amazing thing. Church history is filled with blood. It sounds good, it sounds chivalric, and it sounds courageous and bold. "Lord, you've got an enemy there? Do you want me to take care of them?" So said Peter as he drew out his sword against Rome; the fisherman against Rome, "I'll help you, Lord. I'll defend you."

One of the most neglected truths is that Christians can't get their hands off the tares. They are constantly trying to uproot. So many make it their mission to rid the world of tares. It expresses itself in many ways. "We are wheat, are we not? Let's march. We've got to march against this evil. Tares are sneaking in, and corrupting our family, and our children. We've got to march against this group and that group, against

this book and that book, against this man and that man. We've got to get rid of them. "Listen, I have a group of petitions here, and I'm going to pass them out, and I want you to sign them, and send them to your congressmen and to your representatives. We've got to get rid of these tares. We've got to get rid of this evil. Maybe we can boycott. If all the Christians would get together, and we are a moral majority you know, no slam intended there, we can make an impact on the world, and we can do something, if we work together, if all the wheat get together." Jesus simply says, *"No, less while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them."*

The problem is that some tares look like wheat. The other side is that some wheat look like tares. We don't have the insight; we don't know how to discriminate. We've used man's measurements for so long that we've come to believe that they are accurate, and they are not. They came out of man's head. We hold up a ruler and say, "I can tell if you are wheat. I know how. Do you go to church all the time? Do you make all the meetings? Are you all involved? Do you go to prayer meeting? Do you memorize scripture? Do you get up early? Do you witness? Do you share the gospel? Then you are wheat. If you are outside the walls of the local church, if you miss meetings, if you hold a quiet faith or take a rugged stand against some tradition, then you are not wheat," so they judge.

I was reading a book today by Lloyd Oglesby on parables, and he talks about false standards of judgment, and about outside insiders, and inside outsiders, and inside insiders. He says that some may be on the inside of the church and outside of the grace of God. And there may be some on the outside of the church and very much inside of the grace of God. Of course, he appeals to inside insiders. He'd like them inside the walls of the church, and inside the grace of God, but the point is this; don't deal with the tares, because you might hurt some dear child of God; some of the tares look like wheat, and the wheat look like tares. They are His enemies. We do not need to study cults, to fight error, or know what all of the false teachers believe. We don't need that.

"Well, you don't know what is going on in the schools today. We've got to get rid of those tares, and we have to take a rugged stand. We're Christians, you know. I've got to fight witches, and demons, and devils, and fight drugs, and I've got to fight socialism, and I've got to

fight slavery, poverty and communism. I've got to." Leave the tares alone. Jesus said, "I'll take care of them." He'll do something about that. Don't you worry about that! Faith is patient. God has reasons, good reasons. Do you know that it's for the good of the wheat that the tares grow side by side with them? If I were to ask you some of the greatest blessings in your life, you'd probably not mention the tares. And yet if all of the record were in, I think we'll all be praising God for the tares He has allowed in our lives.

I think Saul made David a better man. I really do. I think those three counselors that Job had, that he called *"miserable counselors",* were tremendous weapons for good in his life. I think Joseph's brothers were some of the greatest benedictions that Joseph ever had. How they crowded him to Christ. David wouldn't have been David without Goliath. Blessed tares; blessed darnel! It's also for the good of the tares. God is patient and long suffering, and not willing that any should perish. The presence of the wheat in the midst of the tares is a constant object lesson, and invitation of God to draw them unto Himself in reality. It sounds so paradoxical. The remedy for the evil that Satan sows—let it alone. And yet that's the teaching, not only of this parable; you would be hard pressed to find anything else in the whole Bible. That's what He says, *"Leave it alone."* That's the negative statement of our responsibility. Don't touch the tares. There will be a day when the angels of God will discriminate between them, and the true wheat.

Meanwhile we have much to do—not sowing, because that's the Son of Man's job, and not fighting the tares, and not fighting the devil because that's the Son of Man's job. Then what are we supposed to do positively? Matthew 13:30, *"Grow."* That's what He said, "Grow together until then. Just keep on growing and growing, and don't touch the tares. Leave them alone, and just grow and grow and grow." "How long do I have to grow?" *"Until the harvest."* When you are all done with that, that's your whole Christian life. Don't touch the tares. Just grow and grow and grow and grow until the harvest.

This parable, as I understand it, is full of hope. If you miss the main point, you miss everything. The expression in verse 30, *"until the harvest",* is a wonderful word. It teaches us that the Lord deals with us very slowly. He's not finished with His planting, His sowing in our lives. He deals gradually. The day is coming when the wheat will

triumph. The day is coming when the tares will be separated from the wheat. It's not here yet. Now they are altogether, but because truth is going to triumph, and the wheat is going to win, we don't have to compromise with the tares along the way. The devil is going to lose. You don't have to surrender to the tares, because you are going to win.

Some people want instant results. "Lord, I want patience, and I want it now. I want to be perfected. Lord, I'm giving myself to you, and with a sudden flash and shock I want you to perfect me." That's noble because it comes from a heart's cry, "Lord, I hate these tares. I want them dealt with. I don't know what to do. They are awful, they are ugly, they are poison, they are hurting me and my testimony, and they are bringing reproach on the name of Christ, robbing You of Your reputation on the earth. I can't stand these tares."

Sometimes, because of our impatience to wait until the harvest, we fall into one of two errors. Either we like to feel spiritual, that we're more wheat than tares, and we bring God's standard down to our experience, or most probably on the other side, because we're more realistic, and we see we're more tares than wheat, we look at the standard that seems so high and out of sight, and sometimes hold in suspicion whether or not we are of the Lord's planting in the first place. We begin to give up in despair, and throw in the towel. But He says, "Just grow. Just be patient. Just wait**.** Just grow until the harvest because the responsibility of the wheat is on God. It's not on man. It's on the Son of Man, and He's the One responsible for the wheat. So, just grow until the harvest. Don't be impatient. The day of discrimination will come when He'll discriminate between the wheat and the tares. He'll do His job and He'll do it well.

Look at verse 26 and these facts about the harvest. It says, *"Bore grain."* Verse 30 says, *"Until harvest," "at the time of harvest."* Verse 39 says, *"The harvest is the end of the age."* Verse 40 says, *"The end of the age."* Verse 43 says, *"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to ear, let him hear."* According to verse 26 the tares are distinguished from the wheat in the day of fruit. When it comes time for the full fruit, it's called the harvest. The Spirit of God refers to the end of the age; the ultimate day of fruit; the harvest. Verse 43 describes the wheat in the

day of fruit. What are you going to look like in the day of fruit? *"Then the righteous will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."*

There are many harvests on the way to the harvest

It's true that time will be the basis for the discrimination between the tares and the wheat. In the process of time, in the day of harvest, in the day of fruit you'll be able to tell the difference. There's a principle as well as a fact. The harvest is not only down the road, but there are many harvests on the way to the harvest. There are many days of fruit. There are many opportunities when the wheat can be as the righteous, and shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. These are the principles of the kingdom of heaven.

I was reading an old Methodist preacher describing Satan as a squatter; a man who settles on land to which he has no right, and then he works it out for his own advantage. He's a counterfeiter. He likes to imitate the wheat; the Lord's children. This principle will have its full application in the end of the age, but verse 26 gives it as a present life principle; the tares become evident in the day of fruit. All through the Bible you are going to find the truth that fruit is the evidence of real wheat. "By their fruit you shall know them."

One of Satan's chief tools, of course, is to imitate the real. He's the ape of God and he likes to imitate. The tares, the unreal, the bastard wheat, know how to do the things that the wheat does. They have everything but the fruit. They know how to sing, and they know how to pray, and they know how to preach, and they know how to warn, and they know how to exhort, and they know how to weep. They know their Bibles, and they are sometimes very faithful in attendance. They are orthodox in their statements and in their creeds. You can find them in the prayer groups, and you can find them in the choirs, and you can find them at the Lord's Table, and you can find them behind the pulpits. The tares are everywhere. They always look like wheat, until the day of fruit; until the day that it is required that there be some fruit. Then, it's a dead giveaway.

You'll know the wheat from the tares in a moment; let a tare get hit by a storm. Let's say a member of his family is struck down with a disease of some kind, a tragedy, an accident, or if they are brought to poverty.

It's the time of harvest, now is the time of fruit, and now is the time to see if you are real or not real. Now is the time to see if the wheat can not only have the blade and the ear, but the full corn in the ear. In the times of pressure the wheat will come forth as the righteous, and they will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. In the day of fruit, in the day that it is required, that's when you'll see the difference between them. The wheat is seen in all the harvests of life. Every time there is a call for fruit you'll be able to tell the wheat from the tares, when the fruit of forgiveness is required, when the fruit of love is required, when the fruit of longsuffering and patience is required, when the fruit of faith is required. It just bows its head and says, "Thank you, Lord. I don't understand why, and it doesn't matter. You've allowed this in my life." It's the fruit of supernatural joy in the midst of outward disaster and calamity. That's the day of harvest and day of fruit. The Christian shines like the sun in the kingdom of his Father. They might look alike for a while, but let there be a call for fruit, and that's when the wheat gets promoted, and the tares gets a promotion.

Leave the tares alone to just grow until the day of harvest

You watch the difference in the humility and the pride, and you watch when the wheat gets enriched without covetousness. It's a marvelous thing to see the fruit of the wheat. You watch when the wheat are slandered. In the day of harvest and fruit, when you have to turn the other cheek, and you have to go the second mile, when you have to return good for evil, or when someone asks for your coat, and you have to give them your cloak, also, that's when you'll see the real. Our responsibility is simple; leave the tares alone to grow until the harvest. The revelation of fruit is going to be the distinguishing feature.

Every plant God did not plant shall be rooted out, both for the saved and unsaved

Matthew 13:30, *"Allow both to grow together until the harvest and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles and burn them up. But gather the wheat into My barn."* Verse 39, *"And the enemy that sowed them was the devil,*

and the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore, just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age the Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire in that place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It's a great warning that a judgment is coming, and no tare will escape it; no tare outside the kingdom, and no tare growing up with the wheat. The best way to state this principle is to use the words of Matthew 15:13, *"Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted out."* Isn't that some kind of a verse? That will be true for the unsaved, and those resembling the true, but it's also a great principle in our lives. The Son of Man is the Sower, and whatever you know of the kingdom of heaven at this point in your life is because He planted it there. Everything else will be rooted up.

I'm not afraid of that fire anymore. I used to fear the judgment seat of Christ, and view it with terror; the idea of standing there with fire and wood, hay and stubble. I'm not afraid of the judgment seat anymore, because there is a glory side to it. There is a day coming when anything I've ever done or said to dishonor my Lord Jesus will be burned up in smoke. I can't wait for the fire. I can't wait for the day when it's all rooted up, and there is nothing left, and the righteous will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their fire. There's warning and there's blessing in that truth of "whatever my Father has not planted shall be rooted up."

The warning is especially true with those who get involved in Christian service. I'm not trying to discourage you from Christian service. I am trying to encourage you to cooperate with the Lord, and make sure He is the sower, because every Christian service and ministry that the Lord has not planted shall be rooted up. There's an awful lot in our lives, I think, that is not there by the Lord's good planting. It's full of self and pride and man and flesh. An enemy has done this, but it will all be rooted up some day. Meanwhile, don't worry about it. I'm not telling you to live sloppily and slipshod. I'm just saying to not worry about it. Leave the tares alone, and grow until the harvest, and the Son of Man will continue His sowing in your life. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in His field. The seeds are the sons of the kingdom, and the man who sowed it is the Son of Man.

3

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

Matthew 13:31, *"And He presented another parable to them saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took, and sowed in his field, and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it's full grown it's larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."*

Background

This is also recorded in Mark 4:31&32 and in Luke 13:18&19. Unlike the two parables we've already studied, we have no inspired interpretation of this particular parable. So, we must wait upon the Lord to instruct us. Let me begin with a little bit of background by suggesting a problem that interpreters have had with this particular parable. There seems to be (there isn't) an apparent discrepancy between what the Lord Jesus said, and what actually exists. From verse 32 you'd get the idea that this mustard tree was enormous, and yet the fact is that the mustard trees that we know anything about today get to be about four to six feet high. One commentator said there was evidence there was one nine feet, and another made reference to twelve

feet, but it wasn't documented. So, you are talking at the most, let's go way on the outside, from five to fifteen feet high. That's not very big. Matter of fact, in verse 32 it says, *"This is smaller than all the seeds."* So, they go and dig up all these other seeds and say, "How come you said that? That isn't true. There are other seeds in Palestine in that day smaller than the mustard seed."

One of the explanations the commentators give is that the wrong word was translated in the Greek. There is another word that looks very close to "mustard" but it wasn't really mustard. There was a copyist's error. Jesus was really talking about another seed which looked in the Greek like a mustard seed. Someone else said, "No, that's not what happened. He was talking about the mustard seed, but remember that mustard trees in our climate where it's cold are a lot different than the mustard trees in the southern climate where it's hot. There's all kinds of proof that the mustard trees in Palestine are big enough for a man to climb onto or for a camel to go under the branches," and that kind of thing. Another explanation I read was, "Jesus said exactly the right thing. It was the smallest seed, and it was the largest tree. It's become extinct now, but in His day it did exist."

I think if you start with what is 100% clear, you come a long way in understanding the mind of the Spirit of God. It's clear that the mustard seed was very small in size. There's no question about that. Fact is, it became proverbial because it was so small. One writer I read said that it was so small that it could hardly be seen with the naked eye. I don't know if it was that small, but I know it was small. It was known for its minuteness. I'll give you a couple of illustrations of that.

One day the disciples were puzzled why they couldn't cast a demon out and the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 17:20, *"That's because of the littleness of your faith. But truly I say to you, if you had faith as a mustard seed, you should say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it should move, and nothing shall be impossible to you."* So, the mustard seed was known for its smallness. Another time He said in Luke 17:6, *"If you had faith like a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.'"* It was proverbial for its smallness.

The second thing that's 100% certain is this; Matthew 13:32, *"When it is full grown it's larger than the garden plant, and becomes a tree*." If you have the KJV it says, *"The greatest among the herbs."* See, it wasn't a tree at all. It didn't have a woody stem. It's got to have a woody stem in order to be a tree. It was grass. One commentator said that it was a garden shrub outdoing itself. As a garden shrub, it was pretty big. As a tree it was no big deal. As a garden shrub, as a plant, as an herb, it was big and unusual in size. For all practical purposes it had become a tree. So much so that the birds thought it was a tree. They came and built nests in it. There were smaller seeds and larger plants, but there were no smaller seeds which produced a larger plant, and there were no larger plants that came from a smaller seed. So, it was 100% accurate what He was saying. For a seed this size to produce a plant this size, the smallest to give the biggest, was His point.

Before I give you the main teaching of that parable, let me remind you of verse 31, *"The kingdom of heaven is like."* I want to keep bringing that up. Whatever the Lord Jesus intends by this parable, it's a picture of the kingdom of heaven. It's positive. It's optimistic. It's spiritual. It's good. It's a picture of the principle of God, the grace of God, the kingdom of God. There are those who think the kingdom of heaven is a mixture of good and bad, a mixture of tares and wheat, of good fish and bad fish, of wicked leaven permeating throughout the whole thing, and they say, "This is a mustard tree. That's not very good. It's got a pungent seed and pungent taste. If you were talking about heaven it would have been a sweet tree; a fruit tree; not an old mustard tree." They read in parable #1 chapter 13:4, speaking of the seed on the wayside, *"The birds came and ate the seed."* And then in His explanation in verse 19 He said, *"The evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart."* So, they say, "Birds are evil. The birds came and took the seed, and God says that's the evil one. So, when the birds come into the mustard tree, that's not talking about anything good. That's talking about the corruption of the church, and the birds come into it, and they are not good birds. They are bad birds." And so on. They say, "There's a mixture in the kingdom of heaven. There are going to be tares and there's going to be bad fish, and there's going to be bad birds, and there's going to be leaven."

There is not a mixture! The kingdom of heaven is pure, and there are no tares in heaven, and there are no bad fish in heaven, and there is no

wicked leaven in heaven, and there is no bad birds coming in heaven. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard tree. It's not bad. It's good, and in order to understand it, you've got to see it as He's teaching it. Just because the birds were bad in one parable doesn't mean they are bad in parable #3. It's a different story, and it's not legitimate to overlap them. That's an illustration of taking the details, and reading into the details.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. He's describing heaven and the grace of God; spiritual truth. Let me try to nail down the chief point, and then we'll look at the details. Whatever the chief message of this parable is, it has to revolve around two truths. The apparently small, contemptible, insignificant seed has to be included in there. There's a small beginning, and it also has to include the future grandeur; the growth, the maturity. Verse 32 says *"full grown tree"*.

In Palestine the mustard tree was an illustration of a striking increase from smallness to greatness. For years I thought the message was, "The kingdom of heaven will start small and get large." I thought the difference between the kingdom of heaven as a mustard seed and as leaven was that the mustard seed showed outward growth while the leaven showed inward growth. I don't believe that's the point at all or what He's saying. I believe in this parable the word "mustard" is a detail, and doesn't have to do with the main point at all. The main point is in verse 13:31, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a seed."*

The seed is a comparison. He's going to say something about that seed, so he brings in mustard. That's a description. He's going to show how it's not only like a seed but a mustard seed. But the point is not mustard seed. It's a seed, and He's calling attention to life and to vitality. He's calling attention to the growth principle. The kingdom of heaven is like (we'll get to mustard in a minute) a seed. It starts small, not like a building where you put brick upon brick and finally it gets to be a big building. But it's an illustration of life; life and vitality in the seed. I believe the message can be summarized in these words, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed; life and vitality." When once planted (implied by God), though it's seemingly insignificant at the start, because it's life and it's a seed, it grows and it grows until it's full grown. When the life of the seed is full grown, then it becomes a

ministry, and a home for all who fly out to it for refuge and nesting. It's a picture of the grace of God and life in the Spirit.

I don't know of anything that shows the wonder of life any more than a seed. The power to grow is the unique characteristic of a living organism. I read an article about an experiment they did in Pennsylvania. They took seeds which were found in the hand of a mummified Egyptian girl approximately five thousand years old. They took the seeds, and they planted them in Pennsylvania. Guess what they got? Blue morning glories. After five thousand years the seeds were still alive, and they grew blue morning glories. Jesus said, John 12:24, *"Except a grain of wheat dies, it abides by itself alone. But if it dies it brings forth much fruit."* For five thousand years those seeds remained by themselves alone, but then in Pennsylvania they died. They were buried, they were put into the ground, and they lived. Do you know why? There was vitality and life in the seed. That's the message of this parable. The kingdom of heaven does not grow as a snow ball grows, or as a building grows, or as a wave grows, or as a big pile of junk grows. The kingdom of heaven grows like a seed grows. It's alive. It has energy inside. It's vital.

Don't be discouraged by small beginnings

From that main point let me mention several principles from the details that tie into that main point. I think He intentionally chose mustard seed. To illustrate life He could have chosen any seed, because life is in any seed. But I think He had something else in mind when he chose "mustard seed". Jesus could have used the cedars of Lebanon. They are used in the Bible a lot. If He wanted to show the tremendous growth and strength and the power of the kingdom, what would be stronger than the cedars of Lebanon? But I think He chose the mustard tree because it was large enough to be a resting place to all who flew to it. But it wasn't large enough to be admired by the world. He chose an illustration that was right in between. When you hear about famous trees in the world, not too many people mention the mustard tree. It's an "outside the camp" tree. It's a rejected kind of a tree. Its fruit is pungent. You wouldn't expect that to be a picture of heaven. But when you read your Bible you know it's an accurate picture of heaven. It's alive. People can fly to it for refuge. They can nest there and rest there.

The world doesn't like it. It's one of those trees that's rejected, and that's part of His illustration.

From the fact that the mustard seed is among the smallest of the seeds, I think the Lord is encouraging His disciples and we who are presently his disciples, not to be discouraged at small beginnings, if those small beginnings have the Life of God in them. We are to be discouraged at small beginnings if there is no Life of God in them. But if there is a Life of God in the small beginnings, then we don't have to be discouraged. Zachariah 4:10, *"Who has despised the day of small things?"* This could be true corporately or individually; as a group or as an individual. As a group sometimes we might think, "Boy, the church is just like a seed. Nothing is happening." How many times in my heart I wanted to pray David's prayer in Psalm 12:2, *"Help, Lord, for the Godly man ceases to be, and the faithful disappear from among the sons of men."* Your heart cries out, "Where are the Godly? Where's the remnant? Where are those who are in love with the Lord Jesus, and living in an unbroken union with Him? Help, Lord. The Godly man ceases." It may look like the church is dead, just like it might have looked like those seeds were dead in that girl's hand. It may look like there is no kingdom of heaven, but the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. There's life.

I know it's a contradiction, but follow along as I say it; the church is doing fine on the earth. Now, not the picture of the church; the thing they call visible and local. That's not doing too well, because mostly that's manmade. But the real church; the life and the people who have life in God, wherever He has implanted life, it's doing fine. His church is growing. He hasn't called me to write books. He's called me to write titles of books, and have you write the books. I wish someone would write a book entitled, "The Church is Alive and Well on Planet Earth". Now, I stole a few of those words. But it's true! The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, and the real church, the invisible church, individuals related to God, they aren't suffering. They are feeding on Him. He has to often slay the shepherds, and feed His sheep in secret places, but they're doing fine. God's people, those who fear the Lord, who are living in union with Him, they're doing okay. Our human eyes can't see it, but the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. There's life, and it's growing, and it will come to maturity.

Life in Him guarantees growth

What's true for the group is also true for the individual. This is a parable, as they all are, of hope. Life guarantees growth. You probably do what I do. I think I'm pretty average. Sometimes I look at my own life, and wonder where the tree is. I look at my own heart, and wonder if it's still the seed. You look at your life, and it doesn't cast a shadow, and it doesn't shelter very many birds, and it doesn't yield any fruit, and doesn't complete the landscape, and you wonder if God is doing anything, and is active in your life. It's easy to look at your life, and long for the branches and the fruit and for the leaves. Those are figures of speech. It's easy to look at your life, and long for the love and for the patience and for the meekness. Where is that forgiving heart? If I really am His, where is His image in me? How come I'm still sinning? How come I'm still in bondage in so many ways?

1 John 3:9, *"No one who is born of God practices sin because His seed remains in him."* Isn't that a verse? His seed remains in him. The kingdom of heaven is like a seed, like a mustard seed. What a word that is! His seed abides in him. That indwelling life of Christ is what gives hope, and keeps you going. Because His seed abides in you, you are going to grow and mature. That's true for the individual as well as for the group. I also believe that from the fact that the birds come to nest in its branches, we learn a double truth; not only is the kingdom of heaven a place where we can nest and rest, but also when that life is developed in us, it produces a place where others can fly to us in order to find rest and a nest. We're at rest in the life of God, and as part of the life of God, we can offer ourselves to give others that same rest.

There's many things to learn from this parable. The big teaching is that the kingdom of heaven is like a seed. It's full of life, vitality and energy, and its progress issues only from life, and it's certain. As a mustard seed will be rejected as the smallest seed, we don't need to be discouraged. Life guarantees growth. You say, "I'm not growing in the Lord." Then you're dead. Every living thing grows. If it stops growing it dies. There's nothing alive that's not growing. That's part of life; growth. Every Christian is growing. They may not see it, but if they are truly alive, they are growing. That includes you and me.

Matthew 13:33, "*And He spoke another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three packs of meal until it was all leavened.' All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled saying, 'I will open My mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.'*"

Background

Once again let me begin with a supposed problem. It is a fact that twenty two times in the Old Testament leaven is mentioned, and in every case it is forbidden. It is bad, and is a symbol of evil and wickedness and sin, and that which corrupts, and that which disintegrates, and that which makes foul, and that which decays. It's also a fact that it's used fourteen times in the New Testament, and clearly thirteen out of those fourteen times it's used of evil, sin, and wickedness. Leaven was always forbidden, and was always warned about. Jesus warned about the leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod. Thirty six times in the Bible leaven is mentioned. In at least thirty five times out of the thirty six times it's bad; the fermentation is evil.

Matthew 13:33, *"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven."* Say what? The kingdom of heaven is like leaven? Most commentators don't like this, so they try to get around it. They say, "Kingdom of heaven? It must be talking about some other kingdom, and not the kingdom of glory in the sky, because that can't be like evil, and can't be like wickedness. He's got to be talking about Christendom, or the professing church where you've got a mixture and a combination of good and bad, and of the wheat and the tares, and of the bad fish along with the good fish. God wouldn't use the same picture thirty five times to say, 'Sin, sin, sin, sin.' and just when you get grip of that, He says, 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.' Come on, Lord? You just got me in the mood to learn that it's wickedness. He's got to be talking about the terrible mixture that takes place on the earth; the way evil spreads, and is contagious, and a little leaven leavens the whole lump."

Let me clear up a few points before we look at the chief message. You know already my approach. Because of the Sermon on the Mount, I'm not about to back off from what the kingdom of heaven is. The kingdom of heaven is good, and is the kingdom as it is in heaven. And now on the earth we can pray, Matthew 6:10, *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* We can have a kingdom of heaven on the earth. God often uses the same pictures to picture different things, even opposite things.

What comes to your mind when I say "serpent"? Satan. Revelation 12:9, *"The serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, and deceives the whole earth*." How about John 3:14? The serpent there pictures the Lord Jesus. *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up."* It's the same figure of speech. 1 Peter 5:8 calls Satan *"a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour"*. Four times in the Book of Hosea God is called a *"roaring lion seeking whom He may devour*". It's the same figure of speech, and meaning a different thing. I looked up "tree" in the concordance. Sometimes it would be a picture of a kingdom. Sometimes it would be a picture of a righteous man. Sometimes it would be a picture of a wicked man. Sometimes it would be a picture of a proud man. Sometimes it was good, and sometimes corrupt. Look up wind. Sometimes it's the shortness of life. Sometimes it's the judgment of God. Sometimes it's the work of the Holy Spirit in the Believer. Sometimes it's the spreading of evil doctrine; *"every wind of doctrine."* You can't look at a picture and say, "It's been used this way all these times, therefore it's evil." The same salt that pictured Lot's wife, also pictures the Christian in the world, *"You are the salt of the earth."* In one case birds feeding on seed become a picture of God's provision for all of us. In another case it's the evil one snatching the word from their heart.

Because leaven is used thirty five times in the Bible for evil, I'm not surprised that He uses leaven here for the kingdom, because it's one of the wonderful illustrations of the grace of God; of the kingdom of truth. Matter of fact, using the mustard seed and leaven in the parables was part of His plan to hide the truth. He deliberately chose leaven in order to hide the truth. You wouldn't expect Him to change gears so quickly. The word "leaven" in Matthew 13 I'm convinced is positive. It's the

Spirit of God describing the process by which the kingdom of heaven will spread. It will act exactly as leaven does.

The leaven, the grace of God, comes from outside of ourselves.

Let me nail down the main teaching, and then take some of the details. I believe the message can be summarized in these words; the kingdom of heaven is like leaven in the sense that it radically transforms the meal. Leaven is a chemical agent always working toward one end and one goal—it's going to work and work and work until the entire lump is transformed into itself. In this parable our hearts are like meal, and like unleavened paste, and His grace in our heart does what leaven does to the bread. It transforms us. It radically changes us. It turns us into what we are not. The main message of the parable is the radical transformation of all the meal.

