Lessons on the Life of Christ

Taken from the Gospel accounts

John Hendershot

Text copyright © 2013 John C. Hendershot

All Rights Reserved

Cover: Rembrandt, *Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (public domain).

Dedication

To the memory of John B. and Lillian V. Hendershot – who taught us to "pass it on."

Table of Contents

The Incarnation - Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1; John 1-18 7
On This Wise - Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2 (various) 11
John the Baptist - (Found in all four Gospels) 15
The Temptation of Christ - (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13) 18
Rejection at Nazareth - (Luke 4:16-31) 22
On Miracles 27
First Miracle - John 1:29-2:12 32
Born Again - John 2:13-3:36 37
The Woman at the Well - John 4:5-42 42
Authority, Sins and Sinners - (Matthew 9:1-14) 47
The Call of Matthew - Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2;13-22; Luke 5:27-39 53
Equality With The Father - John 5 57
The Beatitudes - Matthew 5:1-12 61
You Have Heard It Said - Matthew 5:13-48 65
The Secret Saint - Matthew 6:1-18 69
Treasure - Matthew 6:19-34 73
Golden Rule - Matthew 7 77
Faith to Doubt - Luke 7 81
Rest for the Weary - Matthew 11:20-30; Luke 7:36-50 86
Looking For A Sign -Matthew 12:22-50 90
Parables - Matthew 13:1-52 95
Traveling Healer - Mark 4:35 – 5:43 99
Sending the Twelve - Matthew 10 104
Bread of Life - John 6:22-71 110
Tradition - Matthew 15; 16:5-12 115
Who Is This Man? - Matthew 16:13-17:21 120
Greatness in the Kingdom - Matthew 17:24-18:14 125
Cost of the Kingdom - Matthew 18:15-35; Luke 9:57-62 129
Taken in Adultery - John 8:1-11 133
Man Born Blind - John 9 137

Who Is My Neighbor? - Luke 10:25-37 142
Dishes and Prayer - Luke 10:38-11:13 146
On Wealth and Worry - Luke 12:1-34 151
Waiting for the End - Luke 12:35-59 155
Costly Banquet - Luke 14 159
The Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32 164
Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16:19-31 168
The Resurrection and the Life - John 11 172
Divorce and the Church - Matthew 19:3-12 178
Who's Who in the Kingdom - Matthew 19:13-20:28 and parallel passages 183
Prayer - A Lesson for Children - Luke 18:1-17 189
On the Verge - Luke 18:35-19:28, and parallel passages 193
Passion Week – Beginning - Luke 19:28-41; John 12:12-25 198
The Nature of Authority - Matthew 21:23-32 203
Christians and Kings - Matthew 22:15-22 207
Testing Jesus - Matthew 22:23-46 and parallel passages 211
On Hypocrisy - (Matthew 23) 215
The Art of Devotion - (Mark 12:41-44) 220
Olivet – The Early View - Matthew 24:1-44 224
Five Parables - (Mark 13:37; Matthew 25) 229
Perfume - Matthew 26:1-16 and parallel passages 234
Not Like That - Luke 22:24-34; John 13:1-30 238
The Lord's Supper - 1st Corinthians 11:23-32 243
The Oneness of God - John 14 250
Church and World - John 15-16:4 254
On the Holy Spirit - John 16:5-15 258
High Prayer - John 17 262
Garden Prayer - Matthew 26:31-46 267
Trials – Legal and Otherwise - Various Scriptures 271
Small Things - Matthew 27:26-66 and parallel passages 276
The Cross - Various Scriptures 279
Defending the Resurrection - Various Scriptures 284

Epilog..... 289
Farewell - Various Scriptures 294

The Incarnation - Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1; John 1-18

It is as C. S. Lewis put it: the Incarnation is the supreme miracle. There is no meaning to atonement if there is no incarnation; even resurrection requires it. In this series we shall examine the life of Christ – and begin at the beginning.

Matthew – the Jewish View

It is important to remember that Matthew wrote for the Jews. As a result, he begins with the family tree. It is a carefully constructed table, ending with this comment:

Mat 1:17 NIV Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.[2]

It's clear that Matthew expected his readers to understand why he would start this way; it's not so clear to us. But he has his reasons:

- First, he establishes the fact that the birth of Jesus contains descent from King David – which is prophesied of the Messiah. Matthew gives us descent through the legal line, which means Joseph. (Did you know that Joseph had to be of the house of David?)
- Second, by this genealogy he establishes that Jesus is fully human – he did not step off the flying saucer fully grown.
- Note, though, that he is careful not to allow the idea that Joseph is his biological father – in accord with the full divinity of Christ.

In short, we know where the kid came from. We know his family history. It includes some unusual people:

- It includes the kings of Judah – great names, such as David, Hezekiah and Josiah. It also includes the names of kings like Manasseh, who gave Judah fifty five years of idolatry and misery, yet repented at the end.
- It includes ordinary people – Rahab, the prostitute who hid the spies; Tamar, who prostituted herself with Judah and Ruth, so renowned for her faithfulness. Many of the names in the genealogy are just that: names. Ordinary people living ordinary lives.

This section includes fulfillment of various prophecies. The tribe of Judah is specified in Genesis 49:10; His family (David) in Isaiah 11:1 and the virgin birth is given in Isaiah 7:14.

Matthew introduces the theme of his work: Jesus is to save his people from their sins. In short, the atonement was planned from "day one."

Luke – The Gentile View

Matthew's account, however satisfying to his first readers, tends to deter the modern reader. Luke, however, wrote for the Gentiles. We can learn about the writer and his purposes from the first four verses of his Gospel:

Luk 1:1-4 NIV **Introduction**
Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled[1] among us, (2) just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. (3) Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from

the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, (4) so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

We may note:

- Luke's intention is to be thorough. He tells us that "many" have tried to document Christ before he did. Evidently those accounts were in some way deficient, so Luke has gone back to the original sources to interview them. This most certainly included Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- Luke is a doctor, of the medical variety. We know from the writings of such men that they are thorough and detailed. Luke is the researcher of today.
- Luke was Paul's traveling companion. As such, he no doubt had the opportunity to speak to all the living apostles.

Luke writes with a particular purpose in mind. He addresses the work to "most excellent Theophilus." This may have been a real person – the name is not unknown – or it may have been generic, for Theophilus means "lover of God." Either way, it is Luke's intention that Theophilus be solidly grounded in the faith, knowing the certainty of the things he has been taught.

This deals with a couple of problems:

- It gives the lie to the idea that faith must be blind. If God requires you to believe on no evidence at all, why was this Gospel written? It is given to you so that you may also be certain of what you believe.
- It is written in terms that the average person would understand; you don't need to be an expert in Jewish custom, tradition and law.

If you read on in Luke's account (more next week) you will see that he has particular information concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus. The common Roman Catholic worship of Mary (I call 'em as I see 'em, folks) is conspicuously absent from the Gospel of Luke. But Luke must have talked with Mary, as we have her Magnificat and the song of Zacharias in this chapter. This contributes to one of the characteristics of Luke: he is not afraid to use a little more ink. His orderly research and attention to detail cause most expositors to use his order of events.

So we have now expanded scope from "just the Jews" to that of the celebrated man in the streets. But neither of these explanations deal with "why." We have the earthly viewpoints; what about the celestial ones?

John – the Philosopher's view

It is worth reading John's opening in its entirety:

Joh 1:1-18 NIV The Word Became Flesh
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was with God in the beginning. (3) Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (4) In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (5) The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[1] it. (6) There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. (7) He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. (8) He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. (9) The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.[2] (10) He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did

not recognize him. (11) He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. (12) Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- (13) children born not of natural descent,[3] nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (14) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[4] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (15) John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' " (16) From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. (17) For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (18) No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only,[5][6]who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

If you will look at the footnotes (not reprinted in this quote from the NIV) you can see that even the translators have exceptional difficulty with this passage. It introduces us to the concept of the Trinity, in particular the divinity of Christ. How, we must ask, can God come in the flesh? How can God be more than one person – when we know that "the Lord your God is one?"

We can but state the difficulty and say that our understanding is incomplete. We have two facts:

- God, the eternal, unchanging one, is One.
- God is also three persons; one of those persons is Jesus of Nazareth, who arrived on this planet as a baby – just like the rest of us.

There are many explanations; we shall leave it as fact, and move on.

The roles of Christ

John gives us three roles which he attributes to Christ – and are clearly divine:

- He is the creator of all things – the "agent of creation" as the philosophers might put it. Everything in the universe was created by Him.
- He is the life of all things – the word used means biological life. The idea of living is taken from Him.[1]
- He is the Light – without Him, no one sees clearly. We take this in the metaphorical sense; without Him, no one can know the truth. Truth, in all its fullness, is in Him.

There is much, much more. But I hope you can see the inherent marvel of these three writers:

- Matthew describes the promised Messiah, in the right genealogy. He is the fulfillment of prophecy given to the Jews – a local thing.
- Luke expands that to a global thing – in factual terms, invoking no mysticism.
- John then declares to us that this Jesus of Nazareth, born like the rest of us, is in fact the one and only God – in the flesh.

Word become flesh

It is astonishing. It is also the source of no end of heresy, as people seek some other explanation. How can this be? How is it that the God of the Old Testament would do this? That He can do it, there can be no doubt. But why?

---

[1] The evolutionist may note that we are describing the source, not the method.

- What we are really saying here is that God is too high, too holy to mingle with the likes of us. But turn that around: what are the limits of divine humility? If our own humility allows us to descend to the level of changing diapers, how can we limit God's humility? Indeed, would it not be perfect humility, as God is perfect? It would take perfect humility to do this.
- We are also saying that there is insufficient motive for God to do this. But again: God is love. It would take perfect love for the sinless God to come down among a sinful people; a perfect love.

Do you see it? When people say "God couldn't/wouldn't do that" they are placing human limits upon the attributes of God. Is He love? He is perfect love. Is He peace? Then perfect peace.

What, then, was the objective in doing this? He became like man so that we might become like God. His purpose in coming was to be the atonement for our sins; even as the Baby slept that silent night the Cross was already in view.

On This Wise - Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2 (various)

(The reader will note that this lesson was originally delivered on December 23, 2007, which influences its scope.)

The Principal Players

The story of the advent of Christ is probably the best known birth ever recorded. We may begin by looking at its principal players: Mary and Joseph

Mary, the "handmaid of the Lord"

(Luke 1:26-38)

It all seems so matter of fact, as if it should happen every day. Mary gets the word; she accepts what is to come for her rather calmly, it seems. In fact, the bare words do not describe how this child of about thirteen years was overwhelmed by the announcement:

- Notice, please, that the angel is named Gabriel – which we presume is the same angel who interpreted the prophetic visions for Daniel.[2] We know little else about him, but even to know his name implies power, for only he and Michael are named in the Old Testament.
- We see also, for the first time linked explicitly, the Trinity. The matter is from God the Father; by the Holy Spirit, to give birth to the Christ.
- Mary's reaction tells you why she was selected: obedience. In the older versions you will see "handmaid" instead of "servant." The word is also translated "bondslave." It is her reaction to the highest of honor given to woman. Now you know what makes for greatness in the kingdom.

Joseph: an explanation

(Matthew 1:18-25)

If you wish to upset a man, nothing quite touches the problem as finding his fiancée pregnant – by somebody else. So angel comes to make the explanation. Joseph will have much to do with raising this child, so it is not a great stretch to infer that his character might also be a reason for God's choice. Character, indeed:

- He is called a righteous man – and that is given as his reason for divorcing Mary quietly. Righteous? Wouldn't a righteous man condemn her? Well, no. Joseph was ready to "do the right thing," which was to handle the matter discreetly. He's a man who first of all does no harm.
- The angel calls him "Joseph, son of David." It is a reminder that Jesus' legal claim to the throne of Israel comes through Joseph. It's also a reminder of the one promised to come.
- Finally, he did as he was commanded. Mary and Joseph share the same blessing: obedience.

Magnificat

(Luke 1:46-56)

Other than French, I know of no language more susceptible to bursts of poetry than Hebrew. Or any language less so than English. We must remember that the Psalms were daily fare; so when Mary

---

[2] Daniel 8:16; Daniel 9:21

bursts into poetry it is not as it would seem in English. It is spontaneous, but full of the Spirit as well. Mary would understand that man is not supreme, but God. So her words would magnify God, not Mary:

- She praises God for his mercy – at long last the promised Messiah is coming, bringing salvation for his people.
- She praises God for his might, the great things he has done.
- She praises God for his faithfulness – keeping his promises over thousands of years.

Birth

The story of Christ's birth is familiar to any child in the church, but we can still learn from those events.

Circumstances

(Luke 2:1-7)

Perhaps you missed it, but the careful research of Dr. Luke has pinned down the date of Christ's birth. The matter is debated by scholars, but it is certainly between 6 BC and 13 AD. How is this known? We have secular records of who ruled when. This is not an event "long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away." It's a local event. Many English villages and towns are first listed in the Domesday book prepared by William the Conqueror; this is a similar purpose. This is the hard reality of fact.

One cannot help notice that the king of kings and lord of lords cannot get a reservation at a decent motel. Being born in a stable – laid in a manger, or eating trough – is not the height of social status.[3]

The Shepherds

(Luke 2:8-20)

It is a fact: angels usually announce themselves with the words, "Do not be afraid." Even those angels on the most glorious of nights must calm the fear of the shepherds. Why shepherds? Perhaps it is because David was a shepherd. They are definitely not high in social status; so a baby in a manger would not seem too out of place to them.

That's the good news, the "gospel" that they received. The poor working stiff is the first to hear the news; the Messiah has come. Their reaction is just as you would expect: they drop everything and go see this thing announced to them. No committee meeting, no plans for a "Welcome, Jesus" banner, no ceremony at all. Just straight to Jesus. Which is still the right reaction today.

Magi

(Matthew 2:1-12)

Much has been written about the Magi. In some circles this event "validates" astrology, for example. We need to get a little background here that will help us understand this:

---

[3] And it hasn't done much for the reputation of innkeepers, either.

- This is the same flock of wise men whose leader once was Daniel. You will remember that he was head of the "wise men" of Babylon[4]. You will also remember that he was told when the Messiah would arrive. Is it not likely that this would have been written into the records of the magi, along with detailed instructions concerning the astronomy of that time?
- These wise men were not worshippers of idols. They worshiped "the one true God", whose icon was light itself. They are indeed very close to the Jews in their view of God the Father.