Let's look back at the details. Matthew 13:33, the leaven describes the empire of grace, and says *"which a woman took."* From that I get this truth, all tied into the main point, that leaven is foreign to the meal. What I mean by that is that it's not naturally in the meal. If you let the meal be all by itself it would never get leavened. It can't. Leaven is not derived from the meal. Leaven doesn't create the meal. Leaven has to be brought from point A, and put into the meal. If it's not brought from without, there can be no change in the particular dough. This introduction of leaven, the principle of leaven from without, begins a work, occasions of contest, and begins a process inside of that bread. A radical transformation is taking place that will last for the life of that bread. That's the first fact. The leaven is brought from the outside and brought in.

The second fact, same verse, *"which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal."* I don't see any point that the Spirit of God intended for three pecks of meal, except that six times in the Old Testament that was the amount used for the normal cooking. *"A woman took and hid…"* It comes from the outside, and it's brought in, and it's hidden inside, and it begins a secret invisible influence. It's hidden from within, and it has a vital energy, like the seed, except that it's not alive. He's illustrating something different here. It's inside, and it begins to

penetrate, and it works from the inside to the outside. I don't think He's choosing that arbitrarily. I think He's illustrating the principle of the kingdom of heaven. The leaven lays hold of the mass of dough at the center, and it begins its transforming work. It begins inside, and works itself from the inside out into every atom, essentially changing the very property of the entire body of the paste in which it is; from the inside out. It begins to conform itself, or the paste to itself. It imparts its own quality to the meal, and the meal becomes leavened. The idea of hiding it in the leaven; the leaven is assimilating. It's active, it impregnates and penetrates, and it converts and changes and conforms. It doesn't destroy. It just changes. It starts from the inside, works to the outside and actually alters the quality of the thing in which it is working. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven. It's brought from without and placed within. It's hidden on the inside, and because it's diffusive, it commences its work at the center and it works its way throughout the whole loaf by a secret invisible influence.

The third fact is in verse 33 again, *"until it was all leavened*". The kingdom of heaven is exactly like leaven. It's brought from without, and it's hidden within, and it finally conforms everything into itself until the whole is leavened. It doesn't happen all at once. It's gradual by degrees, and it's by contagion. We're conformed step by step into His image. The leaven will not stop. It cannot stop. You can't stop the leaven. It will not stop until the whole lump is leavened**.** It will not stop, and it will not let up, and it will not be satisfied until its whole object is radically changed from the inside to the outside, and everything is transformed into itself, and you have leavened bread. You start with unleavened bread, and you end up with leavened bread.

I'm not forcing these facts. These things are right on the surface, and it's exactly what the Lord Jesus was saying, and it's true through the balance of Scripture. The kingdom of heaven is like that, and if you don't accept this interpretation, then scrap it, because you've got these principles every place else in the Bible. Even if you reject this, you can't reject the truth that the grace of God starts on the outside, comes to the inside, works itself from the inside to the outside, and transforms what it touches into itself. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven; radically transforming the meal into itself. It's naturally foreign to the meal. It's an internal work, and it's guaranteed. Like the others, this is a parable of hope. I'll give a couple of principles to illustrate that.

From this parable we may learn that our hope is the grace of God, and that comes from outside of ourselves. It's not in the meal to leaven itself. It's not in me to change, and unless God brings from the outside and implants within, the message of the kingdom of God, His principles, His grace, I can never hope to change, and I'll have to remain my own pasty self. Only the introduction of the leaven, the grace of God, is going to do me any good. It will frustrate you to pieces to try to study the life of Christ, and then try to imitate that life. You can't imitate that life, any more than a lump of dough could study a true loaf of bread, and try to imitate that loaf of bread. It can't be done.

I used to do that; imitate Christ. I read a few books, and I thought, "I know what I'll do. Every time I come to a situation I'll ask, 'What would He do in this situation? How would He think and how would He feel? I'll imitate Christ.'" Bull feathers. It doesn't work. You fall right on your face. "I wish I were as selfless as the Lord Jesus. I wish I was as compassionate as the Lord Jesus. I wish I was as cut off and as free from things temporal as the Lord Jesus. I'll imitate Him." You'll learn as you go on, that the Christian life is not your ability to imitate Him, but it's His ability to reproduce Himself in you. As He puts in the leaven of the grace of God, He begins to change you. Until that leaven changes you, and conforms you to Himself, give up on changing. There's no hope. You can't quit sin. You can't break your habits. You can't stop those thoughts. You can't control the temper. You can't change your tongue. You can't get rid of the bitterness. You can't become more patient. You can't do anything unless He puts in the leaven from the outside; the leaven of the grace of God.

A holy character is a radical change, and it must come from Him because our hearts, brothers and sisters in Christ, is unleavened paste, and we can't do a thing without the grace of God. If He's going to turn us into bread for the hungry, then it has to come from Him. You can't do it. Any changes that don't come from His leavening, you are faking it, and I'm faking it. It's easy to play the game. "I'm supposed to have these seven attributes hanging on my life, so I'm going to start putting them on there. I'll glue them on; glued fruit. I'll get up early, and I'll pray, and I'll read my Bible." It's not real. It's a radical transformation by the grace of God, and only New Covenant Christians, only kingdom of heaven Christians, only those who have begun to learn to tap into the grace of God and the life of God begin to understand that. Without the

leaven of the grace of God you are a legalist. You are doing it by works and by the energy of your own flesh, generating all of that self-effort. And it's all in vain because it's not real. It's a game.

The first changes of a leavened life are very deep and invisible

The next thing I learned is that as you begin to understand the grace of God and the kingdom of heaven being as leaven, the first changes that take place are very deep and invisible. It's a grave mistake to look for outward results. You see, it takes time to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, just like the leaven took time. God is concerned with the hidden leaven in your heart. He's concerned with that hidden influence that will radically change you in due process. He's not impressed when you change your behavior. He wants to see your character change. Any behavior change that doesn't issue from a character change is an unreal change. By and by the leaven will reach the outside. Don't worry about that. God does His work from within, and our business is not outward results, but a true planting of the leaven within the heart. The rest will happen. The leaven works. It's slow and gradual, but it's certain and it's radical.

The leaven begins deep within in the spirit, in the motives, in the thoughts, in the intents of the heart, in the real you, in the blood of your soul. God plants that leaven down so deep, and it begins inside, and you become like Him. He leaves the form but He changes the character. If you are tall when He plants it in your heart, you aren't going to get short. And if you are fat, you aren't going to get thin. And if you are an introvert He probably won't make you an extrovert. He won't change your personality—He'll liberate it, that you might put on display what He can do through other personalities like yours, but you'll still be you, but changed. He does that from within. So, don't be discouraged if you don't see results, whether they are in your life or in loved ones lives—don't worry about results. Just pray that God will plant His leaven in their heart, and then it will work. That's His work, and He's the One that has to do it. God is not under the law of time. If He takes eighty years to transform you to His image, that's no big deal. Of course, you've got to knock that off a tick at a time. You might

think it's a big deal, but not to God. He's far more interested that your changes are real.

Don't play games and don't fake it. Even if you look embarrassed, and even if you have to testify, "God is doing nothing in my life, the book is dry, I have no victory, and I'm in slavery all the time," at least be real and be honest. Don't pretend you have a victory that you don't have, and you have a rest that you don't have. Don't pretend you have a union and a fellowship with God if you don't have it. Don't pretend He's answering prayer and you have a relationship with Him if it's not true. Just get in that secret place and cry out to God, "Plant your leaven in my heart, and begin to change me," and then testify to only those transformations which are real, which God has done in your heart.

Trust God and know that some day we'll all be leavened—completely transformed

We're also taught by this to trust God to complete His work. The whole thing will be leavened someday. He plants His leaven in your heart. It starts from the inside, and it works toward the outside, and it begins to change you into itself, radically change you, and that which He has begun to do He will perform. If it's wrong for the children of the king to put their hand to the plow and look back, how much more for the King would He put His hand to the plow of transforming you, and then give up on you? It's not possible. The leaven will do its perfect work. He never has an unfinished symphony. He begins a work in you, and He'll bring it to completion. One day we'll all be leavened. It won't be long when we all will be standing in our resurrection bodies arrayed in white with palms of victory in our hands, casting our crowns before the enthroned Lamb of God with the numberless saints who have gone before. We'll cry, Revelations 5:9, *"Worthy, worthy, worthy, art Thou, for Thou was slain, and is purchased for God with Thy blood, men from every tongue and every kingship and every tribe and every nation."* And the whole lump will be leavened.

We'll know it someday. We need to know it in foretaste now, and have that present foretaste of that future glory now. Don't get discouraged. The leaven will have its perfect work. You will be changed, and transformed, and you will be free from everything that hinders you

now, and then you'll confess, *"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven."* Oh, indeed it is! The grace of God comes from without, and He brings it within, and He starts a work, and it changes us radically, gradually, step by step until one day we're like Him. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed in that it's the kingdom of Life. The kingdom of heaven is like heaven in that it radically transforms.

Matthew 13:34, *"All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and he did not speak to them without a parable, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled saying, 'I will open my mouth in parables, and I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the earth.'"* At first that sounds proud, *"I'll open my mouth, and tell you things that were hidden from the foundation of the earth."* That's not proud. What He's saying is, "This is not new truth. It was just hidden. It's old truth, and it just needs to be revealed." It doesn't thrill you because it's new. It should thrill you because it's true. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, and that's not bad news. That's good news. That's life and that's hope.

4

PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

PARABLE OF SCRIBE BECOMING A DISCIPLE

PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

Matthew 13:44, *"'The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field which a man found and hid, and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."*

Christ is the Treasure

As you can see, the only information we have to work with is in verse 44. It's only one verse. It's a short parable. Let me get before your heart what I consider to be the Holy Spirit's burden, the main point and the chief teaching of this wonderful parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, a precious treasure. His point of this parable is the

exceeding value of the kingdom of heaven. It's like a treasure and most especially, the heart of the kingdom of heaven, Christ Himself. Christ Himself is the heart and soul of the kingdom of heaven. When you talk about grace, you are talking about Christ. When you talk about the laws of the Spirit, you are talking about Christ. The kingdom of heaven is the realm in which the king rules. So, the treasure here, I believe is the kingdom of heaven, but especially as it relates to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is presented as a valuable treasure; a great wealth, a fortune. Such a great treasure, that the one who found it could only do one thing, and that is to sell everything that he had so that he'd have enough money to buy that treasure, to buy that field.

So valuable is the gospel, so valuable is the grace of God, so valuable is the truth of the Spirit, the kingdom of heaven, so valuable is the treasure Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is only one reasonable wisdom. That is, to part with all earthly so called "treasures", and obtain the only real treasure, the Lord Jesus Himself. Of course, that main point is consistent with the balance of truth throughout the Bible. Christ throughout the Bible is presented as a treasure, and He's constantly contrasted with those treasures of earth, where moth and rust corrupt, where thieves break in and steal. This is the One that He spoke of when He said to have a single eye, and to have your treasure laid up in heaven. This is what He means when He says to be rich toward God.

One time I saw an acrostic on the word "faith". An acrostic is when it takes the first letter of a word, and then makes a saying about it. The acrostic was this, "Forsaking all I take Him." That's the message of this parable. He's the One that's the great treasure, and in order to get that great treasure, forsaking all, I take Him. Jesus is to be highly esteemed over the price of the whole earth.

Even though it's a short parable, there are five details that the scholars have fought about through the years. Let me get a little bit of it before you, and try to touch on what is common denominator. We don't want to argue over these things, or try to select a school of thought, but just find out what the Lord had on His heart. The first question, of course, is what the field is. The field had treasure hidden in it. Some say, "Well, that's easy to understand the field—Matthew 13:38, the field is the world. You see the Lord Jesus Christ came down as a treasure from

heaven, and He was hidden because of His condescension. He was hidden in the field; in the world."

Others say, "The field is not the world. The field is the Bible because the word of God is where Christ is hidden. That's the field." Others say, "No, it isn't. The field is Satan's dominion and that's why that fellow could rip him off, and hide this thing in his field, because he's a usurper, and Christ came into the devil's world. He's the prince of the power of the air, and he's the god of this world. In the wilderness didn't he tempt the Lord Jesus saying, *'All that Your eyes see I'll give you,'* because this is his world? So, the field is Satan's world, and this man found Christ in Satan's world." Someone else says, "It is not. It's the human heart. That's the field. When he hid the treasure where it would not be lost, he hid the treasure in his own heart because it could not be lost as long as it's hidden in the heart." Others say, "No, no. The field is Israel." Others say, "No it isn't. It's the church." Others say, "No; it's the remnant." They go bananas over all these details and that's just the first detail.

Keep your eye on the treasure (Jesus) and not the field (the human instrument)

What is the field? Let me give two answers to the question. The first is that I don't know. I'm not sure it means anything. The second answer is the common denominator truth. I know this; the field is the place where the treasure is. I know that from the parable. That's safe. The field is the place where the treasure is, and the field was only important and valuable because it contains the treasure. It may be better off to leave it blank, and say, "Whatever contains Jesus, that's the field." At least there is a great life principle that flows from that, even if God didn't intend that. Always in your life, always, always, keep your eye on the treasure and not on the field. I suggest that you do that. Always look to Christ alone. But there is also a sense in which the field has value. We're to appreciate not only the treasure but the field that contains it. For example, if God were to provide physically for you, and he were to use some human instrument to provide your physical needs, when you receive that provision, praise God. Worship the Lord and adore Him. He's the source and reservoir of all gifts. It

comes from God. But then also appreciate the field. Appreciate the instrument that contains the treasure; the field that He used.

Whatever contains Jesus; it could be the Bible or it could be other Christians, very often they are the vessels that contain the great treasure. It could be nature. Sometimes in your life when you're meditating on the Lord, and you are out in nature, that contains the Lord Jesus. It's a precious thing when it contains Jesus. It might be a book or a piece of literature or a radio program or a television program. It could be a suffering that He brings into your life, a disorder of some kind, a sickness or a loss, or some experience. If it contains Jesus, it's precious. It's not as precious as the Jesus it contains. The treasure is always greater than the field, but also appreciate the field. Nothing in life is worth passing by that contains the Lord Jesus. Everything else you can let go of, but those things that contain the Lord, lay hold of those. That's the first fact, and I suppose the first answer is the right one. I don't know what that field is supposed to represent.

The second fact, what does the hiding mean? Again, men have tried to interpret it, and some with their eye on the Lord in a Godly way. They say that the treasure is hidden, Christ is hidden because of man's blindness and man's ignorance, and until God reveals Him, He's hidden, and we can't see Him. He's hidden by our ignorance. Others say, "Well, that can't be so in this parable because it's not God that hides it, but it's the man who finds the treasure that hides the treasure in the field. So, what does the hiding mean?" One says, "Hiding might not necessarily imply secrecy. That's what we usually think of when we're going to hide it, so that you can't find it, and I don't want anyone else to know where it is. So, I'm going to hide it from others." Maybe but then someone else says, "It may just be that this man has found such a treasure, he doesn't want to lose it, so he's putting it where it won't be lost; hiding it in the sense, not of secrecy but of safety and putting it in a safe place. 'It's such a great treasure I can't put it just anywhere.'" Others think there is rather shady under the table dealings going on in this parable. A man finds a treasure and then he hides it in the field, and then he goes to the owner and says, "I'd like to buy your field," and the man who owns it doesn't know there's a treasure in it, so he sells it for the price of the field, and this guy gets a good bargain because he knows there is rich ground there because he himself has buried a treasure in

it." And there are all kinds of explanations as to what that is to mean. What are the details?

Again, I think the hiding is one of the details that if you try to interpret it, you are going to end up in all kinds of trouble. I think it's just holding the story together. Let me illustrate what I mean. This might sound simplistic, but I think it's at least this much. Notice verse 44, the kingdom of heaven is likened to something. It's likened not like a treasure on a table or a treasure in a box. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hid in the field. That's what He's saying the kingdom of heaven is like; it's like a treasure hid in a field. If we stopped there we'd have no problem. How did the treasure get there? Is this too simplistic? Somebody hid it there. That's one of the details. If He's going to say, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hid in a field," he would say, "Someone hid it there." I think it's a fact in order that He might have a likeness to the kingdom of heaven. I don't know if it has a spiritual significance. Why this detail? I think it's just to tell us how it got in the field, so that He could have a story, and He could have something to compare the kingdom of heaven to.

I know there are plenty of places in the Bible talking about hiding. We could go into spiritual principles about the hidden Christ. All I'm trying to say is that I'm not sure that God intended anything by that. If you want to study the hidden Christ, study Colossians, *"Your life is hid with Christ in God."* There's a lot in there about the hidden Christ, but I don't think in this parable that God means anything by it except that it's one of the details that holds the story together. I know this treasure was in the field, and that it was worth everything that this man had. One of the big points of this parable is finding the treasure. You can't find it unless it's hidden. It's just one of those details that is needed if you are going to find the treasure. I think He was just creating a likeness to the kingdom of heaven, and threw that detail in.

The third fact has to do with the word "found" in verse 44, *"A man found this treasure."* Some have contrasted this parable with the next one, the seeking merchant. And they have observed in verse 44 there is no seeking. He just found it. He wasn't looking for it. He wasn't searching for it. The treasure in verse 44 apparently was unsought. I don't know how. He doesn't tell us. This man evidently stumbled upon it, unaware. While in the next two verses the merchant is out

deliberately searching for jewels, for pearls. From that point, some have said the Lord is the treasure and, therefore, He's just found. No man seeketh after Him. He's just found.

Some time ago, you probably remember there were buttons and bumper stickers with the words "I found it." I think it was Campus Crusade. When man says, "I found it," God says, "I revealed it." That's the only way man is going to find anything. He doesn't find it by searching for it. He finds it because God is gracious, and God reveals it. We won't go into it now, but here's a good definition of seeking the Lord. It's from Luke 19. What is seeking the Lord? The answer is responding to Him seeking You. You read the Zacchaeus story in that light, you'll understand what it means to seek the Lord. It's nothing else than responding to His seeking you. I don't know how much God intended in this parable by "he found it". It doesn't seem to contradict the grace principles, yet I still think that's just scenery. I think it detracts from the main point.

There's no struggle in surrender when we value an intimate relationship with Jesus

There is one detail, though, that I think is important in terms of the main point, and it has to do with the expression, *"From joy over it, he goes and sells all that he has."* In your mind or in your Bible, underscore *"from joy over it"*. I think that detail is in keeping with the main point, and it's perhaps the most important detail of this parable. The parable has to do with the preciousness of Christ, the great treasure. So valuable is this treasure, that the one who finds Him, recognizes the worthlessness of this world; no value whatsoever. He surrenders everything, and nothing is kept back; everything is surrendered and counted as loss for the excellence of knowing Christ.

I thinks it's important to underscore the words *"from joy over it"* because it sheds light on the truth of surrender. This is a great parable on surrendering everything to have Christ. When a man or woman's eyes have been opened to the value of Jesus Christ, and you come by revelation to see how precious He is, there is no struggle in surrender. There is joy in surrender when you have the value of Christ. When a man struggles with surrender, and has trouble surrendering his family

or his children or his job or his income or his vacation or his talents or his education, it's a dead giveaway he has a low vision of Jesus Christ, and has a low value of the Lord. There is no pain in letting go of vanity. It's easy to let go of nothing. There's no pain in dropping garbage. Fact is, there's a joy in dropping garbage. The problem comes when we don't see it as vanity, and we don't see it as garbage. When this world appears to have an intrinsic value, and appears like it's worth something, and we lose the fact that it's passing away, it takes a mighty miracle of God to show us the real value of this world. And He never shows us the real value of this world, except first He shows us the real value of Christ; it's in proportion to that revelation of Christ, that you see how vain this world really is.

It's easy to say, "Gold is vanity, silver is vanity, houses are nothing, lands are nothing, I don't want prestige, I don't want fame, and I don't want popularity, I don't need a whole bunch of friends, and position is nothing to me." It's easy to say that. Is it true? When does it become true? It becomes true as God increases our vision of how precious our treasure is. The more clearly we see how precious He is, the more we'll see how worthless everything on the earth is. This can't be reversed. It cannot. If you have a struggle with surrender it's because you have a low value of the Lord Jesus Christ. Until by God's quickening you see Him as your exceeding treasure, you'll never let go. Never.

You give a little baby a $100 bill wrapped in a box with pretty paper on it and a nice ribbon, tell me what he'll play with. See, he has no value for that $100 bill. He'll play with that paper and ribbon and box because that's valuable; it has color and crinkles when you move it around. You can wrap it around your fingers and arm, and drop it on the floor, and pick it up very easily. If you go and try to take that wrapping paper from the baby, you'll make the baby cry. Do you know why? It's because that has value to that little baby, and the baby hasn't seen the value of the $100 bill.

Now watch. You take that little example, and then because we're sophisticated adults, let's bring it up to our own level. It's the same thing. With all of our savings accounts and securities and all our desires for things and material possessions, nice vacations and automobiles and education and influence, when God finally opens our eyes we'll see that it's wrapping paper—an old paper bag, an old box and just a

ribbon. It's nothing. When God begins to open our eyes to the real treasure, we'll have no trouble letting go of the wrapping paper. We'll have no trouble of letting go of the worthless things, the vanity of this life. When God opens our eyes to the value of Christ, He automatically opens our eyes to the vanity of the world. The tragedy is Christians are appealed to constantly surrender to a Christ that they don't value, and you can't surrender to a Christ you can't value. You can't surrender to a stranger. You can only surrender to a friend**.** The issue is no longer surrender, but it's cultivating a relationship with God, so that you might have a valued friend, and then surrender will become as easy as pie.

I suggest when this man found the treasure, and he understood the value of it, we read*, "With joy he sold all that he had."* It was a sheer delight to let go to get that treasure. It was a jubilee. Surrender is designed by God to be a celebration and not a bondage. Some people say, "Oh, it's so hard to surrender." It's because they don't see Jesus. They don't see the treasure. It's not hard to surrender when your eyes and the landscape of your heart is filled up with Christ. Then it becomes easy.

In this connection let me just quote Philippians 3:8, *"I count all things but loss, in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."* I suggest that's exactly what He's teaching in this parable.

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13:45&46, *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."*

Our worth is based on what Christ paid for us

These parables are not at all teaching the same thing. They are different; wonderfully different. Notice verse 44 & 45, *"The kingdom of heaven is like…"* You see, in 45 it's like a treasure, but in 46 he's like a merchant. Some people read 45 & 46 as if the kingdom of heaven were like a pearl. It doesn't say that. It doesn't say the kingdom of

heaven is like a pearl of great price. It's not! It's like a merchant, a merchant whose hands are full of pearls—a rich merchant who became poor by selling all that he had to buy a pearl of great price. Do you know anyone like that? A person who is very rich who became poor in order to purchase a pearl of great price, who spent everything He had? You see, this is a parable of our dear Lord Jesus. In this parable He's not the pearl of great price. You are. The people of God are—the church is. Christ is the rich merchant who became poor to buy us.

Notice how those two parables go hand in hand. The first; He's the treasure, and I give everything to have Him. In the second you're the treasure, and He gives everything to have you. The chief point of this second parable is just this; the Lord Jesus is the seeking merchant, and He holds back nothing in order to possess you. In this connection I love 2 Corinthians 8:9, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich."* Isn't that a verse? This is one of those truths that we are tempted to read, "La, la, la. I mean a lot to Him. I know that. I'm valuable and I'm worth something." If God would open our eyes to the truth of it!

I'm sure all of us at one time or another have felt worthless. We have the attitude that nobody really cares if I live or if I die. My life is not worth two cents. Brothers and sisters in Christ, lay hold of this in simple faith. You are of more value, according to this parable, than all of the gold and all the silver, all the oil, all the uranium, and all the precious metals on the earth. There is only one way to compute what you are worth. It's the same way you compute what anything is worth. How much would someone pay for it? How can you value the blood of Christ, and feel worthless at the same time? It's not possible. The blood is the measure of your worth. If you have a high view of the blood, you'll know how much you are worth. For you He laid His glory by, and spilled out His blood. He considers you His treasure, the pearl of great price.

I know earth is not always congenial to this truth; it doesn't matter how despised you are, or are mistreated on the earth by men, you are still His diamond in the rough. You are still His crown of glory. You are still His treasure. You are still His elect. You are still His bride. You are still His pearl of great price. Fear not, little flock, it's the Father's

good pleasure to give you the kingdom. You are so valuable in His sight. The more I see by grace, by revelation, how much He surrendered to own me, the easier it will be for me to surrender to own Him. I believe that's why as He's coming to the end of these parables, He's bringing these glorious kingdom truths to a great climax.

THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

Matthew 13:47-49, *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the see, gathering fish of every kind. And when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach, and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age. Angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

The Lord is the evangelist, and He's patient for the scribe to become the disciple

This is the last kingdom of heaven parable, and in a sense it's a clincher, wrapping up the truth about God's kingdom. We learned from the first parable that He won't force His grace, but waits for receptive soil. We learned from the second that He is the One that plants in our lives. We learned from the third that the seed will grow because it's life. We learned from the fourth that as the grace of God spreads in our life, we'll be transformed and changed. We learned from the fifth parable that as He increases in value as our treasure, we surrender. We just touched on the truth that we're very precious to Him. It's a kingdom of heaven truth that He paid the price of His blood, that He might possess us.

How would you clinch that? Do you see what I'm saying? How would you end up? How is this parable of the dragnet a clincher? How does it wrap it all up? Let me tell you what this parable is not teaching, in order that you might know what it is teaching. It's not teaching evangelism. That's what I'd always heard, "This is a parable on evangelism; throw out the gospel net, and bring in the sinners." It's not talking about that. This parable, as you can see, the net is not dragged

in until the end of the age. You have the idea with a dragnet you are always fishing, throwing out the net, and dragging it in, and throwing the bad fish back, and throwing it out, and dragging it in. It's not that at all. There's no separation now. This is not some method of evangelism where we throw out the life line and throw out the net. He's not talking about that.

I believe the key to understanding this parable is understanding these two things. #1 The net was cast into the water one time, and now it's just sitting there. It's not moving, and even though it's called a dragnet, it's not being dragged. It's just sitting there, and the fish are swimming all around it, going in and coming out. It just sits there. #2 Verse 48, *"And when it was filled,"* it was filled with what? All kinds of fish; good fish, bad fish? No. It's a kingdom of heaven parable. It's optimistic and positive. He's not talking about bad fish at all, or else He could have pulled it in at any time. What is He waiting for? He throws out the net and He waits until it's filled. With what? The good fish; seekers, Christians. This is how He ends; with the patience of the Lord. The kingdom of heaven is like the Lord throwing a net out, and just waiting until all the fish from the ends of the earth are gathered in. As long as there is one elect fish swimming on the outside, He'll never pull it in. But when it's filled, then He pulls it in, and then there's a separation, to be sure. But that isn't the point. The point is He's waiting for the good fish to fill the net.

In one sense this is a missionary parable; not telling us how to be missionaries but showing how He does His missionary work. Verse 47, *"Fish of every kind are swimming into the net, every nation, kindred, tongue and tribe."* And even though this parable is optimistic and positive, this final one adds a great warning. It shows the patience of the Lord waiting for the net to be filled, but a lot has to do in this parable about the day of reckoning, the day of discrimination, the day when He separates the true from the false, and it will be a complete and final separation. The point is not a judgment coming. That's not the point. That's a detail. The point is a net waiting. He's patient. But I'll tell you, it's a solemn warning. Judgment is coming, and the wicked will be separated from the righteous. There will be a furnace of fire, and there will be weeping. There will be gnashing of teeth, and the bad fish will be thrown out. They will be rejected.