What about that star? My opinion is that it was a particular planet showing up in a particular constellation which would have been computed by Daniel. Other views include a supernova or a purely miraculous star.

The gifts the magi bring have their own meaning. It is clear that they have some understanding of who Jesus is, as they refer to him as the King of the Jews. For that monarch they bring three gifts appropriate for him:

- Gold – the symbol of eternity, for it never rusts or corrodes.
- Frankincense – the symbol of prayer.
- Myrrh – used for embalming, it is prophetic of the Cross.

One of the saddest incidents in the Bible came from these men, indirectly. Herod would kill this infant king, but needs to know his exact location. The magi are warned against telling him. The result is the slaughter of the innocents.

After His birth

Presented in the Temple

(Luke 2:22-38)

It sometimes surprises students of the Bible to discover that Jesus was obedient to the Scriptures as given in the Old Testament. This should not be so surprising; he is simply obeying his own rules. Mary and Joseph would have been particular about this. Bethlehem is a short distance from Jerusalem, about a day's walk. Mary and Joseph presented the sacrifices of a poor man for the redemption of their first born son.[5] Then the unusual happens:

- Simeon, an old man announces that he can leave the planet now. This is a righteous man, and he has been promised that he would see the Messiah. He is old, his back hurts in the morning, he might even have asked God to give him a date. But when the child arrives, Simeon knows. He can say, "mission accomplished."
- But not before he pronounces his dark prophecy. This child will reveal the hearts of many, forcing a decision: just who is this Jesus? He sees the stone of stumbling, the rock of offense. He also sees the Crucifixion – and its agony for Mary.
- A woman of prophecy, Anna, takes up the refrain (so that there might be more than one witness). It is a fitting reward for this elderly widow, so faithful to God.

---

[4] Daniel 2:48
[5] Leviticus 12:2-6

The flight to Egypt

(Matthew 2:13-18)

One might suppose that God could easily have thwarted Herod's plans – Herod, after all, dies like the rest of us. But in weakness is the strength of God revealed; when his people flee, the faith spreads. So it is here; the infant's protectors are the poor and weak. He commands them to flee with the baby.

This incident points up the inevitable conflict between church and state. Herod has it quite correct: the child is a menace to his reign. The Child is a menace to the reign of all governments who consider themselves to be supreme in the obedience of the citizenry. Please note God's method: until Christ comes again, the weapons of Christ wielded by his children are those of flight, sacrifice and martyrdom.

In this passage we see a prophetic fulfillment. It sometimes is criticized in that regard; after all, the prophecy seems rather obscure – and the fulfillment somewhat awkward. But it is God who defines prophecy, not us.

Growing up

(Luke 2:40-52)

In obedience to God's command Joseph does not return to Bethlehem but to Nazareth. For the next twelve years we know nothing of Christ's life. We then have this incident in the Temple.

The young man seems to have thought his parents should have known where he would be. In fact, by his view they are rather thick headed about it all. Which is true; the Scripture tells us they did not understand. Many a teenager has thought the same of his parents.

But see the model Jesus gives us. Despite the fact that they should have known by now, he returns to Nazareth with them and is obedient to them. Much of Christ's life is exemplary; here is one of his best examples.

John the Baptist - (Found in all four Gospels)

The reader will please note that we have not included copies of the Scripture for this lesson. They are extensive, and might violate the standard copyright permissions for the NIV. The relevant Scriptures are Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:1-14 and John 1:6-27.

Rite and Ceremony

It is a tradition at our church that we have only one tradition – which is that we have no traditions. The view seems to be that traditional ways are those of meaningless rites and ceremonies. These, we are told, encourage a Christianity which is ceremonial only.

One must object: the human experience is bound up in rite and ceremony. We use such things for a variety of purposes:

- Sometimes we must say something which is beyond words. We have Communion to portray the great sacrifice of Christ – the symbols portray the deed, and we have yet to find words which equal this.
- Other times we use ceremony to mark important changes in life. We have baptism to mark the beginning of the new life in Christ; weddings to mark the beginning of life together; funerals to mark a passing.
- Perhaps most important of all: we use rite and ceremony to engage the experience and memory of others. Wedding ceremonies provoke a reflection on the joy of marriage. Funerals teach us of our own mortality. Our national anthem invokes our personal patriotism. These ceremonies reach within our hearts, personalizing the experience for each of us.

Jewish conversion

With these principles in mind, then, we may ask what the hearers of John the Baptist would have seen in his baptizing. To understand this, we need to know that the process of converting from Gentile to Jewish in those days involved baptism. John's audience would have this background for his ceremony; what would they see?

- First of all they would see an act of humility. The Gentile must adhere to God the one and only, renouncing his previous worship of many gods. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord!
- They would also see it as a new beginning. All the sins of previous life are now washed away. From then on, sin had its atonement in sacrifices at the Temple.
- Perhaps most disturbing to them would be the reminder that God does not play favorites. You don't have to be born a Jew; you can become one.

The baptism of Christ

With this in mind, then, we may gain some insight into Christ's baptism – and John's objection to it. John sees it as a baptism of repentance. He knows that the Christ is sinless; it would be completely fitting for Christ to baptize John, but not the other way around. So John is surprised when Christ asks to be baptized. Like John, we may be puzzled by this. But there are answers:

- Christ tells John that this is to "fulfill all righteousness." This is a difficult thought. One explanation is that Christ is to be our High Priest, and this priest was to undergo ceremonial cleansing before taking office. Thus Christ would fulfill the Law. (We must remember that Christ suffered under the Law so that he could be our atonement).

- This also emphasizes the humanity of Christ – so that all who thought him something other than completely man would have to explain the physical fact of baptism. For example, those who taught that Christ was a specter who left no footprints would need to explain how you baptize a specter.
- Finally, there is the divine example. What nobleman could refuse baptism because of his high position when the King of Kings was baptized?

John, the Prophet

It's worth noting that John's ministry is prophesied in the Old Testament.[6] It is therefore no wonder that Christ refers to him as the greatest of the prophets. He is the quintessential Old Testament prophet, and we may learn from this.

Role of the prophet

The role of a prophet in the Old Testament does not seem at all to be "get along, go along."[7] In fact, it is quite the opposite – which generates opposition.

- The prophet is to "forth tell." Listen to "you brood of vipers, …" This does not tend to get you in the good graces of the establishment. The well read among us will recall that John lost his head this way.
- The most common function of the prophet (at least in our view) is foretelling the future. In this case, the foretelling is about Christ.

Unpopular sermons, unpopular prophecies; it is no wonder that John is the "voice in the wilderness."

Example

Most of us would be extremely unwilling to adopt a life style that called for a camel hair shirt accompanied by a diet of honey and locusts.[8] But we might see it as an example for us in other ways:

- What does it say to us about materialism? If so great a prophet can reject things material, should we not be able to reject the cycle of greed, envy and acquisition in our own lives?
- Such a life style is a continuous sacrifice. Is this not an example too? How many Christians today are willing to sacrifice – as long as it doesn't cost them anything?

The man walked the talk. Go and do likewise.

In our own lives

Suppose we took this man seriously. What effect would it have on our own lives today?