This is a wonderful blending, I think, of God's part and man's part. All these parables are. The net is cast into the water, and now the fish must swim into it. It's a wonderful illustration of both parts. If I were God, I would have drawn that net a long time ago. I think if you were God you would have seen the wicked fish, and drawn that net a long time ago. But we learn from another book that the long suffering of God is salvation. He is patient, not willing that any should perish. I think as we wait even in this day, some bad fish are turning into good fish, and swimming into the net. He's waiting. He knows when that last fish will go in.

THE PARABLE OF THE SCRIBE BECOMING A DISCIPLE

Matthew 13:52, *"Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household who brings forth out of his treasure the things new and old."*

We don't only need to study, we also need to enter into those truths

Now, here's a parable, but notice it's not a kingdom of heaven parable. He's not saying "that the kingdom of heaven is like". He's saying, *"The scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like.."* That's not just words. That's a different direction. There are scribes of the kingdom of heaven, and there are scribes who have become disciples of the kingdom of heaven. What is a scribe? What was it in the New Testament? It was a scholar. It was a student. It was one who studied, one who wrote, one who has all the answers. The scribes of the kingdom of heaven, "That's me. I know." And then there are scribes, students, who have become disciples of the kingdom of heaven. Notice in verse 52, *"The one who has become a disciple is like the head of a household who brings forth out of his treasure..."* He's only bringing out of his treasure. He has everything. It's all there. Everything is there, but he brings it out little by little. He gets a little bit at a time; things new and things old. Did you ever come to this book, and see something brand new, "I never saw that before"? Sometimes He takes the old truth, and quickens your heart to them again, and it's like meeting an old friend. It's the same old truth but now it's alive.

Here's what He does. First He gives the kingdom of heaven truths, and then He says, "Now are you scribes, or are you disciples of those truths? Do you just know how to say them, or are you entering in to those truths? Are you taking out of the treasury things new and things old? Are you just studying the facts, or are you entering in; old, because we've heard it before; new because the dew of heaven is upon it, because the Spirit of God has made it alive, and because there is fire in our breast, and because we're quickened again to those same old truths, and they are made alive?"

This is how He closes the parable section. God isn't saying, "Don't be a scribe." He's saying to be a scribe that's become a disciple. Study and study hard, but then enter in. And out of the great wealth that God has given us of the kingdom of heaven, this great treasure, let the Spirit of God give you things new and things old, and don't always want to come saying, "I want something new." You don't always need something new. Maybe you need something old that God will make alive again to your soul. You need things new, and you need things old, and you need old things made new. You don't always need novel things. You need to be made alive to God.

My heart goes out to so many Christians because they are scribes of the kingdom of heaven but they aren't scribes who have become disciples of the kingdom of heaven. These are kingdom of heaven truths that He gave, and now He says, "I want you to go into that treasury, and I want to give you things new and old, little by little, until you have the whole treasure."

5

JESUS' RESPONSE IN THE SYNOGOGUE

THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

JESUS' RESPONSE IN THE SYNOGOGUE

Matthew 13:53-58. *"And it came about that when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there, and coming into His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers James and Joseph, Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in His own town and His own household." And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief."*

Just be ordinary, and God will put the extra in the ordinary

What is the issue of these six verses, what is the point, and what is the message? Why does the Spirit of God record this section? How does it fit into the section we've just looked at; the kingdom of heaven parables? I believe the message of this section can be summarized in

these words; "The credentials of the Lord Jesus." In chapter 13 we've been looking at what He said. Now we're going to look at the authority by which He said it. Who taught Him these things? Where was He trained? Why is it that when He spoke there was such power? Why did His words have such penetration to transform lives?

I think this is a wonderful climax to the section on parables because in a wonderful way it takes your eyes off the parable, and it puts your eyes on the One Who spoke the parable. God often does this. He turns your eyes again to the Lord Jesus. Look at verse Matthew 13: 54, *"This man,"* verse 55, *"The carpenter's son,"* verse 56, *"This man."* Your eyes are turned to *"this man"* in these verses rather than what He said. We've been studying what this man said, but now we're going to look at this man.

He was a completely ordinary man, yet there was something quickening; the Lord Jesus when He was teaching had credentials from God. Do you think He just got tired one day of being a carpenter? I read that some of the Jews believed that he made rakes. That's what He did as a carpenter. I don't know where in the world they got that. But did he say, "It's tiring and boring making rakes and yokes. I don't think I'll do this anymore. I'm tired of working with wood. I think I'll become a preacher. I think I'll become a teacher."?

There are words that we use today, and expressions that have become very common; "the anointing of God." "Boy, that man has an anointing. His message and teachings are anointed." Another one I've heard is "unction". "He speaks with unction. He has unction from God." Others are "the power of the Holy Spirit", "speaks with authority". In Illinois they say, "You have the influence when you speak." It's all talking about the same thing. Another expression is "being quickened"; "Boy, his words were quickened and were alive." Here is the simple explanation; when Jesus spoke, God spoke. That's unction. When Jesus spoke, God spoke. That's anointing, that's quickening, that's the influence, and that's the power of God. That's why there was such results, because God was releasing His own burden, and was communicating through the Lord Jesus.

I think it will make more sense if we look into some of the responses that you see in these verses. The home town that is talked about in

verse 54 is not Bethlehem. His home town was Nazareth. He grew up in Nazareth, and that's why they called Him "the man from Nazareth". That's not the same as a Nazarite or Nazarene. Let me give it to you through some observation. First of all, the home town people, the fellow Nazarites, looked only on the outside of the Lord Jesus. They couldn't understand beyond what they could see, and what they could experience through the senses. Look at verses 55 & 56 again, *"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't His mother's name Mary? Aren't His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? Don't we know Him? Aren't His sisters here?"* That was the only explanation they had; human, "I can see this."

There's a human proverb, "Familiarity breeds contempt." You see something every day, and hear the same thing over and over again, and if you are brought up with it, often you will under value that thing; it becomes old hat, and you'll regard it very lightly and neglect it. They were brought up with the Lord Jesus. They saw Him as a little boy, as a neighbor, as the one running through the neighborhood. They saw Him in His teens, and they saw Him as a young adult, and they knew His family, and they knew His trade, and now all of a sudden the home town boy walks up in the synagogue, and picks up a Bible, and begins to teach. They say, "Wait one minute. Isn't this Jesus? Isn't this the one who grew up in our neighborhood? What is He doing teaching in the synagogue? He's just an ordinary man, and we don't understand the extraordinary things this ordinary man is doing. We don't understand the signs and wonders and the power He has in teaching."

Because He was an ordinary man, and He was doing extraordinary things, and they didn't have an explanation for the extras in His ordinary life, and there was no human explanation for the wisdom and power that He had, and because they only saw the outside, the Bible says they took offense at Him. All they saw was the outside. Matthew 13:54, *"Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?"* They had no answer to that question. Notice the question, "Where?" It doesn't say "how", and it doesn't say "why", and it doesn't say "when". It says "Where?" What do they mean by "where"? Just this; from which school did He graduate? Where did He get that? Does He have a degree, a piece of paper? Certainly He must have gone to one of the accepted schools of the Rabbi. "What right does He have to stand in our synagogue and teach? He, an ordinary man without

proper training. The very idea; an ordinary man without proper training. Where did He get that wisdom and power?"

One would have thought, except unbelief blinds, that because He was an ordinary man, and because they knew His humble family background, and because they knew He didn't go to their regular colleges, that they would have concluded, "Wow, He must be sent from God." Well, they didn't conclude that. God takes us right to the heart of their response. The last word in this chapter is "unbelief". Verse 54 says, *"When they heard Him they became astonished at His wisdom, and they were astonished at His power."* How could they be astonished and still have unbelief?

Let me say this by way of application, when you teach the truth of God, and people get astonished, and they begin to admire and wonder, don't think you've got a favorable response, because you may not. Astonishment, wonderment, amazement and admiration flow out of ignorance. It's not a sign of life or a sign of the Spirit of God, and it's not the sign of a receptive heart. They were astonished, but they didn't repent—they didn't turn to Jesus. They admire but they are still unbelieving.

Let's answer the question the right way. Matthew 13:54, *"Where did this man get that wisdom?"* You know the answer. God Himself spoke through the Lord Jesus. Here's how it works, and it's illustrated by Christ, but it's the same principle. The fact is, it doesn't change. God finds an ordinary person with an ordinary background, and then he puts a little extra in the ordinary, making the ordinary extraordinary. God Himself qualifies the ordinary person, giving him wisdom and power that he could never get from any seminary or Bible school, or any school or institution of learning.

What is an extraordinary person? An extraordinary person, according to this chapter, is a person whose life cannot be explained by any other word than "God". The question is, "Are you an extraordinary person?" Do people look at you and say, "The only way I can explain that life is God,"? If that's not so, then we're not entering into the life of God. God has planned that we become extraordinary by living ordinary lives in union and relationship to Him. When you get that, you've got

unction, and you've got quickening, and you've got anointing, and you've got power from the Lord.

I've got to say this because I know I'll probably be misunderstood, especially some of those who are Bible school students, "Well, now we don't need to get an education, and we don't have to get trained." I'm not saying that. I'm not saying it's wrong to go to Bible school, or it's wrong to go to seminary or some university. The goal is not "no credentials". That's not the goal. This passage is not for or against human training. This passage is for credentials from God. You can have credentials from men, too, but you better make sure you have credentials from God. It doesn't amount to a rat's nest, really, if you have all the credentials in the world from men, and you don't have credentials from God. What good is it if you have no power from God, no anointing from God, and you don't have His blessing upon your life and your ministry?

Thousands of Christians speak. There are teachers, elders, pastors, evangelists and priests, but their message stands in the power of schools and books, and then they quote, and they aren't in the power of God. Human credentials, human endorsements and human certificates of recognition don't mean a thing when it comes to God's program of redemption on the earth. In this connection listen to Jeremiah 23:30&31, *"'I'm against the prophets,' declares the Lord, 'who steal my words from each other. Behold, I'm against the prophets who use their tongue,' declares the Lord, and say, 'The Lord declares.'"* The people of Nazareth in Jesus' hometown did not recognize the credentials of Jesus because he was an ordinary person that they knew, and because He didn't go to the recognized school of the Rabbis, and because He came with only one credential, "Thus says the Lord." They couldn't see beyond their nose. They only saw the outside. Because they couldn't see something you could put in a frame, and hang on a wall, they rejected Him, and were offended at Him.

I think one of the greatest evidences of the lack of spiritual insight in the church, and on the same token one of the greatest slaps in the face to our Lord Jesus Christ, is how many churches choose pastors today. In many places, if a person piles up enough degrees, and has enough schooling from men, and enough people to endorse him, then they'll be accepted in the pulpit, or as a teacher in a Bible school or seminary.

Very few questions, and I've been invited to sit on a lot of pulpit committees, have to do with credentials from God. It's sickening, really, and it must wound the heart of the Lord. Nobody asks if they are anointed of God. They say, "Where did he go to school? How long did he study? What were his grades? Let's see his transcript," and things like that.

If a man comes weak and humble and meek, but he's standing in the power of God speaking with the life of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in most places he'd be turned down, and would not be qualified. I suggest that's an insult to the Lord of glory. I'm not knocking Bible schools and seminaries, but I am trying to tone up the credentials of God. They should look at your life and mine, and be scratching their heads and saying, "Where did he get that wisdom? He's just an ordinary man. He's an ordinary man but he got it from God." What good is any teacher if he doesn't have the power of God?

According to the last verse, their response is unbelief and rejection. They looked only on the outside, and they saw what physical eyes saw, and because they can't see beyond the ordinary, they are offended. But I think there is also instruction in not only seeing how they responded to him, just seeing the shell and the outside, but how He responded back. I trust the Lord will give us heart-eyes to see this. Jesus spoke with the credentials of God. How did He respond to those who were offended in Him, and disbelieved Him, in order to know how we're to respond to those who respond that way to us?

Don't try to defend the power of God in your life

Let me give you two responses of the Lord Jesus. First of all, when they questioned His authority and credentials (this is a paradox, don't miss it) He responded by not responding. Do you follow that? That was His response. His response was no response. Matthew 13:57 is not really a response, *"A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown, and his own household."* That's an explanation of why they did it, but that's not His response. In verse 54 they said, *"Where did He get this wisdom and where did He get this power*?" There's an easy answer to that, but He never gave it.

If someone came up and said, "Where did you get that power?" You would say, "God." See how easy that is? Jesus didn't say that. He didn't respond. Their question was simple enough, "Where did you get that wisdom? Where did you get that power?" He could have said, "My authority is from above. My power is from within. It's the Spirit of the living God. It's not human training, and it's not group dynamics, and it's not understanding some principles of psychology and human behavior, and it's not human wisdom. Where did I get My authority? That's easy; from God; from heaven; from the Holy Spirit; from the living God." That's probably what I would have said. I would give my reasons why my message was from God. But not Jesus. The Lord Jesus responded by not responding. Why didn't He respond? It's because it wouldn't have helped. They had unbelief. When there is unbelief, Jesus said, "Even if someone arose from the dead, even if there were great signs and miracles, these unbelievers would say, 'If there is a God, make the lights blink or make something happen in the sky, then I'll believe.'" No, they won't. The wicked generation seeks after a sign.

If you speak in the power of God, under the anointing of the Spirit of God, and men don't recognize that you're from God, telling them isn't going to make an iota of difference. If they don't recognize the power of God in your life, do what Jesus did. Walk away. He ignored it, and He didn't try to defend it or try to prove He was from God. He didn't say anything, and they were offended. He didn't give a sermon on apologetics, He didn't defend His calling, and He didn't stand there and say, "If you believe it or not, it's from God." He didn't do anything. I suggest there's enough sound timber in what the Lord Jesus did to fill the city, and we ought to get that principle of God. If we speak in the power and Spirit of God, we don't have to say, "I'm speaking in the Spirit and power of God." You just be filled with the credentials and Spirit of God, and they'll know it. If they don't know it, it won't help to tell them. So, don't waste your breath, their breath and God's time. Don't argue. Just smile and walk away in the power of God. That's what the Lord Jesus did, and I believe it's very instructive.

That's the first response, no response—just live and just speak, and don't try to convince a flea that you have the power of God**.** If the power of God can't convince them, what good is it going to be for you to tell them? D. L Moody used to say, "'*The word of God is sharp and*

powerful like a sword.' I don't have to prove it's sharp any more than I'd have to prove there's a lion in the cage. Just let him out, and that will be proof enough." Exactly right! If you have the power of God in your life, just let Him out. You don't have to give five reasons why you've got the power of God. Let Him out. Once He comes out they'll have all the proof with all the evidence that you need.

If there is unbelief, just minister to the few who are open

The second response of the Lord is in Matthew 13:58, *"He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief."* And Mark adds this, chapter 6:5, *"He could do no miracles there except, He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them."* The first response was no response. The second response, it says that He didn't do many miracles. It doesn't say He didn't do any miracles. Mark says that He laid His hands on a few sick folks, and then He left. The principle is this; the Lord Jesus ministered to the few that were open. There were a few sick and needy people, and those He ministered unto.

If we're going to follow the rejected Savior-King, then we're going to find for ourselves, as indeed it was for Him, that the world, especially those most familiar with us, will not, as a whole, recognize the credentials of God. They just won't see that. And where His credentials aren't recognized, His power is withheld. He didn't do many mighty works there but there will always be a few who are open; a few sick folk. And God will use you to minister to the few. The power of God, the anointing of God, has never needed numbers and masses to be satisfied. . God has always and only gone after the hungry, the thirsty, the few, the individuals, the sick folk who want His help. Go after them. Don't try to have a big following.

THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 14:1-12,*"At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard the news about Jesus and said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist. He has risen from the dead, and that's why miraculous powers are at work in Him.' For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother, Phillip, for*

John had been saying to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.' And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitudes because they regarded him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Thereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked."

The path of the King is the path of the King's servant

Chapter 14 is in three parts, really, even though they are wonderfully connected to chapter 15. Matthew 14:1-12 is the beheading of John the Baptist, verses 13-21, the feeding of the five thousand, and then verses 22-36 is Jesus walking on the stormy sea. The feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on the stormy sea are recognized as great miracles. But what about chapter 14:1-12, the beheading of John the Baptist? It looks like the miracle chapter begins with no miracle. Exactly right, and it's very instructive. Jesus let John die. Jesus did not lift a finger to help his cousin, the forerunner. He could have stopped it and prevented it, and He could have worked some miracle to set him free, but He didn't. He let him die in jail at the hands of some very infamous people.

Mark 6:23-29 says, *"And he swore to her, 'Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom.' And having been prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.' And although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a platter, and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. And the disciples came and took away the body, and buried it, and they went and reported it to Jesus."*

Matthew 10:24, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household?"* The message of Matthew is the message of a rejected Savior-King. As you go through Matthew, increasingly the rejection deepens. At every stage in Matthew He is being more and more rejected. We might get the idea if we follow the Lord Jesus, and we're identified with Him, that He'll

use His miracle powers to deliver us, and that He'll keep us safe. The answer is, "No, He'll not deliver those who follow Him." Those who follow the rejected Savior are themselves going to be rejected, because the way of the King is the way of the King's servants, and the way He walked is the way we walk.

In some churches they call Easter week "The Via Delarosa, the Way of the Cross". Every Christian is to walk the Via Delarosa, the way of the cross, and that's illustrated in John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, and here's what happens to the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the climax of redemption. They beheaded Him, and served His head on a platter. That's what every true follower of the Lord Jesus can expect, and Jesus will not lift a finger to help.

The misconception among some Christians is that they're exempt from what befalls other men. This is especially true with persecution, but there's a broader application to the principle. Let me put it in these words, to make it crystal clear; God has not exempted His children from any of the common troubles of life, He gives grace, but He has not promised deliverance. I know God can give deliverance, and I know that He often does, but He hasn't guaranteed it. You can sing, "Keep me safe by night and day," but God has not promised to keep you safe by night and day, especially as you line up increasingly with His Son. Of course, when you are safe, you can praise God. It's God that's kept you safe. When you wake up, and your house is not burned down, you can praise God that He allowed that, and He engineered that. Indeed, praise the Lord!

The Christian is not exempt, and it won't help for you to pray that bandits don't break into your house. You won't find that in the Bible. They'll break into your house as fast as they'll break into anybody else's house. The Lord is not a protection against rapists and murderers, against fires, against accidents and against disease. You won't find that in the Bible. Sometimes Christians pray for what they call "Journeying mercies". If someone is going on a trip they'll say, "Let's pray for journeying mercies, that the Lord will keep you safe on the road." I don't know where in the world they get the warrant for such prayers as that. They aren't in the Bible, and it's not from God's word. I'm not saying God won't keep you safe on the road, but I am

saying that He hasn't promised it. You can't pray any of those prayers with assurance because He hasn't promised to do that.

God has never promised that His children wouldn't be scorned or diseased or burned out or broken into. John the Baptist and Stephen the martyr might have liked it if they were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They had it easy. Listen to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's attitude. Daniel 3:17, *"Our God who we serve is able to deliver us from this flaming fire, but even if He does not…"* See, that's the right attitude. Our God is able, but even if He doesn't, we're going to serve Him. He's able but He hasn't guaranteed. John the Baptist is a foretaste of what would happen to the Savior, and then would happen with all who lined up with the Savior. When God does not deliver, your faith hasn't failed, and your God hasn't failed. It's just that for some wonderful mysterious reason in His love and providence, completely consistent with His wisdom and His grace, He has a plan and a purpose. How mysterious the providence that let such a holy man as John the Baptist into such infamous hands as these, and was committed to be sacrificed to the malice of an abandon harlot, and the dance of a vain girl, to the foolish vow of an intoxicated prince. God just turned him over to all those things. His ways are unsearchable. The miracle section opens with no miracle, and I believe God is deliberately illustrating through that, that the path of the king is the path of the king's servant.

Let me get a few principles before your heart and let me get a couple of the facts of the story. It's pretty complicated. When you see the name Herod, for example, in your Bible, don't think about the baby killer. Remember in the days of the infancy of the Lord Jesus that Herod had all those babies killed? When you see Herod in the Bible, it might be him, Herod the Great, but it might also be Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, Herod Phillip the First, Herod Phillip the Second, Herod Agrippa the First, or Herod Agrippa the Second. There are seven Herods mentioned in the New Testament. It's the same thing with "baptism"; don't think water. There are seven different baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. Make sure you get the context, and see what it's talking about.

Let me try to get a little of this background before you. This was Herod Antipas. Herod the Great, the monster, the great baby killer, had five

wives. We only need three of them to get this story. The first one was Mariamne. We'll call her Maryanne. And then his second wife was Malface, and his third wife was Cleopatra. Maryanne had a child, a son, named Aristobulus. He had a daughter, whose name was Herodias. Malface also had a son named Herod Antipas. That's the Herod in this chapter. Then Cleopatra had a son named Phillip. You can see that Herod and Phillip are half brothers. They have the same father but different mothers.

The unsaved are under the law of God

One day Herodias, who was the niece, fell in love with and married Phillip. They got along pretty well, and they had a child named Salmon, a girl. Herod Antipas had eyes for Herodias, but the problem was that Herod Antipas was already married to the daughter of the king of Arabia. He decided that he would divorce his wife, if Herodias would leave her husband and marry him. However, Phillip refused to divorce Herodias. Herod had already divorced his wife. It caused a war between Arabia and this particular province where Herod was tetrarch. So, now you have a war going on, and he decides to marry Herodias without a divorce from Phillip. That's when John the Baptist came in and said, "That's not right. You have no right to take your brother's wife." Because he took a rugged stand and said, "You have no right to take your brother's wife," he finally lost his head. Herod becomes a wonderful illustration of someone who has been under the influence of a powerful man of God, namely John the Baptist.

Let me give four little principles here, and then we'll wrap this up. Matthew 14:4, *"John had been saying to him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'"* The principle can be stated in these words, very simple; the unsaved are under the law of God. Some have said that it's wrong for Christians to put their law on the unsaved, as they don't have any relationship to that. What right does a Christian have to tell a non-Christian that he can't be open for a retail business on the Lord's Day? The answer is, "Every right." The law of God is for the whole world, and not just for Christians. It's for the whole world, and the unsaved have a responsibility to keep the Sabbath. They aren't saved, and they don't know Jesus. If they died they'd go to hell, but they have a responsibility to keep the Sabbath, and they have a responsibility not to

kill, and not to steal, and not to commit adultery. Herod wasn't saved, and John the Baptist went up to him with the law of God and said, *"It's not lawful for you to take your brother's wife,"* Leviticus 27. And he begins to quote the law of God to this unsaved man. The law is designed to bring conviction.

When the law speaks, it doesn't clear its throat. I can show dozens of verses to show the purpose of the law. Here is a couple of them; Galatians 3:10, *"Those under the law are under the curse; do and live, don't and die."* That's the whole message of the law; guilty. *"Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things written in the book of the Law to do them."* The law never lies. The law says, "Guilty." It doesn't play around. The law is never deceived. It's based on the character of God, and it's also inbred in your heart. You know when it says guilty, you're guilty. The law is good and righteous and holy and just and pure. It's reasonable, and it agrees with your heart; guilty.

Today Christians are afraid to preach the law. We've come into this "love of God". I love the love of God, too, but to get people saved, God's method is to convict them of their sin by the law, to show them they are guilty. The law is designed to slay you. John didn't go up to Herod and say, "Jesus loves you." He didn't go up to Herod and say, "God has a wonderful plan for your life." He didn't go up to Herod and say, "Jesus wants to solve all your problems." He went up to Herod and said, "You've sinned. You've broke the law. You're guilty." It's because the love of God makes no sense except in the dark backdrop of a guilty conscience. So, the law is designed for sinners.

The Christian's relationship to the law and conscience; don't listen to it

There's another law. This is the second principle. Romans 2:14&15, *"The gentiles who don't have the law do instinctively the things taught by the law. They, not having the law, are a law unto themselves in that they show the law of God written in their hearts, their consciences bearing witness, accusing or else excusing one another."* God says there is a law out here, a moral standard, a perfect law. There is also a law in here. The law out there has one purpose. It condemns; guilty. The law in here, conscience, has one voice: guilty. That's all that it

knows; do or die. It's the same thing; it's the law. This is the law written in their hearts. That's what the conscience is; a built in monitor, a built in preacher. So, when you do something wrong it says, "Guilty, guilty, guilty." You can't read Matthew 14:1-12 and not see that Herod had a guilty conscience. Verse 1 & 2, *"At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, and he said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist. He's risen from the dead."* It's really bothering him. That's interesting because he was a Sadducee. The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection. He said, "Man, I've changed my doctrine now!" His conscience was driving him crazy. And the Lord Jesus was doing these miracles and he said, "It's John the Baptist!" God uses the law and the law written in the heart to condemn.

I'm going to take a by-pass here just for a moment because I think it's important and necessary. Since we're on the law and conscience for the unsaved, if you are going to enjoy the Lord, then you need to understand the Christian's relationship to the law and conscience. Here's the problem. When a man fell into sin, that wasn't affected. The law out there was not injured. It still said, "Thou shalt not have any God before Me. Thou shalt not take the Lord thy God's name in vain. Thou shalt honor thy father and mother. It wasn't touched with the fall." However, when man fell into sin, the law that was in his heart was smashed to smithereens. His conscience was destroyed.

Before you are saved, before you know Jesus, law and conscience have a ministry in your life. They are designed to condemn you, designed to make sin ugly and alive. They are designed to slay you. They only know one language; guilty, guilty. If you do something wrong, the law says "guilty". If you do something wrong your heart says "guilty, guilty, guilty". Every time you turn around; guilty. Listen carefully, and God give you wisdom. If this is not from God, scrap it. Once you become a Christian, you no longer have a relationship to your conscience. Your conscience becomes an enemy. It is no longer a friend. It's not on your side. Its mission is over.

Let me get this before you. Did you ever hear the devil's big lie; "Let your conscience be your guide?" Listen to these verses; 1 Corinthians 8:12 talks about a *"weak conscience"*. "Let your conscience be your guide." 1 Corinthians 8:7 and Titus 1:15 talks about *"a defiled conscience"*. "Let your conscience be your guide." 1 Timothy 4:2

talks about *"a conscience that is seared with a hot iron"*. "Let your conscience be your God." Hebrews 10:22 talks about an *"evil conscience"*. "Let your conscience be your guide." Hebrews 9:14 talks about a *"dead conscience"*. Oh, isn't that a wonderful guide; weak, defiled, seared, and wicked, evil and dead?! That's your conscience!

What is conscience? Is it an entity? Is it a state of mind? Is it based on an absolute standard on the traditions of men? Is it based on culture? Is it relative? Is it absolute? I don't know what it is, but I know what it does; guilty. It only knows one word; guilty. It gives a million and one reasons why you should go to hell, and not go to heaven; "You sinned, you lied, you stole, you're angry, you're impatient, you're selfish." Talk back to your conscience and say, "Now listen here, conscience, you say 'guilty', but I've been forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. I've received God into my life. I've taken His Son and He died for me." Do you know what your conscience will say? "I know nothing of that. I don't know anything about grace. When God created me He programmed me with one word; guilty, guilty." "But I'm forgiven." "Guilty" "But I have peace." "Guilty." That's all the law knows; guilty. That's all the law written in your heart knows; guilty. It does not know forgiveness, it does not know grace, and it does not know the Spirit of God. It does not know the love of God. It just says, "You deserve to die. You deserve to be separated from a thrice holy God. You deserve to burn forever in hell. You are guilty."