- There would be repentance – a turn from the sins of this lazy world back to the righteousness that only comes from God.
- There would be confession – the admission, publicly, that we need to turn around. What an example this would be!

---

[6] Isa_40:3; Mal_4:5-6; Luk_1:11-17

[7] Followers of the cartoon strip "Drabble" may recognize the quote: "Every time I go with the flow, I get soaked."

[8] I'm sure that some species of locust must be endangered.

It's not just that we would confess and repent, but we would also work to "make straight the path" which leads to Christ. A true Christian is a light in the world by which others may discern the path that leads home.

The Greatest Servant

Mat 11:11 NIV I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The true servant of God knows…

It is obvious that if one aspires to greatness as a servant of God, there are some knowledge requirements. So, what does the true servant of God know?

- He knows his *tradition*. He does not stand only on his own experience, but he adds the experience and wisdom of those who have gone before. This has prevented many a stupid mistake.
- He knows his *position*. It is not for him to claim the credit, the glory, due to God. Rather, he has the humility to be what he has been called to be. His reward is not from men but from God.
- He understands his *mission*. He understands his role in the kingdom, accepts it as such without complaint and then works hard to fulfill the tasks that position brings. It is a form of craftsmanship.

The true workman of God does…

There is something encouraging about watching a craftsman work his trade; you know that things are going to be done right. So what does the true workman do?

- He gathers his disciples around him. There is no sense of solo flight for the workman; rather, he needs to have others to whom he can pass on the craft.
- He then teaches those disciples. He does not teach them his own pet theories; rather, he passes on his craft to the next generation.
- In so doing, he acts as a model for his disciples. As Paul expressed it:

2Th 3:6-10 NIV In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching[1] you received from us. (7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, (8) nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. (9) We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. (10) For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

The friend of God

The highest honor bestowed by God before the Resurrection was the title, "friend of God." John shows us how this is done. May we see just two things about this?

- There is nothing standing between the friend and God. For John this meant an ascetic life style; for Abraham, not so. But the principle is the same: God is first in each life.
- Being a friend means sharing your Friend with your friends. So it is with John, many of whose disciples became disciples of Christ.

The Temptation of Christ - (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13)

It is well to review both accounts:

Mat 4:1-11 NIV
Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (2) After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. (3) The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (4) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'[1]" (5) Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. (6) "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:
" 'He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'[2]" (7) Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'[3]" (8) Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. (9) "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." (10) Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'[4]" (11) Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.
Luk 4:1-13 NIV
Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, (2) where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. (3) The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." (4) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'[1]" (5) The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. (6) And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. (7) So if you worship me, it will all be yours." (8) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'[2]" (9) The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. (10) For it is written:
" 'He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully; (11) they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'[3]" (12) Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'[4]" (13) When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Lessons from Satan

A study of Satan and all his techniques is beyond the scope of this lesson; however, it is helpful to know some of what the enemy is doing.

Why now?

That the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for the specific purpose of allowing Satan to tempt him is beyond doubt. But why did Satan agree?

- Surviving a forty day fast must be a spiritual "high." It is at times like this that we grow overconfident in our abilities to resist temptation.
- If successful, the fact that we started with a "high" means that the "low" following will be a very deep one indeed. ("I can't believe I did that!")

- The spirit may be at a high, but the body is at a low – famished. Satan's hope is that the body will ride over the spirit. This should not be; but when the body is at a low, we sometimes forget this.

Remember, it's not how you see your spiritual state but how Satan sees his opportunity that determines his time to strike.

Why here?

Why does Satan do this in the wilderness? Wouldn't it produce better results for him if this was in front of a crowd?

- Temptation seems much less of a problem when you can say, "No one will ever know." For some of us, the eye of the crowd is a sufficient deterrent to many sins. (Example: "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.")
- The failure then becomes a guilty secret – which is a favorite handle for Satan. Remember Bathsheba – and the rape of Tamar?[9] David could do nothing for fear that his children would throw Bathsheba back in his face.
- Worse yet, it gives us plenty of time to think up some self-justification. This quickly defiles the conscience, leading to more and worse sin.

"A more opportune time…"

Satan fails. But he doesn't give up. Like all villains, he is endowed with certain virtues, without which he would be ineffective. In this instance, it's persistence. So do recall that the temptation has not gone away – it's just gone away until Satan finds a more opportune time.

And what time might that be? The next instance of temptation for Christ is found at the end of his ministry, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Again, the flesh is weak. Even more opportune is the fear the moment produces. Fear? Read the accounts; you will see that Christ was overcoming his natural fear of death. That was his temptation in the garden; don't go through death, rather call for a few billion angels and set yourself up in charge. In charge, but not the atonement we need so much.

Fear is often combined with temptation. In the early days of the church a problem arose with those who had denied the faith during the Diocletian persecution. Those who did so now wanted back into the church. Some of those in the church worshipped separately, denying these people fellowship unless they were baptized again. The Montanist controversy is no longer with us, but it does point out how one person's succumbing to temptation can bring trouble to the church as a whole.

The Nature of Temptation

The ancient world divides temptation into three categories: the flesh, the world and the spirit (which means pride).

The flesh

An easy one to identify, at least in men, by hormone level. But in this instance it is hunger that is used to enable temptation. See how:

---

[9] 2 Samuel 13 and thereabouts.

- "If you are the son of God…" If? It's an attempt to plant doubt; are you really who you think you are Jesus, or just delusional? Surely you'd want to clear that up?
- There is this matter of stones to bread. In the natural world (created through Christ) stones do not become bread. It's a temptation to show off; indeed, to "put Satan in his place." It is not what the humble and obedient would do.

The ancients listed three deadly sins as sins of the flesh. They are lust, gluttony and anger. Or, a little easier to memorize perhaps, babes, bread and belligerence.

The world

The temptations of the world are envy, greed and sloth. These are easy to memorize too – all you need to do is think of politics:

- Envy – the prime "virtue" of the liberal Democrats.
- Greed – the prime "virtue" of the conservative Republicans.
- Sloth – the prime "virtue" of those too lazy to vote.

The world's temptations tend to come more slowly and stay longer than the sins of the flesh. They are therefore the more deadly. One of the reasons they are so effective is this: the world is genuinely Satan's to give. But like anything from the prince of evil it has a soul-tearing hook in it. Because they take longer to mature we have more time to defile our consciences with self-justification. Then too, they look rather trivial at first – but give Satan the handle of secret sin.

Pride

Pride is the deadliest of sins. Those taken with the sins of the flesh were told to go and sin no more; those taken with the sins of the world were told to repay and repent. Those whose pride was paramount became the objects of Christ's wrath. Satan is well content to cure your problem with lust or gluttony by giving you a Pharisee's pride.

Understand the nature of pride – the word "arrogance" might be more like it today. It consists of looking down on other people. It's a competitive sport, and it is often accompanied by what appears to be victory over lesser sins. C. S. Lewis once called it the "complete anti-God state of mind."

Tools for the Christian

It is of no service to the Christian to point out these sins if there is no counter to them. Therefore it is our duty to list those things which are essential in defense.

Daily habits

We may examine this passage with the intent of collecting the daily habits which will prove useful in resisting temptation.