That's what makes conscience such an enemy. On the one hand it refuses to believe the message of grace, and on the other hand, because it was ruined in the fall, you can deceive your conscience. It's easily satisfied. If your heart says, "You don't love your neighbor; guilty." Then, bring them a can of soup, and your conscience will say, "There, that's better." You might not have a change of heart at all. Your conscience will be deceived. Your conscience will settle for self-righteousness. That's what is so wrong with it. Thousands and thousands and thousands of God's children have not understood this, and they live in constant bondage, slavery and fear to their conscience.

I think one of the great miracles that God does in the Christian's life is that he sets them free from conscience. Once you are saved, conscience has no ministry in your life. Conscience militates against the message of God's grace. I know one Christian who is in glory now because she

was bullied all her life with conscience, and finally took her own life because she listened to that voice, "Guilty." God's word said, "Forgiven." God's word said, "Clean." She listened to the voice of her conscience, and finally took her own life.

Most Christians haven't seen that relationship to the law and to the conscience in the heart, and they hear these voices all the time, "Guilty, guilty, guilty," and the inside says, "I agree with that; guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty." They've got to find a way to shut those things up. "How can I shut the mouth of the law, and how can I shut the mouth of conscience?" So, they come up with cute little inventions that don't come from the Bible. "I know what I'll do. Every time conscience says, 'Guilty,' I'll 1 John 1 my sins away. I'll confess my conscience clean, and I'll just keep confessing, and every time he brings it to my mind I'll just confess." So, they spend all their day confessing their sin; over and over again—confessing, confessing, confessing, confessing. And since the law with all of its high standards keeps saying, "Guilty, guilty, guilty," they set up a whole system of rules and regulations to live by.

Here is what the Bible says, "The law and conscience have a ministry in a man like Herod to show him that he's guilty. But when you get saved, the law is replaced by grace, and conscience is replaced by the revelation of Christ in the Book; the Life of God in the Book. And you begin to walk by a new light. It's not the light of conscience anymore. May God give you deliverance from conscience! Don't listen to that! It's the Christian's enemy. You are going to grow in grace, and in knowledge, and you are going to grow in light, but you'll never grow in assurance. If you are in heaven a million years, you shouldn't be any more certain of your security than right now, because assurance doesn't grow. It rests upon a finished work; the work of the Lord Jesus. And don't let your conscience tell you anything else! That's what the Bible says. Believe God's word; the revelation of God's word.

Don't make rash vows

Look at Matthew 14:7-9. It's an amazing thing. The unsaved live by the principle of pride. They have no objective standard. Here's his reasoning, "I have to commit murder, so I won't tell a lie." That's his reasoning; "I made a promise." Let me say a word about rash vows.

Some teach that if you make a vow to the Lord, and you find out later it was wrong, you've still got to keep it because you made an oath, and you made a promise. If you find out it was sin, you've still got to keep it. Then they quote Ecclesiastes, of all books, chapter 5 to prove that. Sound wisdom says, "Don't make vows." Start there, and don't promise God anything. Don't make any vows to God. That whole idea of making vows is crazy. You can't keep them anyway. Here's the principle; walk in the light you have today. That's simple enough. And tomorrow if you find out today's light was darkness, then walk in your new light. It's not wrong to break a rash vow. Put it under the blood, and go on in the joy of the Lord. Don't worry about that. It's never right to do wrong to do right**.** You can't cheat the government to support your family. You can't lie to keep peace in the family. It's never right to sin to keep from sinning.

The heathen give unwilling testimony

Matthew 14:2, *"He said to His servants, 'This is John the Baptist and he's risen from the dead, and that's why his miraculous powers are at work in him.'"* I'm going to give an illustration from the scene of the cross, but it's also illustrated here in verse 2, and can be stated in these words, "The wicked give unwilling testimony." They don't want to. "They give an unwilling testimony and praise to the power of God." Here from a heathen's lips comes a testimony that Jesus worked miracles. He wasn't trying to testify that Jesus worked miracles but he did. God always makes the tongues of rebellion praise Him.

At the cross, there were those who were constantly trying to oppose, and they were mocking and jeering at the Lord Jesus. Watch how He turned it into praise. He obliges His enemy. At the cross they say, *"He saved others. Himself He cannot save."* They were mocking Him, but by that statement they confessed that He really did save others. They actually were praising Him. They said, *"He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him."* They testified He trusted in God. They weren't trying to praise God, but they were writing down forever great evidences, *"He saved others. He trusted in God."* Another said, *"He said, 'I am the Son of God.' If He is the Son of God, let Him come down."* Some people today say He never claimed to be the Son of God. Even His enemies said that He said it, that He was the Son of God. They aren't

trying to praise Him, but they end up praising Him. *"Thou that destroys the temple and raises it again, builds it again in three days, come down from the cross."* And they testified that He, in fact, said He would rise from the dead in three days. *"Let Christ, the king of Israel, descend."* King of Israel? Is that who He is? And all of these enemies speak with a united voice. They don't try to do it, any more than they tried to say that miraculous powers were worked by Jesus. Yet, in their fury to try to destroy the diamond, they just smash it in pieces, and each sliver begins to shine with a radiance proving how wonderful He is.

The wrath of men, He says, shall praise Him. So, Herod, convicted by the law, and convicted by his conscience, confesses to the miracle working power of the Lord Jesus. The death of John the Baptist, like the death of Stephen, had a great ministry; more than the ministry of their lives. In the wisdom of God, in the love of God, He allowed them to die so that there would be a pall, so that others would be saved. Through Stephen we got almost the whole New Testament. We aren't exempt if we're going to follow the Lord.

Section V

(Jesus says & does something
& the people respond
Chapters 14:13-16:20)

The Lord Teaches His Disciples

1

SIX STORIES

Overview

From Matthew 14:12 until we come to the next section in chapter 16:21, the stories are many, and yet the stories are one. In a unique way, they are all put together, and the responses are tied in very closely to what Jesus does. There's an awful lot of overlapping in this, and how they responded to Him is all part of this same story. You are going to recognize the stories when you hear them, the titles of them.

Usually these stories are studied by themselves alone, and not in their context.. For example, we study the feeding of the five thousand, or we study the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Peter walking upon the stormy sea, or we study the Syrophoenician woman and her great faith, or we study the miraculous feeding of the four thousand, as well as the five thousand. Hundreds of sermons have been preached on Matthew 14, 15 & 16 because there are so many exciting stories in this section. Many unnumbered hearts have been turned to the Lord through these wonderful chapters. Only eternity will reveal how heaven will be different because the Spirit of God gave us Matthew 14, 15 & 16. I love to look at them devotionally, and we're going to do that.

However, at this time I believe the Lord has called us to study the gospel of Matthew itself, and not just isolated stories, as if Matthew were Proverbs. Matthew is not Proverbs. God did not just put one thing after another after another in Matthew. He's telling a great spiritual story, so we want to put them altogether, and see it that way first. What's going on historically? What is the Lord Jesus doing? Why is the Holy Spirit inspiring Matthew to record these stories at this time, and in this order? I realize that touching stories like this in this way is going to be tough on you because you are going to say, "Slow down, Ed. There's an awful lot in there. What you are jumping over are gems. You could be having all kinds of principles." It will be tough on me, too, because I want to stop, and pick up those gems, and hold them before the Lord and before you. But I'd like to look at this whole section, 14:13 all the way through 16:12, the seventy five verses in an overall view. There are six different stories in this section, and you could spend a long time on each one. I believe that instead of isolating the six stories right away, if we stand back to get a telescopic view first, it will mean a lot more to us when we go in for a microscopic view.

Let me just state for you the six stories, and then after we get our proverbial forest out of the way, maybe we can go back, and look at some of the trees. You can glance at your Bibles; Matthew 14:13-21, the feeding of the five thousand, Matthew 14:22-33, the Lord Jesus walking upon the stormy sea, Matthew 15:1-20, the parable of the human heart (where he says food comes into the body, and it's what comes out of the body, the heart, that means something with God), Matthew 15:21-31, the Syrophoenician woman, Matthew 15:32-39, the feeding of the four thousand, and then Matthew 16:1-12, the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. That's a lot of ground to cover, but I believe if we stand back far enough, and see the whole thing together, it will make a lot of sense what God is communicating in this section.

The first thing that ties these six stories together can be summarized in the single word— "food/eating". All through this section you have food or hunger or eating or bread or crumbs or leaven. The whole thing is talking about eating. Of course, you can see it right off the bat in the first story; Matthew 14:13-21, the feeding of the five thousand, and you know that has to do with food and eating. In chapter 14:22-33, when the Lord Jesus was walking on the stormy sea, in Matthew's account you don't see it as clearly how that ties in with food, but listen as I read

these two verses from Mark of the same account, Mark 6:51&52, *"And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped, and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained insight from the miracle of the loaves, and their hearts were hardened."* Here they are on the stormy sea and Jesus said, *"They didn't learn anything from the miracle of the loaves."* He ties in the storm with the feeding of the five thousand. God intended that they would learn something when He fed the five thousand, and then He tested by the storm what He intended that they would learn, which, by the way, He always does. God will never give you a principle, unless He tests that principle in your life, for a number of reasons, and one of them being that He loves you too much to have you hold the truth in unreality. He's going to make sure you are real. So, when He teaches something you can expect a storm, because He's going to test the reality of what He's teaching you.

Matthew 15:1-20 I've called the parable of the heart, but that, also, is around the truth of eating:

> *Matthew 12:2, "The Pharisees and the Scribes come to Jesus, 'Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders, for they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?'"*
>
> *Verse 11, "It's not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth; this defiles the man.*
>
> *Verse 15, "Peter answered and said to Him, 'Explain this parable to us.' And He said, 'Are you still without understanding? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated, but the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart. Those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts and murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things that defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.'"*

Matthew 15:21-31, the Syrophoenician woman:

> *Matthew 15:26&27, "And He answered and said, 'It's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' But she*

said, 'Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table.'"

Matthew 15:32-39, the feeding of the four thousand.

Matthew 16:1-12, "And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "It's because we took no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, "'You men of little faith. Why do you discuss among yourselves because you have no bread? Do you not understand, yet, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, how many baskets you took up; or the seven loaves of the four thousand, how many large baskets you took up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread, but beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that He did not say, 'Beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.'"

If you study these stories one at a time, you might miss that connection, and that's a big connection, as you are going to see. God ties this together with the truth of food, eating, hunger, bread, loaves, crumbs and satisfaction of appetite, and we need to see that connection. However, there is another thing going on here, which I believe is a great key in understanding the section. On first sight you might take these stories individually one at a time, and think that the Lord Jesus is dealing with each of these situations as they come up. In other words, in two cases, His concern is hungry people; the multitudes, and He does a miracle in order to meet their need. Or, when that gentile women came with her problem of her daughter being demon possessed, you might say, "Well, His heart was moved in compassion for that woman and for her daughter." Or when the Pharisees and the Scribes came, you say, "Now His concern is to expose false teachers, and to show how the blind lead the blind." And when Peter was walking on the water, you say, "Well, He was dealing with Peter, and teaching us not to look to circumstances, or to look to Christ instead of circumstances."

If you read it with that perspective, you'll get blessings, but you are going to miss the reason the Holy Spirit put it in the gospel of Matthew. You've got to find out what God is doing, and catch the spotlight of the Holy Spirit. The problem is that it moves so fast, and we study so slow,

we're tempted to miss it because we get in too close. But if we stand back, we'll see that in every case, no exceptions to this, He is dealing with His disciples. Those other things, like feeding five thousand, feeding four thousand, the Syrophoenician woman, the demon possessed girl, are occasions by which He trains His disciples. He's using them as curriculum; He is teaching His own. If you are going to understand what He's teaching, you've got to understand that He is addressing His own disciples. At this point in their lives they are very dull and thick headed; they're having a hard time comprehending spiritual things. Later on God continues to open their eyes and give them light, but at this point they are struggling along. They are in training; they are in school. All the things that take place here are for the benefit of the disciples.

I remember when I was in high school, we took a course in chemistry. I hated it and flunked it by one point. That course was divided in two sections. We had, first of all, the classroom discussion. That was book learning, where you had to take notes, and get all those facts in your head. The professor would lecture or do some experiment in front of the room, or show some object lesson, and then we'd have to take notes, and be ready for pop quizzes or exams. Classroom discussion had to do with knowledge, with book learning, and I didn't really do that badly. I could learn by my own head some of the components of the atmosphere; oxygen, hydrogen, water and carbon dioxide, and some of the inert gases. But the second part of the course had to do with lab, and that is where we tested the reality of what we were supposed to have learned in the lectures. That was the practical side. That's where we tested the formulas. Well, my chemistry course ended with an explosion of my own experiment, and it put my teacher in the hospital. That's how I did in lab. Then he flunked me by one point. (I didn't think that was fair!)

Anyway, the Lord Jesus was dealing with His disciples that way. He didn't only teach parables, and give the Sermon on the Mount, but He also took them into the lab. He took them out where "the rubber meets the road", the practical side, and He tested these disciples in everyday life. You are going to miss a whole lot if you don't see that all of these stories are the Lord Jesus teaching His disciples. He lays down a principle, and then He takes them to the lab, and He teaches and shows them, and then they usually flunk. And then He goes back and teaches

them another principle, and He puts them out in life, and they usually flunk. Then He goes back, and teaches again and again.

I don't know what it means to you to have a very patient Teacher as your Savior, but I don't know where I'd be if it weren't for the patience of God in my life. A marvelous Teacher is our God, and we're going to see that illustrated in some of these stories. I'm not suggesting, of course, that he had no compassion for these other people. He did have compassion on the hungry multitudes, and on the Syrophoenician woman and her daughter, but the main point is that He's using those stories, those situations, those occasions, as opportunities to teach His disciples, and to train them. That was the big thing He was doing. They were part of the experiment and part of the lab. If we approach these stories that way, I have an idea the whole section will open up to us. Then we'll go back, and pick up some of these devotional details.

Let me say again, by way of explanation, so that you don't jump to conclusions, these disciples at this time were about two years deep into the ministry of the Lord Jesus. At this time they are in the middle of the course. They are going to do fine by the end of the course. They are going to pass. But at this particular time, this is not the whole story, they didn't do too well on these pop quizzes they got in these six stories.

I want to give the chapter and verse divisions of these three principles, and then we'll get into them. Matthew 14:13-33 is principle one, and embraces two stories—the feeding of the five thousand, and the stormy sea. The second principle is really in two sections, Matthew 15:1-20, along with 16:1-12. Then the third principle is Matthew 15:21-39, again embracing two stories—the Syrophoenician woman, and the feeding of the four thousand. It would take far too long, I believe, to read those seventy five verses, so I'm going to select, as we go through, some verses that will give a connective hold, and we'll just dip in. I'm also hoping that at least you are familiar with some of these stories.

Union Life: God will do things in union with me and my resources

The first principle is in Matthew 14:13-33. Let me state it for you as a principle, and then illustrate it in the text. The Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples the truth of union with Christ. That was the great thing

that was on His heart, and a great doctrine in the New Testament. You could have a whole course on union with Christ. Let me tell you what I mean in simple words; I can't do it by myself with my own resources, God won't do it by Himself, God will do it through me using my resources. That's union. I can't do it alone. He won't do it alone, but we can do it in union together. Beginning in verse 13, the disciples had not understood union with Christ. They were under the conception that God expected them to meet the overwhelming need of others, the awful hunger of the multitudes, out of their own resources. The disciples were calculators. They could add and count, and so they did. They counted their resources; one, two, three, four, five—one, two. And then they counted the people—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten…. They had five loaves and two fish.

Even if you took Leviticus 23 and Exodus 23 literally, when it says that the men go up to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts, and the women and children stayed home, and said there were no women and children, you still have five thousand in the count. If you read verse 21, you see that there were women and children there, besides. If you take the number five thousand, and my math is right, that's less than half a fish for every thousand people, and one loaf for every thousand. They calculated, they looked at their resources, and then they said to the Lord, "No way." He said, "They don't have to go away; feed them, and give them something to eat." "Right. We've got five loaves and two fish." God deliberately did it this way, to show the disciples that His provision was going to be out of all proportion to their resources.

There were many ways God could have fed the multitude. He could have said, "We'll take it out of the treasury. You go to town, disciples, and get some food, and we'll provide, and they'll see how wonderful and loving we are, and they don't even have to pay for it." He could have done it that way. The multitude had money, because He said, "Send them in, that they might buy food." He could have taken a collection, and when He got enough resources He could have formed a delegation, and He could have sent them into town. He could have passed the basket. He finally did pass the basket, but it wasn't to collect. It was to give. That's usually how He passes the basket, anyway. The Lord had done many wonderful miracles. They were on grass. He could have made that grass produce all kinds of food immediately, or He could have rained manna from heaven, or ravens

could have come. But He had to do it in such a way to teach His point and principle.

Feeding the multitudes is incidental to what is on His heart. He wants to teach His disciples something—to understand what the blessing of God is. It's when God, using our resources, provides impossible things for others. He could have met their needs apart from human resources. He didn't have to use those five loaves and two fish, but He wanted to lay down a great principle. They said, "We can't. You do it." He said, "I won't. Let's do it; let's do it together." Every step of this involvement is symbolic, and lays down Bible principles. You'd think after this they wouldn't forget this in a thousand years.

Watch the process. Number one, they had to yield up what they had to the Lord Jesus. That's how they started. They had to surrender everything they had to Him. Number two, after they surrendered everything, He would put His blessing on it by breaking it. They had to surrender it to Him, and when it was in His hands, He just broke it. Number three, then He gave it back to them. They gave it to Him, He broke it, He gave it back to them, so that they could distribute it to others, and they soon ran out. Number four, then they came back to his feet for more. That's always the process. He's teaching them about union. If you are going to know anything about union, and God using your miserable resources, you are going to have learn that you yield it up to Him, He breaks it and returns it to you, and He blesses it to others, and then you go back to His feet for more, and He gives it again.

I wish God's people would learn how to keep going back to Jesus' feet, in order to receive what is necessary, in order to feed the hungry multitudes. It's by this process that He lays down the principle, that if I'll ever be a blessing to anyone, if I'll ever offer one drop of real food to hungry multitudes, it will never, never, never, not in a million years come out of my own resources. It's not possible. It doesn't matter how many, or how great, or how resourceful you are. You may be very smart, very gifted, very talented, very handsome or beautiful, or strong, and you may have a good personality, and have good teaching skills, or some other skills, mechanical skills or medical skills, or maybe God has endowed you with a generous portion of this world's goods. Maybe you have money, but until those loaves and fish are surrendered to Him, the Lord Jesus will not use them. You can't use your talent by yourself,

you can't use your gift by yourself, and you can't use your strength by yourself. You can't go out and serve the Lord and say, "I'm giving Him all my time and tithes, and I'm doing all this work for Him." You are wasting your time, His time and their time. The only way to feed hungry multitudes is how these disciples did; in union with Christ. I can't feed people by what I have, but only by what I have surrendered to the Lord, and then the Lord breaks it.

I told you on another occasion that the Lord has called me to write titles of books; not books. I'll give you the titles, and you write the books. Here's a wonderful title of a book; it's a book on evangelism/soul winning/missions—"Broken, in Order to Feed". Think about that, because there is no shortcut to that. That's how the Lord always does it. You look at the ones in church history that God has greatly used, all those men and women who have been broken. His blessing is upon weak things, and small things, broken things. It's part of His greatness. It's not we, or our resources that minister. It's not He apart from our resources that ministers. But it's He through we (that's bad English, but it's a great principle). It's the Lord through us, using us, using our gifts and our talents, after they've been surrendered to Him. That's the principle He taught the disciples.

Hold that a moment and follow the events. Look at verse 22, *"And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat."* Notice the word *"immediately."* He taught them the principle that you can't do it, I won't do it, we can do it and will, and immediately He sends them into a boat, into a storm. In verse 29 when the Lord Jesus said to Peter, *"Come,"* and Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water, Peter was representing the whole church. His invitation for Peter to come, and walk on water was His invitation for the whole church to come, and walk on water. The Christian life is illustrated by walking on water. It's an impossible thing, and until you learn to walk on water, you don't know what it means to live the Christian life. It's a miracle life. Nothing is more impossible than for a Christian, anybody, to walk on water with his own resources. It's just not possible to do that.

They were called to walk on the sea, and already it was impossible, but if you look at verse 24 you'll see that it was a stormy sea. In Verse 24 you'll find out that they were in the middle of a stormy sea at its worst. Verse 25 says it's the darkest part of the night in the third watch. Verse

24 says it was against a contrary wind. It's one thing if the wind is with you, at least you have a break, but they were called to walk on the sea, on the stormy sea, in the midst of a stormy sea at its worst at the darkest part of the night against a contrary wind. He is going to test the reality of the principle. You are going to have to learn union with Christ to do that, and learn, "Peter, you can't do it by yourself, and I'm not going to do it alone, but we can do it together. You keep your eyes on Me."

That's what He taught them in the miracle of the five thousand; you can't, I won't, we will, and He takes them out and teaches the same thing again. He tests it—this is lab, and they fail, and He's patient. He takes them back in the boat, and rebukes them, *"Oh, you of little faith."* Look at verse 30, *"Seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out saying, 'Lord, save me,' and immediately Jesus stretched out His hand, and took hold of him, and said to him, 'Oh, you of little faithful, why did you doubt?' When they got into the boat the wind stopped, and those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, 'You are certainly the Son of God.'"* And then these words from Mark 6:51&52, *"He got into the boat with them and the wind stopped. They were greatly astonished, but they had gained no insight from the miracle of the loaves."*

Words mean little if the heart is wrong

That's the first lesson. He longs to teach His disciples union with Christ. The second lesson is Matthew 15:1-20, and the principle can be described in these words (there's many ways to say it and this is just one way). There's a difference between flesh and Spirit. There is a difference between the physical and spiritual; the material and the spiritual, external and internal. God wanted them to learn that the heart is everything. It matters very little if the lips confess the words, if the heart is wrong. He uses the occasion of the Pharisees, Matthew 15:1, *"Some of the Pharisees and Scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem saying, 'Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? They do not wash their hands when they eat bread.' He answered and said to them, 'Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?'" Verse 7, "You hypocrites. Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.'"*

That's the point of this section. They honor with their lips but their heart is far away. Matthew 15:11, *"It's not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man. It's not the physical things, but what proceeds out of the mouth*." Peter still didn't understand, verse 15*, "And Peter said, 'Explain the parable to us.' And He said, 'Are you also still not with understanding? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?"* It's physical. But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart. That's spiritual, and if your heart is wrong, even if the outside is right, you are wrong.

I remember a man telling me one time, quoting this verse, "It's not what goes into a man that defiles a man. It's okay to drink liquor, because Jesus says that it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man. I won't be defiled if I drink liquor because it goes in, and then it's eliminated." His point is exactly the opposite of that. He's saying that drinking doesn't defile a man. A defiled man drinks. Do you see the difference? If your heart is wrong, that's why you do wrong things. It starts from the inside. The heart is everything.

This was the second truth that the Lord Jesus wanted to communicate to His disciples. They took a long time learning this one; that spirituality is not measured on the outside. It's measured on the inside. It's not measured by forms that you go through, by rituals that you keep, and by religious things that you do. It's not measured by activities, observances, works, or even by sound doctrine. The difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was this; the Pharisees had sound doctrine on paper, but they were dead in the heart. It looked good on paper. They were evangelical, Bible believing, fundamental. The Sadducees were the liberals. They were the false teachers, but the Pharisees were more dangerous than the Sadducees, because the closer you get to the truth, without being the truth, the more dangerous you are. The Pharisees had the truth without the reality. They had the words. *"With their lips they honor Me, but their heart is far from Me."* Nothing is more dangerous. The more you go on in the Lord, the more you need this caution; nothing is more dangerous than having all the right answers, and being dead in your heart.

A tree can die at its heart long before the leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit die. You can look at a tree and say, "That tree is doing fine," and

yet deep down inside, the tree is dead. We need constantly to have our hearts searched by the Lord, so that we'll not die on the inside, and keep up the outside. That's what they did in the Old Testament when the Shekinah glory cloud left the temple. God was gone, but they kept up the ceremonies, and they kept up the sacrifices, and they kept up all the forms. It reminds me of 2 Kings 2:19, when the men of Jericho came to Elisha and they said, *"Behold, now, the situation of the city is pleasant, as my Lord sees, but the water is bad."* See, it looked good on the outside. Jericho looked like a thriving city, but what happened was that its springs had become poisoned, and all its fountains had become polluted. It was dead at the heart.

The Lord begins with those two principles. He says, "I want you to get this; union with Christ—you can't, I won't, we can. It's Spirit, and not just the outside, not just the lips, not just the words, not just the forms, and not just the rituals. It's not wrong to have those, but not as a substitute for the heart. Everything is the heart. They still missed it. Matthew 16:6, *"Jesus said to them, 'Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.' And they began to discuss it among of themselves and said, 'It's because we took no bread.'"* Back to the physical. They missed the whole point again. And He says, "Don't you understand? Didn't you see it?" Verse 8, *"'Oh, you men of little faith. Why do you discuss among yourselves because you have no bread? Don't you understand? Don't you remember the five loaves?'* Don't you remember the principle I taught you in class? You are flunking lab, boys. You aren't doing well out there."

We need a large view of the Lord Jesus

In our overview there's one other lesson the Lord Jesus wanted to teach in Matthew 15:21-31. This principle also includes two stories; the Syrophoenician woman, and the feeding of the four thousand. Once again, I know there's a lot that can be said about this, and we'll come back, and pick up some of these details. But let's look at the big principle. Before I state it for you, I believe this background will be a key to understanding this particular section. Jesus had just tried to instruct the disciples on the difference between spiritual things and physical things, and now they are in the lab again. Look at verse 22. *"Behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and began to*

cry out, saying, 'Have mercy on me, oh Lord, son of David. My daughter is cruelly demon possessed.'"

It looks like this is a great concern to the Lord Jesus; this woman, and the awful pain for a mother to have a daughter who is demon possessed. But this woman and her daughter were not the real concern. They were the curriculum. The Lord Jesus was teaching his disciples again. The fact is, the woman and her daughter were doing pretty well compared to the disciples at this point. We read a story like this, "la, la, la," and we miss some of the great principles that God has laid down. I think we need to understand the tremendous prejudice in those days between the Jews and the gentiles. This women was a gentile *"dog",* as they called her. She was a Canaanite. The Canaanites were the cursed people, and she also had a demon possessed daughter.

Matthew 15:23, when the disciples said, *"Send her away. She's shouting after us,"* they didn't have the least bit of compassion on her. Here's a women whose daughter is demon possessed, and the disciples, the students, the Bible students, the seminarians said, *"Send her away. She's bothering us."* When Jesus said, in verse 24*, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"* that gave them more ammunition for their prejudice. They said, "See, He didn't come for that dog. He came only for the lost house of the sheep of Israel. He came for the Jews, not the gentiles." But, the Lord Jesus was talking spiritually, and they missed it. He wasn't talking about the Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham. He was talking about the Jews, the spiritual Jews. Romans 9:6, *"Not everyone is a Jew who is of Abraham, but those who are of faith are Israel."* You see, the opposite is true. They said, "Send her away." His answer is, "No, for what is it that I came?" They look at her and say, "A gentile." Jesus looked at her and said, "This is one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, spiritual Israel," but they didn't have any idea what the Lord Jesus was talking about, because all they saw was physical, the outside, and the material things. They saw her as one who belonged to the nation of the uncircumcised.