- Note, please, that Christ is led into the wilderness not by wandering or by Satan but by the Holy Spirit. Therefore we say "do not quench the Spirit." Make awareness of this guide your goal.
- Christ's defense comes from the Scriptures. In particular, we may note two things: first, Christ quotes it – which means he must have memorized it. Second, he relies upon the authority of the Scriptures. Satan loves it when we pick and choose what verses to believe.
- Finally, we see the habit of regular prayer, valid both for prevention and repentance.

Defensive precautions

Pardon me if these seem obvious:

- Fellowship – maintaining fellowship with your fellow Christians, asking their prayers and aid in dealing with temptation – these things are the benefits of fellowship.
- Settle your mind on the right things, not the wrong ones. Sometimes you just have to tell Satan to shut up and go away by thinking about something else.[10]
- Note that all three of the verses Christ quotes come from instances in which the nation of Israel sinned. In other words, they come from bad examples. Do not let your bad examples beset you; rather, learn from them.

Combat

Finally, these tips for the combat:

- Resist Satan – if you do, he flees.[11]
- Remember: Christ knows what you are going through, as he's been there himself.[12] He is not cold and distant, but a fellow sufferer – and example.
- Finally, remember that there is no alliance between God and Satan[13] - so there is no sense trying to set one up.

Choose you this day whom you will serve.

---

[10] Philippians 4:8-9
[11] James 4:7
[12] Hebrews 4:15
[13] John 14:30-31

Rejection at Nazareth - (Luke 4:16-31)

(Note before beginning: discussion re: Graydon preaching on this passage two weeks ago).
Sometimes I do not know when I'm well off. One of the joys of taking an English class at UCLA is that it's full of girls. I picked out a pretty one; asked her out and (for an interesting reason) was rejected. Good thing, too. God had something much better in store for me.
To the Scripture:
(Luke 4:16-31 NIV) He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. {17} The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: {18} "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, {19} to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." {20} Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, {21} and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." {22} All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. {23} Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" {24} "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. {25} I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. {26} Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. {27} And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian." {28} All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. {29} They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. {30} But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. {31} Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people.
There is every bit of evidence (which shall shortly be produced) that Jesus knew he was going to be rejected. Indeed, he practically states so in his sermon. Why then did he go home?

- Some scholars see this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2, as indicated in Matthew 4:13-16 (read)
- Others simply see it as an obligation: he owed it to the "home folks" to start there. It's a principle of Scripture (first the Jew, then the Gentile).

Whatever the reason, he knew he was to be rejected. And of that rejection we must learn what we can.

Prophetic Aspects

That the Messiah was to be rejected when he came was well established in the Old Testament, in at least these five passages:

Ever Hearing, Never Understanding:

(Isa 6:9-10 NIV) He said, "Go and tell this people: "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' {10} Make the heart of this people

calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."[14]

The point is clear: the Jews would listen to the Messiah -- but would not understand.

(Psa 118:22-23 NIV) The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; {23} the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.[15]

The "builders" in this are the Jews; the capstone, Christ. But note the phrasing, "the Lord has done this." This implies that God intended for the Messiah to be rejected -- so that he would become the "capstone" of something greater. That greater something is the church, of course.

(Isa 8:13-15 NIV) The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, {14} and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. {15} Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured."[16]

Perhaps even prophetic of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, this passage shows us that the "stone" is God himself; hence, an early indication of the divinity of Christ.

(Psa 2:1-4 NIV) Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? {2} The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. {3} "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." {4} The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.[17]

(Recall that "Anointed One" = "Messiah"). Here it is clearly shown that kings and rulers will conspire against him. This is specifically said to be Herod and Pilate. It is also a forerunner of the principle that church and state must be in opposition as long as the state claims to be supreme.

(Isa 53:1-4 NIV) Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? {2} He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. {3} He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. {4} Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.[18]

Here we have a striking prophecy of the pain and suffering inflicted upon Jesus at the Crucifixion.

Side Note: Christ's acceptance of prophecy

This is the first, and by no means the last, instance where Jesus confirms the authority of the Old Testament as being inspired by God. Indeed, he takes these prophecies to himself quite

---

[14] Confirmed in Matthew 13:14-15
[15] Confirmed in 1 Peter 2:4-8
[16] Confirmed in Romans 9:31-33
[17] Confirmed in Acts 4:25-28
[18] Confirmed in Romans 10:16

readily. The reference here is to Isaiah 61:1. Note that here, as in other places, Christ ties the prophecy to himself as he explains its meaning.

One example of this is the reference to the Year of Jubilee ("year of the Lord's favor."). It is an example of how indirect prophecy can be. There are three primary aspects of the Year of Jubilee:

- Rest for the land (it was not planted)
- Restoration of the land to original owners, with some exceptions
- Redemption and release for slaves.

All these are part of Christ's ministry:

- Rest from our struggle with sin
- Restoration to our relationship with God
- Redemption from the slavery of sin.

Rejection establishes the character of Christ's Ministry

Far from being an accident, or something unfortunate, the rejection of the Messiah is essential to establishing the character of Christ's ministry. There are three aspects to this:

- It is a rugged ministry. It is not a ministry in which Christ sits as guru in a temple, expounding the meaning of life. It is a ministry on the road, with physical hardship punctuated by moments of deep meaning. Indeed, as Christ put it to one would-be follower:

(Mat 8:19-20 NIV) Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." {20} Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

- The miraculous aspect of the ministry is directly related to the faith of the listener. Somehow, the faith of those who listen is used by Jesus to work miracles. A prime example of this is given here:

(Mat 17:14-20 NIV) When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. {15} "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. {16} I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." {17} "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." {18} Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. {19} Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" {20} He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

- This is a ministry of God's sovereignty. Nothing that man can do can stop it; Jesus will do nothing that is not commanded by God. As He puts it,

(John 5:19 NIV) Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

Rejection as model for the disciple

Much of our Lord's life was exemplary; that is, it is to be an example for us. If they persecuted him and rejected him, they will do so to us as well. There are, however, some lessons to be learned in this rejection:

God's power is made perfect in weakness

We often feel that as Christians there should be a sense of exaltation and power to our work. After all, we are the ambassadors of the most high God. There should be dignity and character to our work. But see how Paul puts it:

(1 Cor 1:18-25 NIV) For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. {19} For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." {20} Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? {21} For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. {22} Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, {23} but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, {24} but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. {25} For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

God has chosen to work through weakness rather than through strength. He is sovereign; He will prevail; we must endure it, knowing it to be his will.

Failure will be frequent in our family circle; success outside it.

Although the Scripture has several examples of one member of a family (often the head of the family) bringing the others to Christ, Jesus here points out the examples of Elijah and Elisha. These are forerunners of the fact that the Gospel would be rejected by the Jews and thus brought to the world. Indeed, as the Scripture says,

(Mat 10:34-36 NIV) "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. {35} For I have come to turn "'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- {36} a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'

I know this is disconcerting to many, but there it is.

Just who is being rejected here?

We do take rejection personally -- which is usually how it is intended! But understand the word of the Lord on the subject: it is not you and I that are being rejected, but the one for whom we are ambassadors:

(Luke 10:16 NIV) "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

Dealing with rejection -- Christian style

Much has been said about dealing with rejection. I know of no magic formula which makes it less painful; but the Scripture has some definite advice on the subject.

Shake dust

We are not to court continuous rejection. When rejected for the sake of the Gospel, we are to leave it at that. This sounds like a hard saying -- and it is. But hear what our Lord told his disciples:

(Mat 10:14 NIV) If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.

As Graydon mentioned it the other day, no one has the right to hear the Gospel twice until everyone has heard it once.

This bothers a lot of people; it brings up the classic pygmy in Africa argument. But understand as we explained last week, the test is simple: when exposed to the light, men judge themselves. They run to it, or run from it.[19]

Finality of rejection -- for Christians

One of the hardest rejections is from those who are in the church, and decide to leave it. It seems so cruel to us that we should ever make a final separation between the church and anyone. But hear what the writer of Hebrews has to say:

(Heb 6:4-6 NIV) It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, {5} who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, {6} if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

and

(Heb 10:28-31 NIV) Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. {29} How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? {30} For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." {31} It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

This is the most cruel of rejections; to have someone whom you knew loved the Lord turn his back on Jesus. Give this one to God; vengeance is His.

Know the blessing

Why would anyone court rejection? Because it is commanded (the Great Commission) and because it is rewarded.

(Luke 6:22-23 NIV) Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. {23} "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

The rejection is now; the blessing is forever. “He is no fool if he would choose to give the thing he cannot keep to buy what he can never lose.”

---

[19] See also Romans 2:6-8

On Miracles

(Mark 1:21-28)

(Mark 1:22-28 NIV) The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. {23} Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, {24} "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!" {25} "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" {26} The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. {27} The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." {28} News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

(Luke 4:31-37 NIV) Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. {32} They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority. {33} In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, {34} "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!" {35} "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. {36} All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" {37} And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.

(Mat 8:14-17 NIV) When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. {15} He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. {16} When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. {17} This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

(Mark 1:29-34 NIV) As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. {30} Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. {31} So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. {32} That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. {33} The whole town gathered at the door, {34} and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons,

(Luke 4:38-41 NIV) Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. {39} So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. {40} When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. {41} Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked

but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.	them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.

The subject of "miracles" continues to fascinate mankind. We have TV shows about them; books are written about them; and Sunday School teachers teach lessons about them. Of the approximately 200 lessons I have written for my class since 1993, 31 mention miracles in one way or another. Today we shall limit our scope to three questions:

- What, precisely, is a miracle -- and what is not.
- Why does God perform miracles?
- What are man's reactions -- right and wrong -- to miracles.

What, precisely, is a miracle?

Many people confuse miracles with providence. So that we may limit the discussion to the "signs and wonders" of the Bible, here are some simple guidelines:

- A miracle, translated often as "sign" or "wonder" in the New Testament, is just that, Anyone who saw it would regard it as a supernatural intervention; no other explanation would be possible. By its nature, it is impressive. It is also an apparent violation of natural law.
- Providence, on the other hand, is God's daily care for us, as Christ explains it in the Sermon on the Mount. When your Aunt Louisa finds her second best thimble with the aid of prayer and the Holy Spirit, it's providence. It is neither impressive nor is it in violation of natural law.

There are three general views of the miraculous in the Bible. The first view is the liberal view, sometimes called the naturalist view (mistakenly so called[20]). In this view, the liberal scholar denies the existence of miracles and attempts to rewrite the Scripture to fit around this. This is rather difficult -- Dr. Nave, for example, lists over 1400 verses in the Bible which deal with miracles -- but it is a common viewpoint among liberal Christians. I present it here not because I believe it to be a viable one (it really is not) but because it clearly points up the problem that miracles cause for the intellectual Christian:

- The Bible clearly teaches us that God is eternal and unchanging -- immutable. His purposes are fixed; He does not "change his mind" as we do.
- The Bible also clearly teaches us that God is the author of nature, and therefore natural law. In fact, the Scripture tells us that the unchanging order of nature is a reflection of God's character, and evidence for us that He will not change -- that He can be relied upon.
- If this is so, then (argues the liberal), how can God suddenly inject miracles into this system? Is this not self-contradictory, a thing which God cannot be?

There are two common answers to the problem as raised in this formulation. Both have had a great deal of favor at various times, and both serve as more than adequate answers.

- Thomas Aquinas argued this way. Each "cause" (we might say "change agent" in today's management culture) produces its own order of effects. But some of these causes are wrapped inside others, like a hierarchy. His own argument goes like this: a father sets down the law in his own household[21]; if you want to know the law in the house, ask dad. But dad is subject to the city magistrates; so you might have to ask them. And they are subject to the king's orders, so you might

---

[20] The true naturalist view holds that Nature is "all there is;" that there is no God. It also has absolutely no reason to deny the existence of miracles -- it just has no explanation for them.

[21] How times have changed!

have to ask the king. Nature, then, is a lower order of cause than God. The ultimate reality is not Nature, but a Person (indeed, three Persons). Hence, there really is no conflict.

- St. Augustine (coming from the Greek humanist cultural background) and C. S. Lewis (echoing Augustine's thoughts, but in a post-Christian naturalist background) argue differently. Where Aquinas acknowledges interference with Nature, Lewis argues that there is no interference -- it's just that we don't understand all the rules. One of the rules the physicist must leave out is the answer to "what is the purpose of the universe?" Without that, miracles can't be understood, in this view. He compares it to chess. The rules say that a pawn moves this way, a knight that -- but once per game a contestant may perform the maneuver called "castling." It cannot be repeated -- but it is in the rules. An observer who could see only one game, ever, would have trouble with this, since it would seem not to be repeatable and thus a violation of the rules. In fact, it's in the rule book. Hence, a miracle is not a violation of natural law -- it's just another form of natural law.

In the passage above, we see some of the common points of miracles of the New Testament. There are two key characteristics which may help us in picking among theories:

- There is a certain style to miracles. Stones do not become bread; water becomes wine, just as in nature.
- Sometimes that style is an anticipation. All will rise at the last day; some are raised by Christ.
- The miracles are personal; they come from the heart. Jesus weeps at Lazarus' grave.

Why does God perform miracles?

God has a number of reasons for performing miracles. It is best to let the Scripture speak for itself, but we may categorize the miracles:

- Sometimes God uses miracles as a form of credentialing:
  - In Exodus 4:2-9, God gives Moses certain miracles so that the Israelites might know that God is indeed God -- and that Moses was sent by Him.
  - In Mark 2:1-12, Christ uses the miracle to credential himself -- and his ability to forgive sin.
- Often, it is to deliver a message, or to force a choice.
  - In Numbers 17:1-9, Aaron's rod is the one that buds and produces almonds -- so that the Israelites might know that the tribe of Levi is to be the priestly tribe.
  - In 1 Kings 18:36-39, Elijah calls down fire from heaven, to force Israel to choose between God and Baal.
- There is most definitely a series of miracles which are designed to further the divine plan.
  - God chose to forge the nation of Israel as an instrument to bring forth salvation to the world. The events detailed in Exodus forged that nation so well that the Jews to this day retain their identity, long after all the nations around them have melted into forgetfulness.
  - The Resurrection, the supreme miracle, was for our salvation.
  - Building the church by miracles, as detailed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-12, is another use in divine plan.
- Finally, sometimes miracles are used just to show the glory of God. See John 9:1-7, the story of the man born blind.

Human Reaction

One of the most common reactions to miracles is, "Why don't they happen today?" I submit there are many reasons; here are three:

- Miracles seem to occur in spurts, at times of spiritual crisis in history. There are long stretches of Old Testament history in which no miracles are performed. God does them when He chooses to.