In this chapter the woman is doing fine, but the disciples are in bad shape. They are so full of prejudice. In order to lay out this principle, the Lord Jesus takes this woman as an object lesson, and reaches down inside her soul, and pulls out faith, in order to display it in contrast to his disciples. Matthew 15:26; that's the point of this verse*, "He*

answered and said, 'It's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' But she said, 'Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table.'" You see, the disciples had this view of the Lord Jesus; that God had come to bless Israel, their nation, and that the whole loaf of God's blessing, and salvation belonged to them, the children; physical Israel. They said, "There's not enough for the gentiles. The whole loaf is for us." But this woman, and that's why the Lord Jesus used this as the manual, had a different view of the Lord Jesus. They said, "One loaf is for Israel." She said, "All I want is one crumb, because if I have one crumb from Him, that's all I need for myself, and that's all I need for my daughter who is demon possessed." Her view of Him was so great, that all she needed was one crumb from Him to meet all of her needs forever, and she'd go away satisfied.

He wanted them to learn of union; you can't, I won't, we will. He wanted them to learn that the Spirit is life, and not just form. He wants them to have large view of Him, a view like this Canaanite woman had. She had an ocean view of that crumb. She saw that crumb as the whole, and that's all she needed. They saw the whole loaf, and it wasn't enough to share with the gentiles. They needed a large vision of Him.

Let's go back to the lab, Matthew 15:32, *"Jesus summoned to Himself the disciples, and said, 'I feel compassion for the multitude. They've remained with me three days, and they've had nothing to eat. I do not wish to send them away hungry, less they faint on the way.' And the disciples said to Him, 'Where would we get so many loaves in a desert place to satisfy such a great multitude?'"* You wouldn't expect that, after what they'd just been through, and I'm not talking about the feeding of the five thousand. They just got the word from this woman that Jesus took her faith and said, *"I haven't seen faith like this in Israel."* He holds it up. She said that all she wanted was the crumbs, and they said, "When are we going to get enough loaves to feed these people?" Their view of the Lord Jesus was so small.

I see a little irony in the feeding of the four thousand. It used to bother me, "Why record two miracles? After the feeding of the five thousand, why come right back and teach about the feeding of the four thousand?" I have an idea there is irony in it. When it was all over, He didn't take them out in a storm. He got in the boat, and went away. And when He

did, the disciples were standing holding seven baskets full of crumbs; leftover parts. She had such a view of Christ that only one crumb is all that was needed. They couldn't even see the whole loaf was enough, and He gives them seven baskets of crumbs, and as they are standing there holding them, He walks away. What had they learned?

I suggest these are the great principles He tried to teach His disciples then, and these are the great principles He tries to teach His disciples all the time. I can't do it with my resources, and He won't do it alone, but in union with Him, sure He'll break me, and I'll have to be at His feet, but He'll use me to feed thousands, and I'll have to keep coming back to His feet. In union with Him I'll walk on water, and it doesn't matter how stormy the sea is. I can be in the midst of the stormiest sea at its worst against a contrary wind, in the darkest part of the night. If I'm in union with Christ, it doesn't matter how deep the water is, if you've learned to walk on top. He longs to teach His disciples union with Jesus Christ. It's not just the outside, and it's not just form; don't just honor Him with your lips, and have your hearts far from Him. In this He longs to teach His disciples to have a large view, a spiritual view of Him; one crumb is enough from Him.

When we think about our God, and how involved He is, the universe is so great, and it's so complex, and its affairs are so many, and the Bible says, *"He thinketh on me."* I used to think that I was so nothing, "I don't want to have to waste Your time on me." Don't you realize that part of His greatness is in the fact that He considers the insignificant? That's a part of His very greatness. If He wasn't that great, He wouldn't think about the little things. But the fact that He can think about the little things, the crumbs, and you begin to see the crumbs, and see how big the crumb is, then you get lost in the loaf. God, give us union with Christ. Give us the principle of heart and life and Spirit and inward reality, so that from the blood of our souls we're right with our God. God, teach us to have such a big view of the Lord Jesus, that even a little crumb from His table is all that we'll ever need to satisfy us and fulfill us forever. That's the whole section.

2

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND AND WALKING ON THE STORMY SEA

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

Matthew 14:13-33, *"When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages, and buy themselves some food. 'Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' 'We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered. 'Bring them here to me,' he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night,*

he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.' 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt? 'And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

Background

Aside from the miracle of Jesus' death and rising again, the miracle where the Lord fed the five thousand is the only other miracle that is mentioned in all four gospels; Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9 and John 6. Each gospel writer, of course, lays a special emphasis on different facts, because they are telling a different aspect of the glory of the Lord Jesus.

Matthew leaves out a lot of detail, and seems to jump right into the heart of the message; namely union with Christ. For example, Matthew doesn't say anything about the fact that they used barley loaves, or that Phillip took out his calculator, and tried to dissuade the Lord Jesus from doing the miracle. Matthew doesn't say anything about the fact that Andrew located a little boy who had a lunch. Matthew doesn't say anything about the fact that it was such a great sign, that all of the people tried to take Jesus by force, and make Him be king. He leaves out all of that because he's talking about a spiritual principle. He gets right into the heart of it—the truth of union with Christ.

In the feeding of the five thousand the Lord attempted to teach His disciples a great truth. Notice Matthew 14:22, *"And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side."* The Greek word for *"made",* He made His disciples do it, is a very strong word. It means that He constrained them. He urged them.

He pressured them. It almost goes as far as to say, "He forced them," but I won't say that because He doesn't force your will, but He certainly knows how to make you willing. He constrained them to go, and I think it's implied in the Greek word that they didn't want to go, and He constrained them to go.

The storm was the test, the exam. They were supposed to learn something in the miracle of the five thousand, and the storm was the test as to whether or not they learned it. You say, "How do you know that for sure?" Well, you don't know it from Matthew's account, but you know it for sure from Mark's account. Mark 6:51-52 shows that they flunked the test. *"And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped, and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the miracle of the loaves."* Boy, their hearts were hard. They flunked. As soon as He teaches them the principle, He puts them out into the storm. Well, the disciples had many trips back to the drawing board, and I think all true disciples have many trips back to the drawing board. He teaches us something, and we think we learned it, but we haven't learned it. He tests it in reality and life—back to the drawing board. And He has to teach us again and again.

There is no message in all of your Bible, Old or New Testament, more basic than what we can summarize in three words—union with Christ. That's your whole Bible. You get that in reality, you are done. You are on your way to the millennium; you are in the suburbs of heaven. The more you get into that truth, union with Christ, the more you are living in the purpose for which you were created and redeemed, by the blood of Christ. There is no more often repeated expression in the New Testament than the expression *"in Christ"; "in Christ Jesus."* That was God's burden since the Garden of Eden. That was always His plan; union with Him, fellowship with Him; "In Christ Jesus."

What does it mean to be in Christ? What does it mean to have Christ in you? When you begin to read your Bible, especially when you get into the epistles where the truth is fully developed and explained, union with Christ is all over the place. You have the vine and the branches, which is the union of life, the head and the body, which is the union of cooperation. You have the super structure and the foundation, which is the union of strength. You have the husband and wife, which is the

union of love. You have the master and slave, which is the union of submission. Even the Trinity in John 17 becomes an illustration of our union with Christ; the union of mystery. Every place you turn, "In Christ, in Christ, in Christ." 1 Corinthians 1:30, *"Of Him are you in Christ Jesus."* By Him you are in Christ. It's the fundamental idea underlying every other doctrine in the whole Bible. Every preacher and every teacher and every commentary who has ever attempted to sound the depths of the truth of union with Jesus Christ, has felt the inadequacy of words, mind, tongue and clay lips. There is no way to sound the thrill of what it means to be in Christ Jesus. It's too full to grasp, and yet it's simple enough that a little child might understand and lay hold of it.

Believers are in Christ, partakers of all that He does, all that He is and all that He has. We died with Him, and we rose with Him, we live with Him, we're seated with him, we're coming with Him, we're righteous in His righteousness. We are loved with the same love that rests upon Him. We inherit in His inheritance. We are overcomers through the Overcomer. We're sons in His Sonship. We'll be glorified together one day. Christ is before our eyes, He's above us, and He's around us. He wraps us all up in every direction. He's the ground on which we stand. He's the air that we breathe, He's the sphere in which we live and move and have our being.

The churches are said to be in Christ Jesus. People are said to be in Christ Jesus. The Bible says that we're bound in Christ, preserved in Christ, saved in Christ, sanctified in Christ, rooted in Christ, built up in Christ, made perfect in Christ Jesus. Our ways are said to be ways in Christ Jesus. We are to have a good conversation in Christ Jesus. Our life is in Christ Jesus. The Bible says that our faith, hope, love and joy are to be in Christ Jesus. We are to think in Christ, speak in Christ, walk in Christ, labor in Christ, suffer in Christ, rejoice in Christ, conquer in Christ; everything is in the Lord. We're told to receive one another in the Lord. We're told to marry only in the Lord. We're told to forgive one another in the Lord. Children are told to obey their parents in the Lord. We're told to do all things in the Lord. We hold the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. We live in the will of God in Christ Jesus. Someday we'll lay our burdens down, and when we do, it says, "We die in the Lord, we sleep in Christ Jesus, and we're dead in

Christ." And when He appears, we'll appear in Christ, and with Him come again.

This is not a doctrine; it's a life, in Christ Jesus. And yet, if you ask the average Christian, since that's all over the place, and since the Bible doesn't teach anything else, really, what does it mean to have union with Christ? Some get very doctrinal, and they'll say, "I'll tell you what it means. It means to live from God's viewpoint; how does God see you? That's what it means to be in Christ. God sees you in His Son." So, they talk about your standing in Christ and your position in Christ. In Christ He sees you. You are seated in the heavenly places. Those who explain it that way, go into "the finished work". It's all done and nothing else needs to be done. It's doctrine, it's finished, it's settled, it's over and through, and when God sees Christ, He sees you, because you are united with Christ, are in Christ, He's the head, you're the body, He's the soil, you're the root, and you're in Christ Jesus. And you say, "Oh, that's wonderful," but you think in your heart, "What about my sin? How come I keep blowing it?" If all that wonderful truth is really true, how come I'm having such a struggle down here? What does it mean to be in Christ? The fact that God sees me perfect doesn't really help me when my neighbor slaps me on the cheek. My standing is one thing, but what about right now as I go on?

Others say, "Oh, you can't deal with it doctrinally. We've got to deal with it mystically. Talking about a doctrine and a finished work, and appearing representatively before God in our federal head doesn't do much for our soul. You've got to see that but, you've got to also know that there is a living God within. You have Christ living in your heart. The God of the universe indwells your soul, and lives in you, and He wants to live through you," they say. Some have worded it this way, "The more you go on in union with Christ, you can stand on the sidelines, and actually watch God live through you, and you are just observing. The fact is that you are dead, and He's alive in you. It's all Him. He walks in you, He speaks in you, He studies in you, He raises your children through you, and He works through you. It's no longer you, but Christ, and all you have to do is stay out of the way, and allow the Life of God to flow through you, because He's in there."

Some get a little more mystical, and talk about a deep inward, sweet, rich fellowship with God; an experience that feels like someone is constantly dipping a jug of honey over inside your soul, just a wonderful sweet experience, and He fills your life, and actually grows. He's in there, and He's growing, and He begins to take up the whole landscape of your life. After a while He takes over your mind, and takes over your will, so that you begin to move as one. You and God are one. In fact, you are so one that you don't even exist anymore. You are Him, and He just uses your body as His temple. I remember one statement that says, "The same eye with which God sees you, you see Him. You're one."

The average Christian, like me, is tempted to throw his hands up in the air in despair and say, "I think I'll quit on this. I'll never get it into my soul." The doctrine helps for a while. It comes and goes. Every once in a while I see myself as God sees me, and I get a thrill, but then I start to blow it again. I get confused about so many things. I wonder why I can't be more like Him. Everybody talks about this great spiritual life. Of course, the mystical sounds so good. It sounds spiritual. I like that. It sounds "unearthy". It sounds like I'm heavenly minded. God is walking around in my body as His temple. That sounds good. The more I let Him, then the more Christ uses me.

Don't get me wrong. I love the doctrine of the finished work. I rejoice in how God sees me. I'm not blind. I can see that in the Bible. I rejoice as I stand before you that God doesn't see me in me, that He sees me in Christ Jesus. I love the truth that 100% of God dwells in me, and not just the Spirit of God. There are verses that show that God the Father dwells in you, and God the Son dwells in you, and God the Holy Spirit dwells in you. Every Christian has all of God in His heart. That's thrilling. But it's a whole lot simpler than that. I like the doctrine, and I like the mystical approach, but that just tells you why it works. It doesn't tell you how it works; that's the mechanics of it.

I know how to drive a car. It's easy. I open the door, I get in, I sit in the seat, I put a little key inside of a key hole, I turn it, put it in gear, and I drive happily away. Let someone open the hood, and I'm in trouble. I look inside, and I see the mechanics of it; all of the wires, and all of the belts, and all of the gadgets. You can take my mechanical

ability, and put it in a thimble, and have a lot of room left for a golf game. I know nothing about mechanics, but that didn't keep me from driving a car for the last twenty years. I don't know anything about it, but I do enjoy driving a car. Union with Christ is to be enjoyed, and not understood. Thousands of Christians go after the mechanics of it, and they get all confused, when all God is really calling them to do is enjoy it, and not understand it.

When Jesus fed the five thousand, He was teaching His disciples how to enjoy union with Christ, not how to understand it. He wasn't giving a doctrine of union. He was giving them the practical lesson on how to drive; how to push buttons, and how to enjoy union with Christ. He didn't flood their minds with a bunch of technicalities. He didn't try to lay down before them, "Here's how the full nature of God, with His unlimited attributes, was satisfied by the propitiation of the finished work of Jesus Christ, and how He shed in a moment of time eternal blood, and crushed eternity into three hours." He laid down the principle of how to use it, how to enjoy it, and how to live it.

I can't explain digestion but I know how to eat. I can't explain respiration, but it doesn't stop me from breathing. I don't know the great mysteries of reproduction, but I have six children. I don't understand union with Christ, but I've been enjoying it since 1965. And this is what Jesus Christ is telling His disciples—He's laying down the "how." He's giving this great principle, and not the mechanics of it. Praise God, as you go on, and you begin to see how wonderfully it is fit together, and you begin to see the mechanics of it, and the great symmetry of the wise plan of God, praise God when you see that. But I don't start there. Begin with enjoying union with Christ. Take it by simple faith, and then as you go on, study some of those details. But begin where God begins. These disciples were simple folk. The Lord Jesus was not concerned that they have a seminary degree. He wanted them to know the purpose of their creation and redemption. He was telling them the secrets of union.

God hasn't called us to do miracles; just be your surrendered self

There are two things He lays down here that help get the message of union with Christ into your soul; not the mechanics of it, not the internal working, but the practical every day experience of union. The first key of enjoying union in Christ, illustrated by these two stories, is stated in a couple of ways. Know that God never expects one single thing more from you than that you be your yielded self; just be yourself, surrendered. God has not called you to do miracles. There is a miracle side to your life, but that's His responsibility**.** Don't try to do impossible things, like turn the other cheek, and go the second mile, and love your wife as Christ loved the church. Don't try to be anybody else. For sure, don't try to be God. Just be your yielded self; just you, who you are, what He's equipped you with, and what He's given you. Surrender all you are and all you have to Him. That's all He's ever called you to, and that's all He's ever expected. He'll never ask more than that, ever. That's the key, if you'll learn it— just come as you are, and give what you have to Him, and you will begin to enjoy union with Christ, and all the mechanics of the union experience will work beautifully in your life, and you'll begin to enjoy union with Christ.

The Lord selected this illustration of feeding the five thousand for a couple of reasons. I believe one of them was this, that it was an everyday experience. As I meditated on this I thought it was sort of a waste of a miracle. Here's what I mean by that. He went through an awful lot of supernatural energy and power (I speak as a fool), to do an awful little. I know it's a great thing to multiply loaves and fishes, but He just provided a meal. A few hours later they'd be hungry again. This was one of those miracles that die away very quickly. Certainly by the next day that miracle would have been spent. At least in His other miracles they lasted a while. When He healed the blind they probably saw until they died. I think the leper stayed cleansed. I don't think all of sudden a week later the leper went back into his leprosy. I think the lame were able to walk all the way to their graves, and the deaf heard. This miracle was different. As great as it was, it was soon over, and they were in need of another one, another miracle, and another meal. I thought if I were Him I probably would have created a tree there, instead, that constantly gave forth fruit. Then, at least I'd

have a perpetual miracle. He could have done that easily enough. Everybody could line up and get their food. Next day if they came, the tree would still be there giving food. That would be a good miracle.

But I believe He was trying to teach something else. This wasn't an accident. He was laying down a simple day by day, hour by hour principle. He deliberately chose this kind of a miracle. The other reason that He chose this one is because the details show what an absolutely impossible situation these disciples were in. I almost have to laugh when I read Matthew 14:16. Picture yourself there, *"And Jesus said, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."* We just read that, "la, la, la," but say you were there, and when you mustered your whole group together you've got twelve of you, and there's at least 10,000 people with five thousand men, and we don't know how many women and children. Great day, if they had a family like mine, there would be 60,000 there. At least, there were probably twelve or fifteen thousand people there. And He says, so calmly, "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat." Right!

You see, the resources were out of all proportion with the need. John's gospel calls attention to the fact that the loaves (they amounted to about a pancake), were barley loaves, which tells you a lot about that boy. He came from a very poor family. The average person didn't eat barley. Barley was what they fed the animals, and when they had these barley loaves, it was a very low grade of food; low quality. You see, the miracle was more than multiplying quantity. I believe the Lord Jesus actually changed the quality of the bread. One reason I know that is that they came back for seconds; because it says, *"They all ate and were satisfied."* He changed the quality, as well as the quantity. Not only was it a poor quality of food, but as you know from the record, there wasn't near enough. It wasn't only a poor quality, it was not only an insufficient quantity, but there was no time, really, to meet the need. They had already been out there three days. It was evening, and even if they tried to go and buy enough food, by the time they got back and distributed it, they didn't have the time to do that. I don't think anybody would have starved to death. They were close enough to a town, and probably would have gone into town.

Jesus sped up nature a little. Do you realize the processes Jesus bypassed in order to multiply these loaves? He bypassed plowing, planting, growing, reaping, grinding, and baking. He just did all of that in a moment of time, and He had all of these loaves. You add to the poor quality, the insufficient supply, the lack of ample time——add to that the disciples, the human instrumentality. These disciples are only men. They can't do miracles. They didn't have it in themselves. They confessed, "We're nothing. We have nothing." It's a positive victory when we see that we are nothing and have nothing.

Matthew 14:18, *"And He said, 'Bring them here to me.'"* "I am nothing; I have nothing." "Okay, bring it to Me." What happens when you bring it to Him? He breaks it. "Oh, that's good. Now I'm a broken nothing." What's worse than being a nothing? The answer is being a broken nothing. Bring it to Him; He'll break it, and what will He do with it? He'll give it back to you; so now you have what you started with–nothing. Now it's broken, but now He's done something. Now He has a part, and that's the part we're always worried about in the Christian life. How are we going to change the quality? How are we going to change the quantity? How are we going to meet a need? How are we going to minister to others? How are we going to satisfy our hunger? It's His problem. It's not our problem.

Our problem is bringing to Him all that we are and all that we have, and that's it. When we bring to Him all that we are and all that we have, He begins to work with all we are and all we have, and that is usually in terms of breaking us, humbling us, making us weak. All the rest is His problem. Forget the mechanics of union. You don't have to worry about anything else, because when you give Him all that you are and all that you have, all that you are and all that you have receives the anointing, receives the blessing of God, and receives the miracle. So, now you are still you, and you still have what you had, but with the blessing of God; with the unction of God, with the anointing of God. That's the message of union. It's no longer you. All you've done is given Him all that you are, and all that you have, and say the same words, "Wow! What a difference it makes!" You do the same acts that you did before you surrendered, but now it has the blessing of God on it, and eternity is stamped on it. You say the same thing, and you preach the same sermons, and you write the same letters, and you visit the

same people, you talk on the same telephone with the same words, but He changes the quality of it somehow, and the barley is changed into steak. He changes it all around, and begins to multiply it. Pretty soon, while you do nothing, you have a ministry in every family on the earth.

You don't have to understand anything. Just give Him all you have, and the rest is His, and He begins to make your whole life a blessing for you, and for everyone who walks in your shadow. Is He doing any miracle? You're not doing anything; He is. You're gathering water, and somehow He's turning it into wine. You are rolling the stone away from the door, and He's calling back dead people, and Lazarus begins to live. You're doing the same thing you always did. You just cast the net into the sea, but this time it's full. Even the breaking; what makes the difference? The answer is union with Christ. What is union with Christ? It's taking all that you are and all that you have, like they took that little lunch, and they gave it to Jesus, and that's it. That's union with Christ. Forget the mechanics of it. The mechanics will work out, and when you do that, God takes over, and God begins to turn your life into a blessing. You'll begin to enjoy all those things you read about, and then other people begin to enjoy, and you don't have to be some kind of a seminary graduate. You don't have to know Greek and Hebrew. You don't need to have a big library full of reference material. You just have to have a heart; I am nothing and I have nothing. Give it to Him, and He breaks it and begins to use you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, don't make the glorious truth of union with Jesus Christ difficult. It's simple. I'm not saying it's on the surface. There's no bottom to it. My, we'll be in heaven for billions of years, and we'll still be sounding new depths of the glorious mystery of union with Christ. We'll never come to the end of that. But to enjoy it, just open the door, sit down, put the key in, turn it, and drive happily away. That's life in Christ Jesus. You don't have to try to copy Paul or Peter. You don't have to try to imitate Christ. You don't have to try to write a bunch of books, or try to copy other Christians. You say, "But I have nothing." Give it to Jesus. "All I have is poor barley." That has nothing to do with it. It doesn't matter what you have or what you don't have. "Oh, but I'm blind. I can't be used of God because I'm bedridden. I'm paralyzed. I'm lame. I'm divorced. I'm retarded. I'm not a full time worker. I have to work hard in the factory all day.

I have no talent. I'm shut in." So what! That has nothing to do with anything. You take what you are and what you have, give it to Jesus, and He begins to do things you couldn't dream possible. Take those same things without yielding them, and nothing will happen. That nothing, "I'm going to the nursing home and visiting that lady," is a waste of time. Yield it to Christ, and He'll make it sound like a thousand thunders in that person's heart, as He begins to transform you; that's union with Jesus Christ.

It's simple. Don't do anything different. Don't try to be anybody else. Don't try to be cloned into a bunch of rules and regulations that somebody has stereotyped and said, "There's a Christian; he does this, and doesn't do that, and he doesn't go there, and he's with this one and not that one, doesn't play this game or that game." Don't go through those stupid machines that stamp out little dumb Christians that don't know how to do anything. Be yourself. God has created you unique! There is no one like you on the earth. Give yourself to Him, and how he'll use it! That's the first principle. Let's test it. Let's bring out the ocean, bring out the storm and see if you've learned that. It's easy enough. Just be your yielded self. Nothing hard about that.

WALKING ON THE STORMY SEA

Know that Jesus is Lord of your life

Not only be your yielded self, but let me illustrate it this way through the storm. Know that He is the Lord of your life. Just know that by faith; that He is the Lord of your life. Here's what I mean. We don't need to be afraid of anything. He's the God of the stormy sea, and He hurled the stormy sea into Peter's life and into these disciples' life. Notice the fear. Matthew 14:26, *"And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened, saying, 'It's a ghost,' and they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, 'Take courage, it is I. Do not be afraid.'"* Verse 30, *"Seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out saying, 'Lord, save me.' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him and said to him, 'Oh, you of little faith; why did you doubt?'"*

The disciples and Peter were not only afraid of the seeming apparition that they saw in Christ, the ghost, but also the storm. I used to think that the big miracle here was Peter walking on the water. That certainly was a great miracle, but it's deeper than that. Peter was afraid. He was scared to death. The storm was threatening their lives and their boat. When Jesus walked on the waves it was designed to show them that there is nothing to worry about, that He is Lord, and is the God of the stormy sea. He is in charge, and He walked on it as the Lord would rule over it. He was ruling the storm. He's in control. Why did Jesus let Peter walk on the water? I don't think His point is that you can walk on water, too. I think His point is that Jesus walked on the stormy sea to say, "There's nothing to worry about. Look, I'm in charge and in control." But Peter was afraid, and Jesus wanted to give him confidence, and he said, "If it's really safe, and there's really nothing to worry about, then let me come out there, too." And Jesus said, "Come on. I'll show you there is nothing to worry about."

His point was not to walk on water. His point is that there is nothing to fear, and to come out and test it. So, Peter began to walk out. Then you know the story. He took his eyes off the Lord, and began to fear again, seeing all of those waves and everything around him, and he went down again. It's a glorious picture of union with Christ; not the doctrine of it, and not the theory of it, not the mystery of it, but the beauty of it. Union with Christ; when I look in simple faith to Jesus Christ, I know He's Lord of all. He's in control. When I look away, I begin to fail and begin to sink. Fear is an enemy of union with Christ. God's people are not to be afraid.

If you can get these two keys to union, you'll be able to drive. If you get these two ideas; I'll just give everything to Jesus, and surrender it all, and then know that everything that happens in my life, that He's Lord, you'll begin union with Christ. Those two things—it's so simple! Give all that you are and have to Him, and then know that He's in charge of everything else that ever takes place in your life. You have nothing to worry about. You are as safe as a baby in its mother's arms. You need to know that He's in charge. We need to know that when something happens in our lives, it wasn't an accident, and it wasn't by chance, and it's not luck, and there is no arrangement of the stars, and it's not fortune. It's God. The hand that gives is also the hand that

takes; blessed be the name of the Lord. It's God–everything that takes place in our lives. You won't drown apart from His will. Know those two things, and you've got the key to union, not the mechanics of it, but the enjoyment of it.

Let me close with the way the Holy Spirit presents the Lord Jesus in this passage, with four different revelations of Christ. I won't develop them. They are just suggestions, and you can mediate upon them. Matthew 14:28&29, *"Peter, answering Him, 'Lord, if it's You, command me to come to You on the water.' And He said, 'Come.'"* When Jesus said, *"Come,"* to Peter, Peter represents all the people of God in every age. When Jesus said "come" to Peter, He was giving an invitation for every Christian to lead a supernatural life; a life described by walking on water. Most Christian education teaches you how to swim. It doesn't teach you how to walk on water. The miracle side of your life is His, and it's for every Christian, and not just an initiated few, and not just a handful. Every Christian is to walk in union with Christ, so that they find themselves doing impossible things.

Verse 23, *"After He sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray. When it was evening He was there alone."* The Lord Jesus sent His disciples into the storm. Let me draw for you a picture of the present ministry of our Lord Jesus. The Bible says that the Lord Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and the disciples were on a stormy sea, and there was a distance between the disciples and the Lord. Mark 6:48 says that the Lord Jesus was not only praying, but He was watching. And when He saw them straining at the oars, it says that He then went down among them, and walked upon the water. This is the present ministry of our Lord Jesus right now. He has gone to heaven to pray for us as our high priest. He's at the Father's right hand interceding, and while He's at the Father's right hand interceding, we're on the stormy sea, and He's watching us. And when we don't remember the lessons He's taught us, and we forget the message of union with Christ, and go back to the oars, when He sees us straining at the oars, He is so patient and compassionate, He begins to come down into our experience and into our lives.