- Miracles seem also to be conditioned, in some cases, upon the faith of the participants. An outstanding example of this principle is the disciples' failure to cast out a demon, told in Mark 9:17-29.
- Finally, it may be that the church is just too rich in worldly good! Remember Peter and John healing the crippled man (Acts 3:1-8)? "Silver and gold have I none..." so they gave what they had. When the church has silver and gold, God tells the church to tithe. When the church is poor, it is blessed (Sermon on the Mount), and gives of its blessings.

Peoples reactions to miracles vary.

- Sometimes, like the disciples, the sight of a miracle has increased their faith.
- Others, like the Pharisees, see the miracle as an offense -- something which denies their system of belief, and therefore must be destroyed.
- Some recipients of miraculous healing react with gratitude. But we should remember that ten lepers were healed, and one returned to give thanks.
- I like Peter's mother's attitude best. She rose up and served.

If the faithful react that way, we should also note that the evil react towards miracles too.

- The call of the evil man is always, "Show me a miracle, and I'll believe" -- see, for example, Matthew 12:34-40. It is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test.
- The day is coming when evil men will perform miracles:

(2 Th 2:7-12 NIV) For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. {8} And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. {9} The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, {10} and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. {11} For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie {12} and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Even in this, however, there is a Christian reaction:

(2 Pet 3:3-14 NIV) First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. {4} They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." {5} But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. {6} By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. {7} By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. {8} But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. {9} The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. {10} But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. {11} Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives {12} as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. {13} But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. {14} So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

This is the ultimate of miracles, the coming of our Lord in glory. And how should we prepare for this event? “Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

First Miracle - John 1:29-2:12

We may see the beginnings of much in this passage.

Joh 1:29-51 NIV The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (30) This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' (31) I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." (32) Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. (33) I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' (34) I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Jesus' First Disciples

(35) The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. (36) When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (37) When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. (38) Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" (39) "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. (40) Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. (41) The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). (42) And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter[10]).

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

(43) The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." (44) Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. (45) Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (46) "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip. (47) When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." (48) "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." (49) Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." (50) Jesus said, "You believe[11] because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." (51) He then added, "I tell you[12] the truth, you[13] shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The Names of Christ

One of the little gems of this passage is the list of names given to our Savior. We must remember that names in this culture meant far more than they do in ours.

- A name often set expectations. You will recall Nabal (which means "fool") in the Old Testament. Many names ended in –el, which is one of the names of God. Daniel, for example, means "God is my judge."
- A name might also honor a relative, though we rarely find father and son with the same name.
- Perhaps most important, names and titles are more blurred together at this time. A similar thing happened with English names when we began to use surnames. John the butler became John Butler; Joe the iron smith became Joe Smith.

While this is by no means a complete list of the titles of Christ,[22] it does provide us with a clear vision of who Jesus is:

- *Lamb of God* – John sees our Lord as the sacrifice which will bring redemption to mankind. From this we may know that Jesus ministry must come through the Cross.
- *Son of God* – a practical title, given the incarnation, but also one which correctly reflects the relationship between Christ and the Father. Christ is the obedient son, who does his Father's will.
- *Rabbi* – the word here is difficult to translate correctly. It is more than "teacher" in the English. Teachers in those days did not have students, they made disciples. A teacher poured into his students both his knowledge and his love for the subject.
- *Messiah, or Christ* – Meaning, "the anointed one," it carries with it the idea that this is the one selected by God. Jesus did not appoint himself as the Christ; god the Father sent him on that mission.
- *King of Israel* – It is the claim of Jesus of Nazareth that he is, by right of inheritance as well as divine appointment, the King of Israel, in direct line of succession from David. A man may be the rightful king without being recognized as such.
- *Son of Man* – Christ's favorite title, it contains within it a prophetic sense.[23] It means not only that Christ is completely human, it also means that he was prophesied to come and establish his eternal kingdom.

Evangelism

It is instructive to go back through this passage again – gleaning some thoughts on evangelism, person by person.

Andrew

Andrew is a disciple of John, and it is John's testimony which convinces him to follow Jesus. Now, John is no miracle worker, but one who calls to repentance. We may therefore presume that Andrew has so repented, and is being instructed by John. His change of leadership is therefore somewhat surprising. He exchanges John – whose ministry tells you that he is from God – for Jesus. John's testimony must, therefore, have been very compelling. Andrew must also have been free of the "my guru is better than your guru" style of thought.

He logically follows up on this. He goes to get Peter. Once convinced, he is in 100%. He will share the good news without hesitation. The thrust of his message can be found in three words:

---

[22] The inquisitive reader may inquire further using Nave's Topical Bible, under Names, appellations, and titles of Jesus

[23] Daniel 7:13-14

- We have found… it's a group effort, not a solo flight. Christianity requires a group, called the church.
- We have found … We did not create him, or anoint him – we found him. It is not our doing but our discovery.
- We have found the Messiah … There is only one.

Philip

Philip is directly called by Christ. What made him respond to such a call? His knowledge of the Scriptures, knowing the Law and the Prophets. The virtue of reading the Scriptures is herein proclaimed.

Nathanael

P. T. Barnum would have had no use for this man. As Barnum said, "You cannot cheat an honest man." That's just what Nathanael was: a man with no element of dishonesty, scheming or deception in him. What you saw was what you got.

This does not mean, however, that the man was naïve. Indeed, his first reaction is that this Jesus is from Nazareth, which is not a very reputable town, evidently. (Picture a great evangelist coming out of Las Vegas.) He also knows that the Christ is to be born in Bethlehem. So this fellow seems very unlikely.

Philip's reply – "come and see" – says a great deal about Philip's character. He is seen as a reliable witness, so Nathanael tries it. Christ is the one who convinces him.

Summary

These few observations pose questions for us as disciples:

- Are we students of the Scripture, knowing that in them we find eternal life?
- Do we bring others to Christ?
- Is our character such that others can rely on us?
- Are we honest enough to "come and see?"
- Are we honest enough to "come and be seen?"

First Miracle – John 2:1-12

Joh 2:1-12 NIV Jesus Changes Water to Wine

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, (2) and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. (3) When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." (4) "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." (5) His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (6) Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.[1] (7) Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. (8) Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, (9) and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside (10) and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." (11) This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

(12) After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

Definition

Permit me a definition: a miracle is

- A contravention of natural law (think physics here),
- But in the divine style (water becomes wine, stones don't become bread)
- In a significant religious context
- For the purposes of God.

The first is evident, as is the second. The disciples provide the context – so we may now ask, for what purposes?

Witnesses

If you want to convince people, it helps to have impartial witnesses who will testify on your behalf.

- First, the servants. They are likely enough to be sober, and they know for a fact how heavy those jars were when they filled them to the brim.[24]
- The caterer[25]. He'd better be sober; and it's clear from his reaction to the wine that he knows the good stuff from the cheap.
- Strangely, the bridegroom likewise. He's plastered, of course. He also is paying for the wedding, and it now appears he failed to be prudent about his wine cellar. He'll never live it down. His only defense is the miracle.

---

[24] Apparently 20-30 gallons, weighing about 160-240 pounds. If you're on the metric system, that's 75-115 liters.