The third thing we learn about Him is also in Mark. Mark 6:48 says, *"And He intended to pass by them."* He will never force Himself into

your life. He walks close enough, so that if you want to, you can see Him. Sometimes you can't really make out that it's Him. He'll always come close enough, so that you can invite Him into the boat, no matter how terrible the storm is. This is a wonderful revelation of Christ, inviting all the church to walk that miracle, walk upon the stormy sea, our high priest praying for us and watching. He's so patient when we go back to the oars, and we struggle, and we begin to flunk the exam, He says, "Alright." And down again He comes, and walks by us, but He'll never force Himself on us. He'll walk right by us if we don't invite Him into the boat. When we invite Him into the boat, the storm ceases, and we get a mild rebuke, and He starts all over, and He begins to teach us again.

Matthew 14:30&31, the fourth revelation of Christ, *"Seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him and said, 'Oh, you of little faith. Why did you doubt?'"* The Holy Spirit uses the word "immediately", and He means immediately. Verse 30 says that Peter was beginning to sink. He didn't sink. I don't know how far he sunk; to his knees, to his waist, to his shoulders? Did his head go under water? I doubt it. The lightening hand of the Lord Jesus to rescue His sinking children, faith in the hand of God to rescue and redeem, is so swift and so quick. What a revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ! His love is as strong as His power; mighty love.

Like these disciples, I have flunked many a test on union with Jesus Christ. It's so simple. All I have to do is yield all I am and have. All I have to do is know that He's Lord of everything. It's so simple; surrender and faith. That's all it is. And I blow it, and go back to the oars, and begin to struggle, and think I can get myself through. Then I take my eyes off the Lord, and I look at the circumstances, and I begin to go down. In a moment of time, "Help, Lord." And He's there every time. And I start again. We have a wonderful Lord. He longed that they would learn the lesson of union with Christ. It's not hard – not the doctrine of it. He's going to unfold that later in Ephesians, but now He just wanted them to see the beauty of it, illustrated by the loaves and illustrated by the storm; surrender and faith; yield and trust; give it all to Him and know that He is Lord of all, and watch what He'll do in

your life. Jesus is beautiful, and Jesus makes beautiful things of my life; tenderly, carefully touching me, causing my eyes to see.

3

THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES TEST JESUS

Matthew 15:1-20, "*Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem saying, 'Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders, for they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?' And He answered and said to them, 'Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition, for God said, "Honor your father and your mother, and He who speaks evil of father and mother, let him be put to death," but you say, "Whoever shall say to his father or mother, 'Anything of mine you have been helped by has been given to God,'" (*and the word is "corbin"), *"'and he is not to honor his father or his mother.' Thus, you invalidate the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. In vain do they worship, teaching as their doctrines, the precepts of men.' And He called to Himself the multitude, and said to them, 'Hear and understand; not what enters into the mouth defiles a man, but what proceeds out of the mouth. This defiles a man.' Then the disciples came and said to Him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard that statement?' But He answered and said, 'Every plant which my Heavenly Father did not*

plant shall be rooted up. Let them alone. They are blind guides of the blind, and if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.' And Peter answered and said to Him, 'Explain the parable to us.' He said, 'Are you still without understanding? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated, but the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man, for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, slanders; these are the things that defile the man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.'"

Matthew 16:1-12, *"And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up testing Him and asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He answered and said to them, 'When it's evening you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening." Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, and cannot discern the signs of the times? An evil and an adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.' And He left them and went away. And His disciples came to the other side, and had forgotten to take bread. And Jesus said to them, 'Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.' And they began to discuss among themselves saying, 'It's because we took no bread.' But Jesus, aware of this, said, 'You men of little faith! Why do you discuss among yourselves because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up, or the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread, but beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

Background

We read both chapters 15:1-20 and chapters 16:1-12 because in both cases groups came to Jesus deliberately trying to trick Him up to test Him. Matthew 15:1 says, *"Some of the Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem."* Matthew 16:1 says, *"The Pharisees and*

Sadducees came up, and testing Him, asked Him to show a sign from heaven." By comparing chapter 15:1 and 16:1 you may get the idea there were three groups—the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, but that's not true. There were only two groups; only Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees had their own scribes, and the Sadducees had their own scribes. There's only the two groups.

In the days of Ezra, the scribes were good. They had a wonderful responsibility. They were scribes in the real sense of the word. They were writers, and copied the manuscripts. That's how we got our Bible, because the scribes wrote it down, when they didn't have printing presses. But by the time you come to the New Testament, scribes didn't mean "one who copied". Scribe was one who taught, and one who debated. He was a lawyer. In other words, there were Pharisees, and scribes of Pharisees, and the scribes were the smart ones. The Pharisees were just the laymen, the regular ordinary people, and the brainy ones were the scribes. They were the lawyers, and the ones who disputed and argued and got into all the fine points. The same thing was true of the Sadducees. They had their scribes, too—those who were the doctors, those who were the bright ones. When you see "scribes", you are looking at the big guns.

Some times in the cults you'll find this. A Jehovah's Witness will come to your home, or a Mormon will come to your home, and as soon as they find out you know something, they say, "Well, I'll come back with my scribe, with the big guns, with the leader." That's what the Pharisees did. They weren't qualified to go against the Lord, so they brought their scribes, and the scribes were the ones who knew all the answers, supposedly. Those were the doctors. Sometimes in the Bible you'll see the word "Rab", sometimes "Rabbi", and sometimes you'll see "Rabboni". Rab had a B.A. degree, a further degree is Rabbi, and then the Master's degree is Rabboni. The scribes are the ones that had those degrees, went to college and had all the big titles.

These two groups, the Pharisees and Sadducees, came together against Christ. In order to get the impact of this, you've got to remember that they were about as far removed as darkness is from dawn. When we read that the Pharisees and Sadducees came together, you are reading about a miracle. That they would have anything to do with each other is amazing. We just sort of read that the Pharisees and Sadducees came

together, like they were friends. Those folks didn't agree on anything. They had no love for each other. The Pharisees knew nothing of a heart relationship with God. His whole religion was to be legally correct before God. He was full of rules and regulations, forms and rituals, and all externals. In many cases the Pharisees were orthodox on paper, but their heart wasn't in it. It was all on the outside. They had the words and the doctrine, but it was all form.

On the other hand, the Sadducees didn't even have the right doctrine. They were the rationalists of the day. They didn't believe in spiritual things. They didn't believe in angels, in God, and if you couldn't taste it, feel it, or smell it, it's not true. They did not believe anything in the supernatural. They denied God, denied miracles, denied life after death, and they had a natural interpretation for everything that happened. So, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were worlds apart, and the only thing they agreed on was to disagree with Jesus, to reject Christ. They stopped fighting each other to join forces against Him.

In Matthew 16:1 they asked for a sign from heaven. Well, that was a good question for the Sadducees because they didn't believe in salvation; there was no such thing, and it was impossible to have a sign from heaven. There is no such things as miracles. So, they said that was a good question, to ask for a sign. And the Pharisees said that's good for us, too, even though we disagree with you, that you don't believe there is such a thing, we do believe there is such a thing, but we don't believe that He can give it.

Sometimes we wonder about these Pharisees and say, "How come they didn't see all these miracles and believe; they had so many signs?" It's because they had a doctrine, and they believed that the only signs that were from God were from heaven. Any sign done on the earth was not from God, but from Satan. That's what they were taught. That's why they didn't believe His healing ministry. That was done on earth. That's why they didn't believe when He calmed the storm. That was done earth. That's why they didn't believe when He multiplied the loaves. That was done on earth. That's why they said, "He does it by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. But if He could show us a sign from heaven, like the sun standing still like it did in Joshua's day, or let fire come down from heaven like it did in Elijah's day, or let it thunder when there is no clouds in the sky, like it did in David's day, or let the

prophesy of Joel or the minor prophets be fulfilled, that the moon turn to blood, and the stars fall from the sky, then we'll believe. But if it doesn't come from heaven, it's not from God."

The question that the Pharisees and Sadducees raised was the occasion the Lord Jesus used to instruct His disciples in the great principle of heart living. It was an object lesson, and Jesus dealt with them in such a way as to instruct His disciples. Notice Matthew 16:6*, "Jesus said to them, 'Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.'"* There's always that double danger of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It's easy to know what the leaven of the Pharisees was because of Luke 12:1, *"Beware the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy."* They come out and tell you what it is; having the outside right, and the inside wrong; having the right answers without heart. Then there is the leaven of the Sadducees; worldly wisdom and rationalization. The words we use today for Pharisees is the word "legalism", and for Sadducees we use the word "humanism". It's the same thing, and it's always been the same. "Watch out for the leaven of legalism, and watch out for the leaven of humanism."

All that is essential life is from above, is spiritual and is from within

With that as background, let's home in on the great teaching that the Lord Jesus longed to give His disciples, "All essential life, real life, is from above, and from within. The Heavenly Father plants it, and He plants it in the heart. That's essential life. If the Heavenly Father hasn't planted it, it shall be rooted up. All essential life is from above and from within. Everything else is not essential." We are going to apply it, but just think in your own life, if God uprooted everything that was non-essential in your life, how much spiritual life would be left?

To bring this principle into the open, He has used the question that was raised by the Pharisees, and the scribes of the Pharisees, the smart ones. Matthew 15:1-2*, "Some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem saying, 'Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders, for they do not wash their hands when they eat bread?'"* The question is a lot deeper than what is on the surface. On the surface

it looks like the Pharisees were concerned about germs, and that they had a passion for cleanliness. I wish it were so.

Listen to G. Campbell Morgan as he quotes from one of the rabbis. "This question of washing before meals was the result of a tradition, that Shivsa, a demon, sat upon the hands of men while they slept during the hours of the night, and if any person should touch his food with unwashed hands, he has touched his food with demons, and the demons that sat upon his hands made the food dangerous." Then he went on to quote another of the rabbis, "Whoever eats his common food with washed hands, may rest assured that he has eternal life." This was the very heart and core of their religion. It's an illustration that shows the essential difference between their religion and what the Lord Jesus Christ was presenting as essential life, and they were opposites. They were going in different directions. This washing of hands was more than a point of etiquette or hygiene. They were talking about something that went way down inside.

A.T. Robertson on the same subject; "The rabbis held it to be a mortal sin, a sin which would lead to hell, to eat with unwashed hands." It's amazing! To the Pharisees life was lived before God, and not in relationship with God. God was a big stranger up there with a whip, and if you didn't keep the rules you would be in trouble. You lived before God with rules and regulations, and they began with the law of Moses, and they had interpreters of the laws of Moses, and they had what they called traditions. As they interpreted the law, they applied it in every area of life. They wrote down those traditions, and those traditions became laws. Then they had a group of scholars who interpreted the traditions. So, they had traditions for the traditions. And then there was another group of scholars that interpreted the tradition, and that interpreted the traditions. They had laws of dress, laws of diet, laws of labor, laws of stewardship, laws of hygiene, laws of morality, social laws, marriage laws, and laws of worship. Life was just keeping all the dos and don'ts straight.

But Jesus had another view of life, and that's what blew their mind. That's what was so radical and revolutionary. He said, "All essential life is from above, and from within. And if it's not from above, and if it's not planted within, it's not real, so forget it." He presented life as a matter of communion with God; not on the outside, but on the inside.

The Pharisees felt defiled because their hands weren't washed, and maybe there was a demon sitting on their hands, but Jesus said that defilement was deeper than skin, and doesn't begin on the outside. It begins on the inside, from the heart. For example, Matthew 15:7, *"You hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.'"* Matthew 5:17, *"Do you not understand, that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man."* It struck at the core of everything. It pointed out the difference between religion and life in Christ. Jesus wanted to teach His disciples that essential life is from above and from within, and that no amount of externals could ever reach essential life.

According to the Lord Jesus, real life, essential life, heart life, spirit life, life within, the life that counted, verse 13, was planted by God, *"Every plant that My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up,"* and it's in the heart, verse 8, *"People honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me."* Of course, that truth went across the grain of the religious crowd in that day. It continues to be the radical truth, the revolutionary truth that goes against the religious majority in every age. This He longed to burn into the hearts of His disciples—essential life, not following rules and regulations, and not listening to the traditions of men, but real life is from above and is from within. Jesus knew the danger of starting on the outside, and working toward the inside, and that you could go through all of the forms, and say the right words, and honor Him with your lips, and yet in reality your heart would be far from Him.

The Lord Jesus in this section spoke very straightforward, very boldly. Let me state what He said in principles, so that it may be practical. The first can be stated in these words; since essential life is from above and from within, all that is not essential life is leaven. Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of legalism, and the leaven of humanism. If it's not from above, and not from the heart, it's dangerous; it's leaven. Verse 2, *"Why do you disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?"* That expression *"tradition of the elders";* Jesus warned about tradition; that which comes from man, and is handed down from man to man, which only touches the shell, and never reaches essential life. You can just look at your own life, and you'd

know the truth of this next statement, "Every man born of Adam is a slave of tradition." It clings to us like glue. We finally hear something, and it sounds good, we read it in a book, and it becomes ours; it becomes a habit, and a tradition. Jesus said, "Beware of tradition. Watch out for the leaven of legalism, and the leaven of humanism."

It's not hard to think about traditions today among the people of God; it's hard to find something planted by God from within. Almost everything you can name is tradition—no matter how you start, almost everything you name. Very little that's among the people of God today is planted by God, and from within. Most of our religion and Christianity is nothing more than the tradition of the elders.

I'm going to give you a list of the traditions of the elders in the modern church, and it's not a complete list. It's only suggested. It's not exhaustive. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not saying to throw all this out. I am saying, "Danger/Caution; watch out and beware!" I'm going to show you in a moment the traditions you have to throw out. You don't have to throw out all traditions. You have to beware of all traditions, but you don't have to throw them all out. I'll tell you exactly what you are supposed to throw out. I'll give you a principle, so that you'll know exactly what it is.

The things that I'm going to mention now have no Bible basis. They've been started by men—men in many cases who love the Lord, and wanted people to love the Lord. So, they came up with an idea how it would help to get people to love the Lord, and they handed down a tradition. It's amazing that some of these things are so entrenched into our lives. To get rid of them, we'd almost feel like we were blaspheming God, like we were departing from the living God, because it sounds almost like heresy to suggest that this comes from man. Let me start mentioning a few. Don't misunderstand it. I'm not saying to throw these out. I'm just showing you how infiltrated the people of God have become with the traditions of men. The tragedy of it all is that it clutters the life. Oh, for the uncluttered life, for the simple life, and only what God plants, and only that's within. That's the Christian life He wants. How simple it would be, and how wonderful it would be if God would root up everything He hadn't planted. May He do it!

Table grace is a tradition of man. It's not mentioned in the Bible. Midweek prayer service is a tradition of man. Meeting in special buildings, Sunday school, quiet time, passing offering plates, having creeds and constitutions, getting married in a church by elders and by pastors, confirmation, choirs, Bible Schools, seminaries, ordination by men, church membership, door to door witnessing—all of these don't have a thread of scripture to back them up. Faith promise plans, designated giving, board meetings, election of officers, all kinds of programs, revivals, open air meetings, retreats, conferences, pastors candidating for position, Christian funerals, mission boards, deputation—are you getting the idea?—courting certain liturgies, prayers, being very quiet in certain rooms in holy buildings (whatever they are). All of that has been handed down by someone, usually for a good reason, and none of it touches essential life. That's the danger of it. It's not planted by God, and if it doesn't come from within, it's leaven, and it's to be watched out for.

Tradition is not in itself sin, but it can become sin. When does it become sin? Let's look. Matthew 15:3, *"And He answered and said to them, 'Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition, for God said, 'Honor your father and your mother, and he who speaks evil of father and mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever shall say to his father and mother, "Anything of mine by which you might have been helped has been given to God. He is not to honor his father and mother," thus you have invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.'"*

Let me show you the illustration Jesus uses, and then give you the principle. These Pharisees had a word they called "corbin". They would go over their possessions, money or whatever it was, and if they blessed it with the word "corbin", it was dedicated to God, and it could never be used for anything but God. Some of these Pharisees liked the idea because they were the distributors of God's money. They were the priests. That was a good idea; they would just dedicate everything, and now they are the distributors of it, so they don't really get rid of it. They still have it, but they just say corbin over it. Now, their mothers and fathers are in hard financial straits, and the Bible says to honor your father and your mother. They said, "Well, we'd sure help you out, mom and dad, but we said corbin over our money, and we can't give you any of that money because it's the Lord's money. Sorry about that, folks."

He points out that when your tradition causes you to transgress a commandment of God, and God said to honor your parents, and to honor your parents is to support them financially, if you don't do that, you've sinned. That is a great Bible passage, by the way, against putting your folks in a nursing home, or something like that. Timothy also teaches about that. It's the child's responsibility to take care of his aged parents. It's not even a question among the Christian.

When the tradition goes against the commandment of God, the tradition becomes a sin. Let me illustrate that. Children love the simple life, as God loves it. He loves to plant His life in the soul, and let it come out from the soul, and permeate. It will touch the external by and by, but it begins on the inside. When you begin on the outside, you can find yourself working against the purposes of God. Let me give you some traditions that can become sin because they transgress the commandment of God. Here's the tradition that I mentioned in the other list; all kinds of meetings, like the one you are at now. That's a meeting, and it's a tradition of men. All kinds of home fellowships, Bible studies, prayer meetings, visitation programs, all kinds of banquets and work days, Christian service opportunities, whether it's open air evangelism or door to door visitation, or prison work, or child evangelism, or nursing home, or whatever it is. All kinds of meetings are traditions. As you know, you can be meeting-ed to death, and sometimes told that we should be present every time the door opens.

Now watch! How can you transgress the commandment of God by meetings? If you have a wife, husband, children, family, or other responsibilities, and you spend all your time at meetings—traditions—and you fail in your responsibility, you have used the tradition to transgress the commandment of God. Some parents would be far more spiritual if they watched their children in the school play, or watched them play Little League baseball, or just played games around the house, or just stayed at home, than they would be going to prayer meetings or Bible study, and a lot of the other meetings. If you neglect your responsibilities, the clear commandment of God, by tradition, even though it's a good religious tradition, then your tradition becomes a sin. Beware of it.

The same thing is true, for example, about quiet time. Of course, there is a positive effect about having a habitual time where you get together

in God's word every day. There's nothing wrong with that; it's glorious! I wish more Christians would do it. But in some cases it could transgress the commandment of God. How so? Well, if it cuts into your health, for example, it's wrong. I know in one case, one Christian brother, it didn't matter how late he had to work, and what his responsibilities were, who rose every day at 4 am to spend time with God. He'd be better off sleeping. He needs sleep. That's the commandment of God. God has provided that. You can sin against God studying your Bible when God wants you to sleep. It doesn't sound spiritual, but that's the simple life; what God plants, and what God puts in is essential life.

God has given a commandment about a generous heart. He's told us to be sensitive to the needs of those around us. Storehouse tithing is a tradition of man. It doesn't have a foundation in the Bible. That verse in Malachi has nothing to do with how it's interpreted today. Some people always give their money in the same place. They support a certain ministry, or a certain church. They may transgress the commandment of God by doing that. If there is a brother or sister in need, I can't say that I've given it all to the church, all to the ministry. It's a wonderful tradition, if it doesn't transgress a commandment of God. That's why we walk in the Spirit. That's why it's what God plants, and what comes out naturally. That's the Christian life, and not following all these rules.

I love to read books. I appreciate that the Lord has given me more and more books. But if there ever comes a time where the books of men, the ideas of men, the interpretations of men ever substitutes the commandment that we must be taught of God, that the Spirit of God is our teacher, then I hope God destroys my library. And I mean that! May God remove it if it ever comes in between my heart relationship with God, and being taught by the Spirit of God!

The Lord's Day is designed to be a day of rest and worship. That's why He gave it. For thousands of Christians it's not a day of rest and worship. Fact is that it's a day of bondage and ulcers. Lillian said one morning on the Lord's Day, "This day of rest is not everything it's cracked up to be!" Sometimes you have to wake up running on the Lord's Day, and you get into a fever to get to the first gathering, and you're screaming at the kids to get ready, and you're frustrated waiting

to get into the bathroom for your own turn. Sometimes we're critical as we sit in the place of worship, listening to the message, and then we sigh with relief when it's all over. It's a day of traditions, and nothing was planted by God that came from within. How often the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Book and the people of the Lord have become traditions, and stood in the way!

Christmas is a tradition. There's nothing in the Bible about that. It's not wrong to celebrate Christmas, if it doesn't transgress the commandments of God. I know in my own life that Christian stewardship takes a beating at Christmastime, and Christian liberty takes a beating around Christmastime, and temperance takes a beating in my life. Traditions can get in the way; they don't need to. I think that's enough to give you an idea what the Lord Jesus was saying. He was teaching His disciples that He wanted them to grasp essential life, simple life, life from above, life from the heart, life from within. Everything that is not from above, and not from within is leaven. It's to be watched, and it's dangerous, and there is a warning that it can even become sin, if it contradicts the commandment of God.

He wanted them to know a third thing, and it's a precious thing; that all non-essential life He would deal with in His own time and way. Once again, verses 13 & 14, *"He answered and said, 'Every plant which My Heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up. Let them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. If a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into the pit."* Jesus knew that this principle of heart living was very radical, and would go against the grain, and would be a hard message for His disciples to lay hold of.

Notice Matthew 15:2, When the Pharisees came they said, *'Why do you disciples transgress,'"* (notice that word), *"'the tradition of the elders?'"* If would be natural for a Christian to try to compromise a little, and soft peddle his stand on tradition, to speak carefully so that you wouldn't offend anybody. But verse 2 is very bold. These people came right out and said, *"Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders."* They didn't say "neglect". It would be one thing to say, "Boy, they are neglecting it," but they said, "You disciples are deliberately and purposely, by an act of their will they are refusing our traditions." You would expect Jesus to say, "Come on, fellows, don't misunderstand. They aren't really against your traditions. They are

just trying to emphasize the more important thing; the heart." He could have said that, but He didn't. He admitted it, "Yes, you are right, they are transgressing your traditions, but you also are transgressing, and it's not tradition. You're transgressing the commandment of God."

Jesus came out and spoke for His disciples, and put them in a very precarious position. He said, "Yes, they have chosen to go against your dumb traditions." He didn't say "dumb", but He said, "Yes, they have chosen. They're not neglecting it. They didn't forget. They deliberately went against it because I'm training them in the uncluttered life. I'm training them in the simple life, the life from within." I expect as you grow in the Lord from the inside out, that you'll be increasingly delivered from tradition. I expect as I grow, that will be happening over and over again. I warn you against all tradition. It's all leaven. I warn you against the tradition that goes against the commandments of God. That's sin. That's more than leaven. That's leaven brought to its fruition. It's poison.

I encourage you before God, and I don't care how simple it is, if you only have two things in your life, don't settle for anything more than what He plants, and what comes from within. I don't care how simple that makes you. If you only know one thing, it's enough; just what He plants, and what comes from the heart, and don't be afraid to admit it. Don't be afraid to say, as they did, "Yes, we are transgressing your traditions. Yes, we don't like it. We've been burned by it. No, we don't want it. Thanks, anyway. Keep your programs. Keep your tradition. Keep your own ideas. We don't want them. I know you need them. I know they sound religious to you. I know you think I'm backsliding, but I don't care. I am transgressing your traditions by a deliberate, bold, straight forward act of my will. I hate tradition. Don't be afraid to say it. That's what Jesus said. "Your disciples transgress our traditions." He said, "Yes, they do. I've taught them to do that." And He continues to teach us to do that.

Notice how nervous the disciples got in verse 12. The disciples came and said to Him, *"Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?"* See, they didn't like it. The disciples were scared to death because they were a minority, a remnant, a handful, and Jesus was pushing to the place where they went against the majority, and they had to swim against the tide, and spit into the wind. Jesus put

them on a spot, and they said, "Don't you know that they don't like this? Don't you know they are offended with this? Lord, if we go against tradition, don't you know we're going against the whole framework of religious thinking?" And He said, "Yes, I know that. So what!" Verse 13, *"He said, 'Every plant that My Heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up.'"* All that is not essential life, Jesus said, "I'm going to destroy it one day anyway. Tradition will not survive. Tradition will die. I'm going to root up tradition."

All the programs that He didn't plant, and all the ministries that He didn't plant, and all the Christian service that He didn't plant, and all the behavior in our lives that He didn't plant, it's all going to be rooted up. If God didn't plant it, it will not survive and won't live. And I don't care if prophets stand up with their pretended visions and prophesies, and it doesn't matter if martyrs die for it, and scholars write books about it, and time endears it, and kings guard it. He that sits in the heavens shall live and have them in derision. Whatever He has not planted He is going to grab that thing, and I don't care how big the stock is, like a cedar needs to be ripped up by the roots. It will not survive, and may God do that in our lives now! I just trust that He'll take everything in our lives that He hasn't planted, and tears it up by the roots! It God opens our mouth, Satan can't shut it. But if Satan opens our mouth, may God shut it. May God root up everything that is not of Him!

There's great hope in that word, "All that is not essential life will be rooted up." Not only should we not be afraid to admit it, "I hate tradition," we should not be afraid that people will be offended when we go against their tradition. So what! But He anticipated the possibility of His disciples taking an opposite view. They might get too brave, and say, "I hate tradition, and I don't want anything to do with it, and anyone who teaches it I've got to shut him up." They might try to shut the mouths of the legalists and the humanists. So, He says in verse 14, "Let them alone. Don't you try to deal with them. I'll rip them up. Whatever your Heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up, but don't you root them up. You don't have to fight legalism or humanism. I'll do that." Every system that He hasn't planted, and it's not only religious; He's going to root up communism, too. It's not our responsibility. Let them alone.

You don't need to defend yourselves. The disciples didn't have to do a thing. Jesus did it all. We don't need to be ashamed and afraid, and we don't need to think that we have to overthrow the enemy "They transgress the commandments." He said, "Yes, they did. And we don't care about your traditions." Let them alone. You just live the simple life, that life that God plants that comes from the heart, and beware of the possibilities that you are giving lip service. May God deliver us from that! The principles are simple. Essential life is from above, and from within. All that is not essential life is leaven, and all that is not essential life, the Heavenly Father will uproot one day.

There's a precious revelation of the Lord Jesus in this passage. The way He dealt with the Pharisees and Sadducees is in contrast with the way He dealt with His disciples. Remember that he's using them as an object lesson, and is teaching His disciples. The way He dealt with the Pharisees and Sadducees was hard and strict. Matthew 15:7, *"You hypocrites."* Matthew 16:4, *"Evil and adulterous generation."* But the disciples were weak and trembling, they were foolish, they were babes, they were backward, and they were awkward. Look how patient He is. Matthew 15:10, *"And He called to Himself the multitude and He said to them, 'Hear and understand.'"* He called them to understand. But the disciples are slow, so in verse 15 Peter answers and says to Him, *"Explain the parable to us." He said, "Are you still without understanding? You still don't understand it, Peter?"* So, He explains it again. Matthew 16:6, *"And Jesus said to them, 'Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' And they began to discuss it among themselves and said, 'It's because we have not bread.' But Jesus, aware of this, said, 'You men of little faith; why do you discuss among yourselves because you have no bread. Do you not yet understand? I'll explain again."* Verse 11, *"Why is it that you don't understand?"* They still don't understand. Then in verse 12 they understood.

Isn't this amazing, how He deals with disciples! The way he dealt with the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Bible says He walked away. For His disciples He says, "Here's what I want you to learn; essential life from within," and they didn't get it. And he said, "Don't you understand? It's this," and He explained it, and they still didn't get it. He said, "Look, it's right here," and they didn't get it. It took five times, and then they understood. He'll always come back a second, a third time,

and a fourth time, until verse 12 is true in your life, *"Then they understood."* Praise God for that! It's doesn't matter how long it takes. He'll deal with you until you get it. Don't feel dumb and stupid going to the Lord and saying, "I still don't think I have this. I'm still having trouble with rest, and I don't understand being crucified. What does it mean to reckon? I still don't get it, though I've tried." He'll explain it again, and again, until the light goes on in your heart, and you understand, and then He's planted it in your heart, and it will come out of your heart, and whatever the Lord hasn't planted will be rooted up. That's the second great principle. He wanted to teach union, and He wanted to teach them this kind of inner life; heart life, Spirit life, real life, essential, life from above, and life from within.

4

THE FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN & THE FEEDING OF THE FOUR THOUSAND

Matthew 15:21-39, *"Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely demon-possessed.' But He did not answer her with even a word. And His disciples came up and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us!' But He answered and said, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!' Yet He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' And she said, 'Yes, Lord; but please help, for even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus said to her, 'O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed at once. Departing from there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee, and after going up on the mountain, He was sitting there. And large crowds came to Him bringing with them those who were limping, had impaired limbs, were blind, or were unable to speak, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. So the crowd was astonished as they saw those who were*

unable to speak talking, those with impaired limbs restored, those who were limping walking around, and those who were blind, seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. Now Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, 'I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.' The disciples said to Him, 'Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?' And Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves do you have?' And they said, 'Seven, and a few small fish.' And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full. And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan."

Great faith is not a humble view of yourself

What did Jesus mean in chapter 15:28, *"Oh, woman, your faith is great?"* There's only two times, as far as the record goes, that the Lord Jesus said "great faith". Both times He was talking about gentile faith. He called it "great"; the Centurion's faith in Luke 7 and Mathew 8, *"You have great faith. I haven't seen great faith like this in Israel."* And then we have this Syrophoenician woman. Jesus also marveled at unbelief. He always marveled at gentile faith and Jewish unbelief. I'm certain that the Lord Jesus used this to shame his disciples, contrasting gentile faith with Jewish unbelief, calling it "great faith".

Wouldn't you also like the Lord to say about you, "Oh, your faith is great."? What constitutes great faith from this context? Let me share with you what I think the Spirit of God intends by that expression. In order to catch the real heart of what is before us, let me begin by going through the story, and showing you what it isn't; what great faith is not, because sometimes, if we read it in a surface way, we'll misunderstand what thrilled the heart of Christ here. We'll look at just the facts and say, "Oh, that's what it was; that's great faith," and then tragically try

to reproduce that in our own life, and just end up in a lot of bondage. What is great faith that is illustrated here?

Let's begin with what it's not. I'll state them as principles, so that we can get into the heart of it. Great faith is not a humble view of yourself. That's not great faith. That's not what He is admiring here. You read the record here, this woman certainly had a humble view of herself; a low view of herself. Let me illustrate that in a couple of ways, because her attitude was exactly the opposite of what we call "ego", and pride and self. Matthew 15:25, *"And she began to bow down."* If you look at the margin of the New American Standard it says "worship." It's a very strong word in the Greek.

There are six different words for "worship" in the Greek. The word "worship" comes from two words. One is a direction toward the cross. That one means to kiss. Real worship is to kiss toward, to kiss toward God, to have your whole life and the direction of your life just kissing God. That's worship; real worship. The other five words that are sometimes translated worship all mean false gods; they worship Baal and Asherah. Another one means to honor. It's a weak word. Another one means to serve. Another one means to act piously. And then the one that's used for the Pharisees means outward ceremony. Jesus didn't use those words. Here He used the word "to kiss toward". He used the strong word for worship, that which you do when you are in love with God, and you are worshipping God, in the sense of falling down in reverence and in praise. That's what she did. This gentile woman came and fell down at the feet of the Lord Jesus, and worshipped Him. This is a humble act.

Notice Matthew 15:26-27, *"And He answered and said, 'It's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' And she said, 'Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table.'"* Her attitude of being humble was revealed again when she acknowledged His estimate of her. In this passage Jesus compared her to a dog. It's true He didn't use the strong Greek word for dog. There are two words for dog; one is a pet, a child's pet, the kind you would have around the house, a little dog. It's not a strong word. The word the Pharisees used for dogs was the other word, the low marauding half wolf dog, a vicious kind of a thing that is not trained in any way, not domestic. Jesus didn't use that word. He didn't

say, "You are just like a half wolf." He just said, "You are like a puppy dog, like a pet." Still, He refers to her as a dog, and what is her response? She doesn't get indignant and say, "I didn't come here to be insulted. You don't have to call me a dog. I may be low, but I'm not going to crawl. I don't have to beg. I have a problem, and I came to you, and I think it's reasonable that we sit down and talk about it, but you don't have to say that I'm a dog." That wasn't her response.

In verse 27, *"Yes, Lord, yes Lord."* She agreed with that comparison. There is a lot to admire in this woman. She has a glorious attitude of self-depreciation. She has a low opinion of herself. She comes as a gentile, as a Syrophoenician, a Greek, and outside the camp. She bows down with a real heart attitude, kissing toward God. She falls down at His feet. He says, "I can't give the children's bread to dogs." And she said, "That's right. I'm a dog. That's true, Lord." She pictures herself as a sinner under the table, a little dog, a Canaanite Syrophoenician, and a woman, a woman with a demon possessed daughter. She didn't defend herself. She just came meek and humble, and bowed down at the feet of Christ. As praise worthy as that is, that's not great faith. That's not what impressed the Lord Jesus, and it's not what He's talking about in this context. Some may say if I say, "I'm just a dog, and I'm no good, and I'm humble, and I bow down before God, that's great faith." No, it isn't; not even close. That's not great faith, and that's not what He's talking about in the context.

Great faith is not determination and perseverance

I'm convinced when the Spirit of God recorded this story, when Jesus was so moved in His heart with this great faith and it blessed His heart, it was not her perseverance. It was not her determination. This woman had a desperate kind of a faith. She refused to be deterred. When you read the record you have to think, "I would have been discouraged a long time before we got to the end of this section. Great faith must be perseverance; refusing to be refused; refusing to be blocked. This woman had so many hurdles thrown at her, it's amazing she kept going, but she jumped over every hurdle, broke down every obstacle, knocked down every wall."

Some people may reason (I'm not saying it's true) we have weak faith because the slightest little thing will turn us back; they would have

come to God, but a hypocrite got in the way, so they just say, "I give up now. I'm not going to come to God because there are hypocrites in the church," so he stops seeking the Lord. Or someone else comes to a Bible difficulty, "I can't believe that! Great day, I know where Cain got his wife." And they find a little Bible difficulty, and they say, "I'm all finished with that. I tried Christianity." Or else they see some inconsistency in a person's life, a Christian, "You call that a Christian. No way. I'm done with that!" They get blocked along the way.

Well, watch this woman. She was clearly not like that. It almost appears as if the Lord Jesus was deliberately trying to discourage this woman. I know better from the nature of God. He'll test faith, but He won't discourage it. I think He's just drawing it out here. But it looks like He's trying to hinder her. Let me give you a couple of blocks she had to face. When this woman came to Christ, she came against religious and racial prejudice. Verse 22, *"Behold, a Canaanite woman came from that region."* She was a Canaanite, and that whole nation was under the curse of God. Syrophoenician means she was a Phoenician in the district of Syria. In was in the suburbs of Tyre and Sidon where God had put such great judgments. By race she was Syrophoenician, and by religion, according to Mark, she was Greek. Chances are that she had many gods in her background. Verse 23, try to get the impact of this, *"He did not answer her a word, and His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting after us."*

Put yourself in her shoes. She's desperate. Her daughter—she has a mother's heart—is grievously vexed with a demon. She has tremendous sorrow. She comes to the Lord Jesus, and His disciples, those in the inner circle now, those who are close to Christ, say to Jesus, *"Send her away."* How do you think she felt when she heard that? *"Send her away."* She cried after them. She knew they were prejudice, and they had the Jews in mind, and that Christ came only for the Jews, and not for the gentiles, and she was just a dog. That was their opinion of her. I think that's why Jesus called attention to that expression. *"Send her away."* That's great faith. She wasn't discouraged because she was Syrophoenician, or because she was Canaanite, or because she was Greek, or because she had a daughter that had a demon, or because she was a woman, or because the so-called spiritual leaders said to send her away. She kept coming, and she wouldn't be discouraged.

It's more than religious prejudice that discouraged her. Matthew 15:22, *"And behold, a Canaanite woman came up from that region and began to cry out saying, 'Have mercy on me, oh Lord, son of David. My daughter is cruelly demon possessed."* Now look at this next phrase, *"But He did not answer her a word,"* nothing, silence. What an agony for a mother's heart; didn't say a word; didn't say yes and didn't say no, but just ignored her, deliberately ignored her. When somebody ignores you, when they don't have the decency, the sympathy to at least speak, even if they say, "Go away and don't bother us," at least they said something, but to pour out your heart to say "I have this great problem; can you help me?" and then there's nothing, deliberate silent, and never answer a word—that can make pride awfully angry and awfully bitter. This is happening to this woman. She was being blocked every time she turned around. Everything was against her. I suppose she drew some hope from silence. I know in our family we were grown up in that human proverb, "No news is good news." Maybe she had that in mind, "He didn't say yes, and didn't say no, so maybe there's still some hope." But she had these obstacles against her; her nationality, her religion, her background, her problem, the disciples being prejudice against her, their attitude, and the silence of the Lord Jesus.

After that, when Jesus finally did break the silence, look at what He said, Matthew 15:24, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* That's all you need to hear. Because you were born in the wrong place, because you are a gentile, and now what He finally does, He speaks a word that sounds like it's in the exact opposite direction of any aid or assistance or help for your own soul. Then He speaks again, verse 26, *"It's not good to take the children's bread, and throw it to the dogs."* You have to wonder if that's the Lord Jesus. He's got something in mind, but oh what a test He drags her through!

It must have wounded her spirit with all those obstacles, but she's not driven back by prejudice, and she's not driven back by silence, and she's not driven back by exclusion, and she's not driven back by anything. She will not be discouraged, even when He calls her a dog. That can be interpreted as being insulting, "Didn't come for you. Came for the Jews." She had a desperation that wouldn't quit. She had importunity, which means to keep coming; knocking and knocking, seeking and seeking, asking and asking. When I read this I must admit

to you that is very praise worthy. When I see a sinner like this that keeps coming and coming, and won't be turned back for anything—if she's insulted or cast out—she refuses to take refusal. She keeps on coming. Some might say that no wonder Jesus said, *"Great is thy faith."* I suggest that has nothing to do with faith. Whatever great faith is, it is not that no matter what gets in the way, you keep on coming, and don't let any obstacle get in your way, and go right through it, like the people who tore down the roof because the crowd was pressing. No, that's not great faith. Great faith is not being humble and picturing yourself as nothing, like a dog. Great faith is not overcoming every obstacle until you end up at Jesus' feet. That's not great faith.

Great faith is not unselfish intercession for someone else

What is it? Someone else looks at the records and says, "I see what it is. It's unselfish intercession. She's not coming for herself; she's coming for someone else." Matthew 15:22, *"Behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and began to cry out saying, 'Have mercy on me, oh Lord, son of David, my daughter is cruelly demon possessed."* She's not coming for herself. She was interceding to the Lord Jesus on behalf of someone else. Even though in verse 22 she says, *"Have mercy on me,"* and even though in verse 25 she says, *"Lord, help me,"* she's still coming for somebody else. She has her daughter, who was so very needy. They say that's what makes faith great. She's not only bold and unashamed, but also persevering on behalf of another; pouring herself out like this, not for herself but for someone else; ruled with compassion. That's what real faith is; a missionary heart, and coming for others. Again, I don't believe that's why Jesus said, "Great faith."

Great faith is having a large view of Jesus

What caused Jesus to say, *"Oh, woman, your faith is great!"?* What was He seeing? Why did He say it, and what did He have in mind? This conversation comes after her statement in verse 27, *"She said, 'Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'"* Then Matthew 15:28 begins, *"Then Jesus answered and said, 'Oh woman, great is your faith."* It was something about the statement that the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table;

there was something in there that revealed to the Lord Jesus the greatness of her faith.

I believe it can be summarized in this simple statement, if you look at her words and actions, she had a large view of the Lord Jesus. For example, in spite of the fact that she was a gentile, verse 22 says, *"Oh Lord, son of David."* And when she said, *"Oh Lord,"* she saw His power, His dominion and His government, and she knew that He had the power right then to cast a demon out of His daughter from a distance without seeing her, and without touching her. That's some view of Christ. When she said *"son of David",* she was just embracing the Old Testament record, saying, "He's Messiah. He's the One that was promised to come." In verse 25 when she bowed down before Him and worshipped Him, she saw Him as very God, the object of her worship, and toward Him she kissed. It's a tremendous view of God.

It's her statement in verse 27 that so moved the heart of the Lord Jesus, *"The dogs feed from the crumbs that fall from the master's table."* Her view of the Lord Jesus Christ was so great that she saw all she needed for her and her daughter's desperate case was just a couple of crumbs of mercy. Her vision of Him was so great that she didn't need the whole loaf. All she needed was a crumb, and if the crumb came from His table, that was enough; that's plenty. "That will meet my need, and my daughter will be free, and the demons of hell will have to run away."

There's a difference between superstructure and foundation. Now watch. It was her full view of Christ, so big and so powerful and so able to deliver, that made her humble. Humility is not great faith. Great faith produces humility. That's what made her humble. Seeing Jesus was her great faith; having a great view of Him. She saw Him, and then she saw herself. That's why she could admit, "I'm a dog." She didn't have to work that up. It's not possible to have a high view of God and a high view of yourself at the same time. That's not possible. You don't have to work on a low view of yourself. Just see Jesus as He is. When you see Jesus as He is, you'll begin to see yourself. The greater your view of God, the more accurate your view of yourself, and it won't be long before you are a puppy under the table. It won't be long before you say, Isaiah 6:5, *"Depart from me, oh Lord. I'm a sinful man."* Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, and He said, *"I'm undone. I'm a leper of unclean lips, and I dwell in a leper colony."*

Same thing was true of all the saints when they saw the Lord. They fell down at His feet as dead men. When we see Him in His all sufficiency, then we'll take our place as dogs. One grows out of the other. Proud people don't need to be humbled. Proud people need to see Jesus. Seeing Jesus makes them humble. They'll see themselves after they see the Lord. All of this foolish psychological victory that goes around in Christianity these days, Christian psychologists saying, "Self-analysis is the way to go; it down in the corner, and look in your heart, and try to discover your problem, and then when you discover your problem, give it to Jesus." The problem is that we have no more ability to discover our problem than we do to solve it. We can't look in our hearts. Psalm 139:23, *"Search me, oh God, and know my heart."* Let God do the searching. You just keep seeing Jesus.

Just so, it was her revelation of Christ, her view of how great He was that kept her persevering. That's why you don't see her give up, because she had a great view of God. It was her view of Christ that kept her going, and that kept her hoping against the odds. If you had just a slight view of God, if her God were just an inch high, she would have given up at the first turn when somebody went against her, and she would have said, "Oh, forget it." In five minutes she would have given up, and she would have despaired when she was rebuked by the disciples. These were Godly men, and they said, "Send her away," and she would have said, "Alright, have it. Keep your own religion. I'm gone." She saw God, and it didn't matter what Christians said, or what the disciples said, or how they treated her or didn't treat her, or how they tried to offend her, or didn't offend her, how sensitive they were. Because of her view of God, she just kept on going.

A great view of Jesus is what great faith is. Everything in your life depends on your view of God. Everything you are and do and will be, depends on your vision of God. Therefore, there's nothing more important in your life than to keep seeing God. Nothing matters except who He is, and knowing Him as He is. When you begin to see Him, nothing will get in your way; every obstacle that the enemy puts in your path, you'll just keep on going. Perseverance is not great faith. Seeing Jesus is great faith, and those who have a full God, and whose whole landscape of their life is filled with the revelation of Christ, are going to persevere to the end, and are going to keep on keeping on, and are going to go right on through. With a great view of God, when you are

discouraged along the way by the silence of God, taking the facts from the story, you don't say, "Oh, I might as well give up," or by the desperate situation say, "Oh, this is too tough. I've got a demon possessed daughter," or become discouraged by so-called unconcerned and unloving children of God saying, *"Send her away."* You're not going to throw in the towel, no matter what anybody says or does.

If anything anybody says or does to you or about you, affects your walk with God, even a little bit, you have a spiritual problem, and not them. You do. God wants to put us in a soundproof pavilion, in the glory of His presence, from the stripe of tongues. He wants to lock us in to His presence, so that nothing anybody does or says can ever affect our relationship and walk with God. Great faith is humble alright, but humility is not great faith. Great faith is humble. Great faith is also persevering, but perseverance is not great faith. Great faith is seeing Jesus; a high view of Christ. That will make you humble, and that will make you persevering. You see where I'm heading.

Intercession/missionary vision comes from a revelation of a full Christ

It's also your view of Jesus that makes you an affective intercessor for others. Some people think God is impressed by those who are always witnessing and soul winning and evangelizing and interceding for the lost. Missionary vision is not the same as missionary interest. They have a new thing nowadays. They'll grab the young people for the summer and they'll drop them on a mission field, and try to make them missionary minded, and try to put the burden in their heart by getting a firsthand look at the scene. Or else you go to a church someplace, and they'll throw a screen up and slides, and you'll see some natives marching, and then you are supposed to be moved with missionary compassion. No, that's missionary interest. And you may have missionary interest, but missionary vision is an outworking of a revelation of Christ. When I see Him I'll have missionary vision.

To further catch the spirit of the passage, let me show the contrast between this woman's faith and the disciples' faith. Notice in verse 15:28, *"great faith."* Matthew 14:31 comes before it, and Matthew 16:8 comes after it. Matthew 14:31, *"Oh you of little faith."* And then

Matthew 16:8 says, *"You men of little faith."* He looks at His disciples and says, "Oh, you of little faith. You men of little faith. Oh, woman, you have great faith." He's contrasting the great faith of the gentiles with the little faith of those who live closest, at least in proximity, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1st contrast between the disciples and the woman— the loaf and the crumbs

Let me show you two contrasts that He makes between this woman and the disciples. The first is the contrast between the loaf and the crumbs. In Matthew 15:26 He talks about the children's bread, *"It's not good to take the children's bread."* The word is loaf, *"The children's loaf, and cast it to the dogs."* It's not an accident that this event is followed by the feeding of the four thousand. Jesus is trying to teach them something here. When you look at verse 34, "Jesus said, *'How many loaves do you have?'* And they said *'seven*.'" The disciples were thinking, "What are these among so many? Seven loaves? That's not enough. There are four thousand people here." You see, they were prejudice. They only had a small group; just the Jews. That's all they thought about, that the children's bread belongs to the Jews, not everybody. Jesus asks, "How many loaves do you have? You just saw this woman, and I said, 'Great is your faith with just one crumb.'" Now watch. This woman broke the boundaries that Christ was a Savior for the Jews. She came as a gentile in the land of condemnation, in the suburbs of Tyre and Sidon, and they said, "Seven loaves is not enough for all the Jews." She said, "One crumb is enough; the leftovers is enough for all the ends of the earth; for the gentiles, and that's all I need." What a contrast this is! She saw the all-sufficiency of Christ.

2nd contrast between the disciples and the woman—the physical and the spiritual

Look at Matthew 15:24. There's a second contrast the Lord gives. The disciples could only see the physical, and not the spiritual. In verse 24 the Lord Jesus said, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* It's amazing how this passage has been abused, beaten down and misinterpreted. All through the Bible in God's mind there were two Israels. There was physical Israel, with the blood descendants of

Abraham, and then there was spiritual Israel, with faith's descendants of Abraham; the father of all who believe. In that sense, Galatians, and Romans and other passages call Christians *"children of Israel", "sons of Abraham."* Paul said, *"They are not all Israel who are of Israel. Those who are of faith are of their father Abraham."*

The disciples could never see beyond Mt. Zion, and all they saw was the physical geography, "Christ came for the Jews." When they said to Him, *"Send her away,"* they had in their mind that she was a gentile dog. "You have nothing to do with her, Jesus. You didn't come for her. Send her away." It looks like Jesus is backing them up when He says, "I didn't come but for lost sheep of the house of Israel." But notice how verse Matthew 15:24 begins, with the word *"but"*. They said, "Send her away," and He says, "Send her away? She's the reason I came. I came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

I told you that He was instructing His disciples. He considered this Canaanite a heart Jew. She was one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It didn't matter that she was a Canaanite, and it didn't matter that she was a Syrophoenician, that she was a Greek. It only mattered that her heart was kissing toward God, that she worshipped Him, and that she had a large view of Christ. He said, "What do you mean to send her away? It's for her that I came. She's a Jew. She's a heart Jew," implied, "You are not Jews with your little faith. You trace your ancestors back to some tribe, and show some scar on your body to prove you've been circumcised. Where is the circumcision of the heart? She is a Jew." In those two ways He contrasts her with the disciples. What an illustration this is that grace makes the difference; not place; that grace makes the difference, not race (might as well throw in not face, either). Grace makes the difference.

Why does the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand follow this miracle of the healing of this Syrophoenician's daughter? I believe, as I illustrated before, that the Lord Jesus is instructing His disciples. They are in training. Matthew 15:37 & 38, *"And they all ate, and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces; seven large basketsful, and those who ate were four thousand men besides women and children."* The chapter ends up with everybody full, and the disciples holding seven baskets, large baskets, of broken pieces. KJV says in Mark they were *"fragments"*. You have an

italicized word there in the KJV which means that it's not in the original Greek. And in Matthew all it says is this, *"Seven baskets of broken*." That's all it says: of broken.

Let me give the essence of the word *"fragments",* pieces, broken. They had seven baskets of what? Crumbs. That's the point, and that's why He ends it that way. Do you see what He is saying? Here is a woman who saw that Jesus was so great, that one crumb was enough for the ends of the earth. These disciples couldn't see beyond their noses. They had loaves and they said, "Still not enough; what are we going to do?" Jesus feeds everybody, and they're standing there holding seven baskets of crumbs, and then He walks away. What an object lesson! He's training them; He's teaching them.

In light of all we've said, it's easier to answer, "If great faith is a great view of God, guess what little faith is?" If great faith is a large view of God, then you know what little faith is; it's a small view of the Lord Jesus. Notice Matthew 16:6, *"Jesus said to them, 'Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,' and they began to discuss among themselves saying, 'It's because we took no bread.' And Jesus, aware of this, said, 'You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I do not speak to you concerning bread?"* Now watch, He says, *"Oh, you of little faith, how is it that you don't understand?"* He ties in faith with understanding. "Oh, you of little faith; don't you see? Don't you understand? Don't you perceive? Don't you have insight? Don't you have revelation?" That's what He's saying.

The more you see God, the greater your faith is. It's not like a plant, so that today it's this, and tomorrow it's this, and then it's this. Your faith doesn't grow. Your faith is a direction of your heart, and as you see Christ, the greater your Christ, the greater your faith. Little faith is no understanding. It's walking in darkness. It's not seeing God. It's not comprehending how great He is. You just can't say, "I'm going to decide today that God is big, and from now on I'll take Him out of my little box, and I'll just make Him big." You can't do that. God has got

to reveal Himself to your heart, and when God reveals Himself, then you have faith. Little faith is no understanding.

The last observation is this; this woman had great faith. She had a wonderful view of Jesus. According to the record it was her terrible affliction that brought her to Jesus. That demon possessed daughter she had, turned out to be a great blessing in her life and family. I project myself into her situation. That mother must have been sorely tried. She must have been tormented, too, because parents are tormented when their children are tormented, and they can't do anything about it. She had a lot of suffering in her life, that mother, and it was that trouble that brought her to Jesus. I close with that because I don't want you to get discouraged with whatever God is pleased to engineer in your life.

Psalm 119:71 says, *"It was good that I was afflicted."* Do you believe that, that it's good that I'm afflicted? If it brings you to Christ, it's good that you are afflicted. Anything that drives you to the Lord is nothing but good. It's ten thousand times better to be afflicted like this woman was afflicted, and be brought to Jesus, then to be at ease, like the rich young fool, and die without Christ. Trouble is a mighty blessing in the hand of God for good, to those who will come with an eye for Christ.

5

PETER'S REVELATION OF CHRIST

Matthew 16:13-28, *"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus Christ began to show 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 up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.' Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole*

world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will recompense every man according to his deeds. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.'"

Some so-called "problems" with this passage

When I was in Bible School I had a professor; Mr. Frank Sells. He named this principle for me, and I've been using it through the years. He called it the "indispensable principle". I'm talking about total reliance upon God's Holy Spirit. The disciples finally saw that truth. Once they saw that truth, there was no stopping them. That thrilled the heart of the Lord Jesus so much. That's the section we're looking at.

In order to get into the principle and discussion of this passage, let me make this comment about these verses. This is one of those, at least in the thinking of some, problem texts in scripture. This passage has suffered in the hands of men, and I think it's deliberately by the evil one. He doesn't want this passage out. I found this to be true of problem passages; #1 usually God's people are afraid of, and don't study them, because they've heard so many conflicting interpretations. I suppose the idea is that if the scholars can't agree, those who are supposed to know and claim they know disagree, where in the world do I come in; how am I supposed to understand God's word? I find that many people neglect problem passages.

The second thing I found is this—some problem passages aren't really the problem they appear to be on the surface. If you get the principle, generally there are common denominator principles, and I've found that many times, it's just semantics and words. People are just saying the same thing in different words, and it sounds like you disagree. Of course, the big thing I believe is this—that Satan loves to wreck strategic passages, especially passages that would wreck him, if he didn't wreck the passage. He is no fool. He wants to muddy up all the scriptures, but especially the passages which expose him, and expose the great workings of God, and would lead to liberty. He wants you to think that it's too profound for you, "Who are you? You can't

understand God's word. You aren't deep enough." I believe in many cases he has succeeded in veiling the truth. The simple hearted can understand it. It's only deep for the intelligent and sophisticated. It's simple for the child of God who comes in childlike faith.

I'm not saying that the whole Bible is simple to understand. I know there is mystery in every part of this book. It's the infinite word of the infinite God. We can't begin to touch the bottom of this, but I also know that the principles are crystal clear, and God can enlighten our heart to them. If there wasn't a beyond in the scripture, and it was just the size of our minds, then the Bible would prove itself a fraud. But the fact that it's infinite, and there's mystery just shows that it's inspired by God. I know this, that the principles in this section are not hidden things. They are revealed things, and they belong to us, and they belong to our children.

Fact is, it belongs to our peace, and we need to understand these things. I believe this passage scares Satan to death because it contains a truth so glorious, that he would never want the mass of Christians to understand the teaching here, because it would unmask one of his most brilliant counterfeits on the earth, and I'm talking about the church. This is the great reference on the church. Remember the first time anything is mentioned in the Bible, it's strategically important. This is the first mention of the church by name in the New Testament, and it contains all of the truths of the church. When you see this, it's as simple as pie, and you'll see why Satan wants this passage covered up.

The whole heart of the Lord Jesus has always been His people, His elect, His children, His church. His disciples didn't understand spiritual things. They were dull to all of this, and finally in this passage they see it. God has opened their eyes and they see it. Let me try to expound a little bit on this great passage. We're going to be looking, of course, at the truth of helpless dependence, but let me do what the Lord Jesus does. Let me take that truth in terms of the great teaching on the church. That's what He gives here. As we enter into this, we'll see the thrill of what gripped the heart of the Lord Jesus.

I'm going to use verse Matthew 16:18 as the text. Of course, we'll look at the context as it ties into that, *"I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will be build my church, and the gates of Hades shall*

not overpower it," or the gates of hell prevail against it. He gives you a definition of church, and then He gives two illustrations of how He's going to build His church; two characteristics of the true church.

It's God's church and He builds it on "rock" men

The first thing, and of course it's simple as pie, what is the church? The first thing that I see from this verse is that it's His; it's His church. He said, *"I will build My church."* Whatever else you read about the church in the whole Bible, nothing will be more basic than this; it's His church. In every way it's His, and He's going to have the responsibility for it. The second thing is this; He builds it, *"I will build My church."* Whatever else you read in the whole Bible about the church, it must include this, that it's His church, and that He's the one that builds it, because if He's not building it, and it's not His, it's not the church. How that ties into all the different programs on evangelism, and soul winning, and all the rest, is not really our purpose to discuss at this time. But I know this, that any program of church building or evangelism or soul winning that would contradict those two things—it's His church, and He's building it—is wrong, dead wrong.

I know God moves through men and methods at times, and I'm not suggesting that He'll build His church apart from human themes, but at the bottom of it all we've got to ask, "Is this really His work, is He the One building it, is it His church?" Because if it's not, it's going to be rooted up. An awful lot of what man calls church is going to be rooted up because it's not His, and He hasn't built it.

Let me share with you from this text what I know to be 100% certain. Some things in here are still puzzling my heart, but some things are 100% clear. If you begin with what is 100% clear, often you have enough to satisfy your soul, and you don't even care about the other things. Let me mention two things that are 100% clear. The first can be summarized, "The church that is His and that He builds is always built upon 'rock' men." There's never an exception to that. Now let me tell you from the context what a "rock" man is. In all the world, where the church of God is being built, He always builds on "rock" men.

The question that I long for the Holy Spirit to press home on our hearts is not about evangelism or missions or soul winning or witnessing or church building. He'll build His church, and it's not even about the purity of the church, and how to get rid of the leaven, and how to be holy. It's His church. That's His problem. He'll present it to Himself one day without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. He said He's going to do that. The question that I want the Spirit of God to press home on our heart is this, "Am I a 'rock' person? Can He build His church on me? Am I usable? Am I what He describes as a 'rock' person?"

A "rock" man is someone who knows Jesus is God

What is a 'rock' man; a 'rock' person? Let me give three characteristics according to this passage. The first can be summarized in these words, "A rock person is one who is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ; one who knows who Jesus is, one who knows God." The whole passage revolves around the question in verse 13, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* And the question in verse 15, *"And then He said to them, 'Who do you say that I am?'"* The church that's His, and the church He builds, is built upon people who know who He is. They are as clear as sun light in their knowledge of God in Christ. Other questions are not important; "What about missions, what about angels, what about gifts, what about the tribulation, what about anti-Christ, what about the confederation of ten?" Those aren't the right questions. *"Who do people say I am?"* The church that's His, that he builds, is concerned with who He is. That's His church.

Glance at Matthew 16:13-17, because here you have a whole course on what is called "hermeneutics". Hermeneutics just means "principle of interpreting the Bible". When you go to Bible school they make you take hermeneutics, and no Bible school likes another Bible school's hermeneutics. Everybody has their own hermeneutics. They are all interpreting the Bible through their own system. Here you have two systems of hermeneutics; *"Who do people say that I am?" "Oh Lord, there's many interpretations. Some say John the Baptist."* Even though he was dead at this time, the word was out by Herod Antipas that he was raised from the dead. He had a guilty conscience, if you remember. *"Some say Elijah."* Probably because that's the last prophecy in the Old Testament, before Christ would come, Elijah would come. *"Some*

say Jeremiah." I don't know why they said that, unless they saw in the man of sorrows, some reflection of the weeping Prophet. I don't know. *"Many interpretations, Lord. They all have different hermeneutics. Some say you are John the Baptist, some Elijah, some one of the prophets."* Each one, being diverse, was contradicting the other one.

These were His friends interpreting. These weren't His enemies. His enemies had another set of hermeneutics. They concluded that He was a glutton, and a wine bibber, and the lord of the flies, a man born of fornication, and a friend to sinners. They had their own interpretation. But these were the ones He was feeding, the ones He was healing, and the ones He was teaching. When He builds His church, the question is always, *"Who do people say that I am?"* "Okay, disciples, let's test yours. What are your hermeneutics?" Verse 15, and Peter answers in verse 16, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."* "I have a clear eye, Lord. I don't have to guess. I know who you are. You are Messiah: *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."*

A "rock" man knows who Jesus is by revelation from heaven

We read that "la, la, la." What an answer Peter gave; so profound, so simple, so absolutely right, so right on target. A "rock" man knows who Jesus is. Now watch—Peter got the right answer. Here's the second characteristic. A "rock" man not only knows who Jesus is, but he knows who Jesus is by the revelation from heaven. Peter got the right answer. His hermeneutics were accurate. He knew the Lord. How? Verse 17, *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is heaven.'"* A rock man not only knows who Jesus is, but He knows who Jesus is by God's revelation from heaven. He's heaven taught. That's the indispensable principle. You've got to get it from God.

There's only two systems of hermeneutics on the earth. One is flesh and blood, and one is my Father in heaven. That's it. One is earthly hermeneutics, and one is heavenly hermeneutics. The church that is His, and that He builds, is always built on those who have heavenly hermeneutics. Flesh and blood cannot reveal truth. Fact is, flesh and

blood can only resist. It can't reveal. The blindness of nature always resists the light of grace; always, and there's never an exception to that. There's an infinite difference between flesh and blood, and the revelation of God. This is one of the most necessary building blocks of Christianity. I want to spend a little time here because it's so basic.

I believe every Christian at one time or another has been burned by flesh and blood interpretation; flesh and blood hermeneutics. Flesh and blood hermeneutics are those who use the principles of nature, the principles of this world, the light of nature, and the force of reason, in order to know God, and understand the Bible. Let me illustrate, not from the worst of flesh and blood. There's an awful lot, like the agnostics and the destructive critics and the liberals, and the so-called atheists. They have their interpretation. I'm not talking about the enemies. I'm talking about the best of flesh and blood interpretation, the ones who specialize in discovery of truth. They're the students.

Sometimes we make this difference, and say, "Flesh and blood interpretation is head knowledge. Revelation from God is heart knowledge." That's simplistic, but that's what we're talking about; the difference between just having the facts, and having the facts written in your heart. Sometimes they use the expression, "Knowing God or knowing about God." That's also true, and that gives you the direction we're trying to head. Those who try to know God by flesh and blood, can be and are very often diligent students of the Bible. In many cases they have had formal training. They have great resource material. Maybe they've been to Bible school and seminary, and they've studied the great minds of church history, and have catalogued all of the so-called doctrines of scripture, and have compared systems of theology with each other, and they've studied the great confessions of those who have lived in the past, and they've formulated their creeds and charts and dogmas, and in most cases, if you looked at it, you could sign it. They are sound, are fundamental, and they are orthodox and evangelical. I'm not talking about the enemy. I'm talking about the child of God, who in his own way is hungering after the truth. He formulates a theology, a creed about God. God will never build His church on this. That's mediate knowledge; mediate perception. That's flesh and blood.

There's something out there, an organization that calls itself "the church". It's built on flesh and blood, on mediate knowledge. It's not His and He's not building it. It's not real. That's discovery of truth. That's a hermeneutics. God never, never, never builds His church, never has and never will, on those with head knowledge, on those who have mediate knowledge. The question is not "what do you know". The question is, yes "Who?", but also, "How did you come to know who you know?" Did you get it by study or by revelation of God in your heart, because if you know what you know mediately, then you have flesh and blood interpretation, and it won't do you any good, and God is not going to use it in His worldwide program of redemption. We've got to have it by revelation. He builds on rock men and rock men always have it by revelation.

Our hearts cry out, "Lord, what is revelation of truth? We want to be heaven taught. We don't want to miss that indispensable principle. We want the Spirit of God to turn the light on in our souls, to open our eyes and anoint us with eye salve, and to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ to our heart of hearts." In verse 17 the word *"revealed"* is the Greek word which means "to disclose or unveil", and it refers to a very special word which means "the immediate knowledge of God". Let me discuss what we mean by "immediate knowledge". We're talking about a sacred visitation of God in your real heart. We're not talking about something you get in a book. We're talking about God really, literally, meeting you, turning the light on in your heart, revealing Christ on the inside in a very personal and intimate way, where He makes your inside heart, your Spirit, the real you alive, to the Christ of God as He is in the Bible.

There's only one thing on the earth that I know of that illustrates the revelation of God in your heart. There may be others things, but I don't know of them. But there's one thing that does illustrate the kind of knowledge that God gives in your heart, and I'm talking about what the psychologists call "self-consciousness". I'll use Pat. Let me give this illustration; "Pat, do you know when you are happy? Do you know when you are sad? Do you know when you are angry? Do you know when you are excited? Do you know that because you went to school? Did you study that? Did you look up "excitement" in the dictionary, and then see if that was what you were having in your soul?" I'll tell you how Pat knows Pat. Pat knows Pat intuitively. He knows Pat because he's Pat, and that's how Pat knows Pat. He just knows; that's

how he knows. It's called "self-consciousness". I know it, not because I studied it, not because I read it in a book. I know because I know.

Paul said, *"Who among men knows the thoughts of a man, except the spirit of the man that is in him."* I know me immediately. Nobody has to tell me that I'm me. I wake up in the morning absolutely positive that I'm me. If there were forty seven Ed Miller clones, and I was in a line, and they all looked like me, I would know which one was me. I wouldn't even have to think about it. You might not know just by looking, because you don't have my spirit. No man knows the man except the spirit of the man that's in him. I know me because I'm me. If I could some way give you my spirit, then you'd have Ed-consciousness, and you'd know Ed, too. But I can't give you my spirit. I'm the only one that can have Ed-consciousness. I speak as a fool, just as I have Ed-consciousness, and I know me, and Pat knows Pat, and God knows Who He is, God is God-conscious. God knows God, the same way you know you, and I know me. God has a Spirit, and no man knows the mind of a man except the Spirit of the man that is in Him. God has a Spirit, and the Spirit searches the depths of God. I can't give you my Spirit, so that you can know me, but God has given us His Spirit, and we have the mind of Christ. That's what He means.

Just as I know because I'm me (self-consciousness), when He turns the light on, I know. How? Because I know. You have a revelation of God in your heart. It's that God consciousness, and it's called "revelation". You know it, not because you studied it, and not because they said it, and not because great scholars agree with it, and not because you studied Greek or Hebrew, but you know because God showed you, and no one can talk you out of that. Whatever arguments they use, you know and have that assurance. God told me I'm His child. I'm saved. I know I'm saved, and I know He's mine. I know we're one. I know He's with me. How do I know? Because it's written? No, that's not how you know. That's true; it's written, and praise God that's how I read it. I know He's with me because I have the revelation of God on that. He showed me that in my heart, and I don't care if they take that out of the Bible, it's still true. No one can take away the revelation. They can take away your doctrine, and take away your creed, and take everything everybody has said – what you've said and what you've enjoyed. They can steal your poetry and your

hymns, but anything God has written in your heart by revelation, you can't explain any more than I can tell you why I know I'm me.

Every truth in this Bible must be known immediately by the revelation of God, or you don't have the truth. Every truth, the thousands and thousands and thousands of principles, you don't get by hearing or by writing them down, or by experiencing them in life, or by hearing testimonies. You get them when God writes them in your heart; not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God on fleshly tablets of the heart. That's when you get it, and when you don't get it that way, you don't get it. It's by divine illumination, and not by observation, and not by wisdom, and not by study, and not by scholarship. Flesh and blood does not reveal it to you, but my Father who is in heaven. If He doesn't give it to us, God have pity on us, because we are wasting precious, precious time. You get a man, woman, or some young person who is knowing God by revelation, and God will build His church on that one.

One explanation for the fact that many people who know the Bible so often fall away by the wayside is because they didn't have it by revelation. They only had it by information. They had discovered truth and not revelation truth. Some people try to get you away from the commentaries, and they appeal to you to get it on your own; just you and God, and don't be spoon fed all the time. Well, that's okay if they mean revelation truth, but if it's only discovery of truth, what difference does it make, if they've discovered it or you've discovered it. It's still flesh and blood. You don't need that. There's an unbridgeable gulf between discovery of truth, and revelation of truth.

I used to see people getting all kinds of insights, and my heart was saying, "How come I don't? I read the same Bible and I don't get those insights. I'd like to see things like that." I thought the way to get to the shore where they were was by harder work. I used to give all the excuses, "Well, I'm counseling, and doing all of this, and I don't have enough time. I work hard all day. If I had more time, I could get to the other shore by further study." You don't get to the other shore by study, even if you studied twenty four hours a day. You've got to be raptured to the other shore. It's a miracle of God, a supernatural turning on of the light from the inside. You don't pave a road there with more tapes, more books more testimonies, more study, getting up earlier, and

praying longer and harder. You get to the other shore by the grace of God; the indispensable principle; helpless dependence upon the Lord. That's the second characteristic of a rock man.

A "rock" man is a blessed man

There's a third characteristic for those whom He builds His church in verse 17, *"And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed are you.'"* It's that word "blessed". Seeing God by revelation makes you blessed. A "rock" man is a blessed man. When you begin knowing God that way (by the way, your Bible will come alive, and it won't be boring anymore, and it won't be dry and barren; it's exciting), and when you begin to know God by a revelation, when God begins to sing Himself into your soul, one of the characteristics of that is fullness of joy. Happy is the man; blessed are you, thoroughly happy and fulfilled and content, and deeply satisfied, because you were created for that, and you found your environment, and you belong there. God created you to live there. The one on whom God builds is not frustrated, and anxious. He is blessed, because he's knowing God, by God's revelation of Himself from heaven, with an immediate knowledge in his soul; intuitively. God says, "On that man I will build my church."

Verse 18, *"You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."* I realize that the people of God have been quarreling over that expression, "What is meant by *'rock'*?" In John 1 when the Lord Jesus first met Peter, He said, *"You are Simon. You shall be called Cephas (Peter)."* Peter wasn't his name. His name was Simon. *"You shall be called 'rock'."* Jesus said that in John 1. Of course, the word there means a little rock or a little piece of a rock. Here the Spirit of God changes the word in the Greek, and you have a little play on the word 'rock'. *"You are Peter,"* and He changes it from masculine to feminine, from the little word which means a piece of a rock, and then changes the word to 'bedrock', a big massive rock, a boulder, *"And on you I will build my church."*

There are arguments, and God's people have been split down the middle on this. Peter is the rock, and that's where people say he's the first Pope, and that kind of thing. Protestants rebel against that, and say that it's not Peter, but it's the confession, *"Thou art the Christ,"* and on that rock I'll build My church. I don't want to get into all the

gymnastics. Is Peter the rock? Is it the confession? The answer is yes; both of those. There is an agreement here in principle. The point here is this. Jesus says, "Simon, you finally see it. I told you when I met you that you'd become a rock." A rock man is a heavenly taught confessor of Christ. That's what Peter was. Peter, in union with Christ, and confessing Christ, is the kind of rock on which Jesus Christ will build His church.

Try to enter into the context here, and forget the theology for a moment. Three years the Lord Jesus labored among His disciples trying to get this thing across. I see an excitement here, as if He found a treasure. It was just another day in the life of the Lord Jesus. He's been teaching and doing miracles, and teaching parables, and been refuting the scribes and the Pharisees and Sadducees, and He's been healing, and He's seen it all. Now He comes to this place where there is a turning point, and He says, *"Who do men say that I am?" "They have all kinds of opinions, Lord." "Who do you say that I am?" "Thou art the Christ. The Son of the Living God."*

I can almost see the Lord Jesus saying, "You did it! Wow! Finally! At last you got it! Hallelujah!" I can just see the Lord Jesus being real charismatic. He jumped up and down and waved His hands in the air. Get the excitement of this; "Peter! Flesh and blood didn't give you that. Peter, you are so used to flesh and blood, this excites me! Peter, you have discovered the life of blessedness. I told you it would happen, didn't I? When I first met you I said, 'You're Simon; you are going to become Peter.' You've done it, Peter. You've crossed the bridge and you've entered in. Peter, you have the keys now!" That's the point of the keys; "Peter, you did it! It's revelation; you've understood that God must show you, and now you have the keys to the kingdom of heaven." That's verse 19. *"I've given you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall have been bound in heaven. And whatever you should loose on earth, shall have been loosed in heaven."*

What a "rock" man binds on earth has already been bound in heaven

I read interpretations on that until they were flowing out of my ears. Notice the tense. The KJV says *"shall be,"* but the New American Standard gives the real tense from the Greek, *"shall have been loosed in heaven*." Here's what He's saying, "Peter, you've learned the secret. It's not an open secret. You have the keys; revelation, not the authority to preach to the Jews, Acts 2, and to the gentiles in Acts 10." That's not what He's talking about—*"the keys"*. Peter had the keys, but that's not saying he was the doorkeeper of heaven, like some jokes make it out to be. Clyde has as much authority as the doorkeeper in heaven as Peter.

What He's saying is this, "Peter, you've understood revelation, and you've come to the Book now, and all of a sudden a truth is loosed on the earth. Do you know why it's loosed on the earth? It's because it's been loosed in the heaven already. And that's the only way you got it, Peter, because what you loose on the earth, shall have been loosed in heaven. It's already been loosed. And if you don't understand it, it's because it's bound in heaven, and it's bound on the earth because it's bound in heaven. And you won't understand one thing until I loose it in heaven. You have to be heaven taught. Now, Peter, you've discovered it, and found the secret, and you've got the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Everything now lies open before you. Whatever you loose on earth shall already have been loosed in heaven. My Father will continue to feed you, and to show you, and to take the veil away. What you bind on the earth, that's because it's still bound in heaven. Don't worry about it. Peter, you have the keys, and now I'm going to take you, and I'm going to build on you."

In a few moments Peter learned the other side of that truth. It's unbelievable to read verse 22, isn't it? *"Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God, forbid it, Lord. This shall never happen to You.' He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan.'"* Look at verse 21. These are words that any dummy can understand, "I must go to Jerusalem. I must suffer. I must be killed. I must be raised up on the third day." He got the facts, but he didn't get it by revelation. He had all the facts, but no insight, and he takes the Lord aside and

says, *"No, Lord, that will never happen."* And Jesus says, *"Get behind Me, Satan."*

He lays down a principle here. We just say, "Oh, poor person doesn't get it by revelation!" It's more serious than that. Here's what He's saying, "Peter, if you get it by revelation, I will use you as a building block, but if you don't get it by revelation, you become a stumbling stone, and there's no in between. You are either being used as a rock on which God builds His church, or you're a stumbling stone." And the whole purpose for getting behind Him was not that He was going to trip up the Lord Jesus. There's no chance of that, but that Jesus was going to go through, and he's going to get stepped on and hurt, and He says, "Get out of the way, because I'm coming through." God's program is going on, but we can become stumbling stones to many.

"Rock" men die in order to live, and are being set free

Let's get back into the big thing. I said there are two characteristics of the church. The church that's His and the church He builds is built on "rock" men; people who know Jesus by revelation, and are made so happy and blessed because of that revelation. He builds on those. The second characteristic comes from verse 18, and the KJV translates it, *"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The gates of Hades shall not overpower it."* The word *"Hades"* as it's used there is "death". Some older commentaries interpret it this way; "Christ is building His church, and there's nothing hell can do about it. Let hell attack all it wants, in any way it wants. Ultimately the church will be victorious. Christ is building His church, and no matter what attacks come from the enemy, the church will survive. The gates of hell will not prevail against it."

Some of the modern commentaries have said, "No, you've missed an important tense of a word. It doesn't say the gates of the church. It says the gates of hell. So, they point out that the church is the aggressor, going after the gates of hell. The gates of hell aren't attacking the church; the church is attacking the gates of hell, and it says that the gates of hell won't prevail against it; against the church. So, in one case the church is the victim, and in the other case the church is the aggressor. I think they have a point, because you don't really bring

your gates with you when you make an attack. But either way, it doesn't satisfy the context. I don't believe that either one is the point.

In this context it's not talking about warfare; who's attacking and who is resisting. That's the wrong question. It's not an offensive warfare or a defensive warfare. The war was won at the cross. What is He saying? When we usually think about strong gates, we're always thinking about knocking the gates down, the aggressor comes and knocks the gates down, but there's another way the gates can fall. They can fall from the inside instead of the outside. It's true the gates of hell are coming down in this context, but I don't believe they are being knocked down from the outside as the church rushes in, because in no way is the church trying to capture hell. It doesn't want it. You see, it's a picture of a jail break. The church is on the inside, and it's breaking out. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The gates are going down. The church that He builds, and is His is becoming freer and freer, is being emancipated, is being liberated all the time, and the gates of hell can't prevail against it. It keeps breaking the shackles, breaking the bond, and knocking down the gates, as God liberates His people more and more progressively. We aren't trying to capture death, but we're going through. And we break the gates of death; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

I suggest, then, the second principle. The church that is His, and the church that He builds, is always built on "rock" men, and is always free. That church is getting freer, and freer every day. Glance down at the context. Right after He says that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, He said in verse 21, *"I've got to die."* I can just see Peter saying, "Hey, wait a minute! If the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, how come you are going to lose? How come you are going to die?" Peter didn't have revelation on this great principle of liberty. He lays down the principle, and that's why in verses 24, 25 & 26 He's talking about laying down your life, because He's saying that it's a liberty from death through death. You die in order to live. It's a paradox. That's how you are set free; by dying. That's why He says that you've got to take up the cross, and you have to deny yourself, and lose your life in order to save it. That principle He has laid down through years has been His method. The principle is that the church through death is going to continually be set free. The people of God through death are going to be continually set free. It's His church and He's building it,

and He's building it on "rock" men who have learned to die in order to live. He's building it on those who know Him by the revelation of God, the immediate God-conscious revelation in their souls, who are so happy they are resting in the Lord, and are constantly being set free through death. He's building His church on such "rock" men as those.

There will be a day when we break through the last enemy, but we're being freed all the time. The sting of death is sin. God's people are being set free not only from death, but from the sting of death. They are learning victory over their sin, over their nature, over their propensities, over their habits. They are being set free day by day. The strength of sin is the law. They are being set free from the law, the bondage of rules and regulations and duties; cold, hard detached obedience without a relationship of love. He said, "This is My church. They are being set free from the church of men." You talk about what church you go to. You don't have a church. You ARE a church, and as you go on in the Lord, all of the walls of sectarianism, denominationalism, and everything that divides the people of God, will begin to come down—you'll be freer from that as you go on. The gates of hell don't prevail against that. *"I will build."* You will be set free from the thinking you have a work to do. He's doing the work and building the church. You've got a God to know, and not a work to do.

Right now it's a principle that through death we live. One day that principle is going to become a fact. We'll lay these burdens down, our bodies will fall into the ground, and we'll be eaten by worms, should He tarry in His coming. We'll hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live, and we'll come rising up out of our graves, and we'll say, *"Oh death, where is your victory? Of grave, where is your sting?" "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

I hear so much about the poor church, and it's in such trouble, "The church is cold, the church is dead, the church is lethargic, the church is lukewarm." May I suggest that something out there is dead, cold, lukewarm, lethargic, and lazy, but it's not the church? It's a great big man-made organization built on flesh and blood that calls itself "the church" but it's an imposter. It's aping the church of God. There's something out there putting God's people in horrible bondage, but it's not the church He builds.

I told you some time ago that God has called me to write titles of books, and He's called you to write books. Here's a book for you to write. I've stolen a little bit of this from somebody you'll probably recognize. "The Church is Alive and Well on the Planet Earth". That's the truth of God. *"I WILL build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* His church, the real church, is doing fine. There's only problems with that which calls itself the church.

When Jesus saw that His disciples, represented by Peter, had finally seen this, and could learn about Him from Him, the revelation of God from heaven in their souls, He knew there was no end—they could go on forever. That was the great principle they needed to learn, because now they could get freer as they went on. From that time on He changes directions, and moves toward the completion of His redemptive work.

The only thing you are going to loose on earth is what's already loosed in heaven. Until God looses it in heaven, you can't understand it. If it's bound in heaven, it's bound on the earth. Peter's best response would have just been silence; a passive acceptance. God said, "I'm going to do this." You sure don't fight what God says. It clicks when you lay down flesh and blood. As long as you are using flesh and blood; they aren't together. You've got to lay down flesh and blood to get the revelation of God. Your first revelation is the moment of salvation. People are being taught that the way to know God is by flesh and blood; they are still saved.

What God is going to constantly be doing is working in your life to teach you to put down flesh and blood, so that you can come as a little helpless babe. When you learn that, there's no stopping. I think because of the counterfeit out there, because the church is flesh and blood, that they teach you you've got to memorize scripture, and you've got to live by rules. You try and try because men tell you that. Paul's principle that he laid down, was, *"Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood."* If you could get a Christian today that came to know Christ, and could get them all away from Christians, they would do beautifully. Put them on an island someplace. They would do great. They're being hurt by Babylon the Great—confusion; that's what Babylon means. God's people are in Babylon today; in confusion.

Have you ever seen Michelangelo's work, like one of the last things he did where a guy is trying to come out of a rock? He didn't finish it, and he's half way out, and you can almost see him breaking out of the rock, but the rock is still half carved around it. If you were right up close to it, you'd think that guy was going to jump right out of that rock. That's how Christ is in this Book. He can't wait to get out, but nobody is seeing it. People read, and they're just satisfied; they're looking for doctrine, for promises, for commands, and for warnings. They don't care about looking for Christ. He can't wait to get out. It's like Joseph behind the curtain, saying, *"I'm Joseph,"* going backstage and crying because they aren't ready. Finally when they're ready he says, *"I'm Joseph!!"* He just longs to say it, and Christ longs to say, *"I'm Jesus."* He just longs to say it, but we aren't ready, like Joseph's brothers.

The principle to be ready is to say, "Lord, teach me." It's just a heart that wants to be taught. These things He's revealed to babes, and hides them from the wise and the prudent. The wise and the prudent are those who say, "I can know God on my own by study. I don't need the Holy Spirit. I need tapes, books, Greek, school, degrees, and I need men and women." The humble just say, "I'm stupid. I don't know anything." He can use anything. It's always the heart! That's why Paul could say, *"When in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached."* Even if they are faking it, Christ is preached. But for the listener, the hungry will be fed. It's the heart; always the heart. Some people have the idea that faith wrestles God into willingness. God is willing already. We don't have to overcome His reluctance. He's infinitely willing, and faith lays hold of His willingness. If we would just trust God—He just wants us to do it!

IT'S ALWAYS THE HEART!

A Hearing Heart

By Ed Miller

I do not ask that years to me be multiplied;
Deceitful wealth, please Lord, do not impart.
I'm but a child, one thing I pray, please Lord, provide;
Your servant needs and seeks a hearing heart!

I'm but a child! I struggle so with fear and doubt;
A little child! How can I find my way?
I'm but a child! Uncertain which is in or out.
A little child! Please help me Lord, I pray!

I'm but a child! The worldly wise will lead astray;
How soon this child will yield and depart!
The strong of earth will try to mold my fragile clay.
Unless You grant this child a hearing heart!

I'm but a child; I claim the child's great reward;
The wealth denied the mighty and the smart.
Who could have known the child's portion was the LORD!
Praise God He gave this child a hearing heart!