[25] Per Chrysostom. English language sources debate this.

The example of Mary

This might just be the main purpose. Mary has provided Christ's disciples with a "teachable moment." It should be clear to them that Mary knows him better than anyone else. So he permits them to see, if you will, "how Mary does it" in the hope that it will rub off on them.

- First, she knows his response to *obedience.* When she tells the servants to "do whatever he tells you," she is inviting God in the flesh to honor that obedience. She is confident of his response.
- Next, she relies on Him to decide the method. She does not order Christ to do it in any particular way; she sets forth the problem and provides such resources as are available. It is "faith and means," not "means and ways."
- In all this, she trusts his arrangements, not her own. She trusts him.

Impact on the new disciples

The disciples have walked with him to Cana of Galilee; now they will walk with him to Capernaum. It has confirmed their desire to be with him. But this instance has also "revealed his glory" to the disciples – and then they trusted him.

It is an example to follow: grant him obedience, follow where he leads and see his glory revealed.

Born Again - John 2:13-3:36

The phrase "born again" is a common description among evangelical Christians. It is almost universally used as the description of becoming a Christian. The Scriptures, however, are not nearly so free with the description. It occurs (NIV) only in John 3 and 1st Peter 1. Its use in John came about in an unusual way. Normally, lessons on John 3 are separate from the cleansing of the Temple in John 2. But in that episode we find the events leading up to Nicodemus' visit by night.

Cleansing of the Temple

Joh 2:13-25 NASB The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (14) And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables.* (15) And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; (16) and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." (17) His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." (18) The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" (19) Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (20) The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" (21) But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (22) So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (23) Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. (24) But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, (25) and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

Background – The Temple

The Temple at Jerusalem was unique in this: it was the one geographic spot on earth where God had placed his Name. As such, it is a picture of access to God. Various courts were included; the central idea was that as you went inward, the persons allowed there became more and more selective. The Court of the Gentiles is outside the Court of Women, and so on until we get to the Holy of Holies, accessible only by the High Priest, only once a year. It's a picture of access to God; no one but the high priest actually had access to God – and once a year at that.

So when Christ speaks of tearing it down and rebuilding it, we can see that this obliquely means the end of Temple worship. The new High Priest arrives; the old order of things passes away. Access to God comes through those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. In short, the coming of the Christ means the end of Temple worship.

There is a problem in this. The family of the high priests has more or less taken over the Temple as their own money-making enterprise. You had to use Hebrew shekels instead of Roman coinage (thus the need for moneychangers). You needed animal sacrifices which were perfect – how convenient that the sellers of pre-approved animals are right there to help the traveler. If you profit by the old regime, you are not enthused about the new one.

How and why

Reflect a moment; how is it that one man drove out the vendors from the Temple? Certainly Jesus would have had physical strength, having worked in a carpentry shop. But the folks driven out were many times his number. How, then, did he do it?

The first answer comes in the nature of moral authority[26]. How many chickens does it take to match one lion? These people knew that what they were doing was wrong – but a sweet deal. The average peasant might grumble at the scheme, but he wouldn't buck the establishment. This man, however, doesn't grumble – he acts. Why is it that no one else did this?

The answer is in the phrase, "zeal for your house." The average peasant thinks of the Temple as part of the requirements of his religion – but not something to stick his neck out for. The care and feeding of the Temple is someone else's problem. For Jesus, it's "my Father's house" – and he cares for it passionately.

In so doing, he pronounces one of the most puzzling of statements. If you tear down this Temple (building taking 46 years) he will rebuild it in three days. The reference is to the Resurrection, of course – but it's worth noting that his disciples didn't get it until after the Resurrection. We may take some comfort in this, as we attempt to understand the mysteries of prophecy.

Reaction of the crowds

Evidently this Jesus made a name for himself at this point, for many believed. Why?

- First, because of the miracles he performed (not mentioned in Scripture).
- Second, because of the moral authority he displayed.

The two "match up." Who he really is does not show yet, but they're convinced he came from God.

Christ, however, knows how fickle the crowd can be, and therefore ignores their interest, knowing the depravity of man. The issue is one of testimony; who would believe this crowd which, after all, experienced him for only a few days? See the way Israel treated Moses! Real testimony takes experience, not just local visibility.

Nicodemus

We now come to one of the minor characters of the Bible, Nicodemus. It is rather ordinary to pass judgment on him with the benefit of hindsight. But I would ask you to consider the turmoil in the mind of this good man. He has seen and heard, but has not reconciled this Jesus with the Law. Genuinely perplexed, he seeks out the Lord:

Joh 3:1-21 NASB Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; (2) this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (3) Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the

[26] Henry M. T. "Lone Wolf" Gonzualles

kingdom of God." (4) Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (6) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (8) "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (9) Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" (10) Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? (11) "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. (12) "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (13) "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. (14) "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; (15) so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. (16) "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (17) "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (18) "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (19) "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. (20) "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21) "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

The Pharisee

To understand this man we must begin with his education and training. He is a Pharisee. Many of this group were hypocrites, but all were learned in the Law of Moses. Imagine, then, how disconcerted this honest man would be when the Temple commerce was routed out. No doubt there was some rationalization for the merchants. However, this man throws them out. Perhaps it awakened some long-sleeping ember in the man. But some things we do know about the man:

- He comes to Jesus by night. He does not have either the courage or the conviction to go by day. He's still an inquirer at this point.
- He is thoroughly *baffled* by the actions of Jesus. The man assaulted people in the Temple, yet his teaching and miracles attest that he is one sent by God. How can this be?

The root problem, of course, is that he does not recognize the Messiah. Christ's answer to his problem? "You must be born again." One bafflement leads to another.

The Defender

We next see Nicodemus in the role of a defender of Christ:

Joh 7:45-52 NASB The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" (46) The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." (47) The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? (48) "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? (49) "But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." (50) Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) *said to them, (51) "Our Law does not judge a man unless it

first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" (52) They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

Note, please, that this is not a personal testimony. His argument is solidly grounded in the Law. It reflects the concern of the honest Pharisee; he's not sure just who this man really is, but the least we can do is give him a fair chance to be heard.

Again, we see that Nicodemus holds the Law in greatest esteem – and is seeking to harmonize Christ with it. This will not be possible in his mind until after the Resurrection.

The friend after death

Joh 19:38-40 NASB After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret *one* for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. (39) Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight.* (40) So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

This would have been considered by the Jews to be a high degree of charity. By caring for his body you are doing something that can never be repaid – except by God. Nicodemus seeks his rewards from the generous hand of God, not the praise of men.

How the man has grown! He starts by meeting Christ furtively – and now openly cares for the dead man.

Born Again

We now come to one of the great puzzle passages of the New Testament: you must be born again.

Joh 3:1-21 NASB Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; (2) this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (3) Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (4) Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (6) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (8) "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (9) Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" (10) Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? (11) "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. (12) "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (13) "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. (14) "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; (15) so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. (16) "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have

eternal life. (17) "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (18) "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (19) "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. (20) "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21) "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Much has been written about this passage. It is clear from the rest of the New Testament that being "born again" is not usually the way to the kingdom of God. Let's take a look at the other methods.

Repent

By far the most common command that Christ gives is simply, "Repent, and sin no more." That's because the most common person Christ meets is an unrepentant sinner. See this simplicity:

- The sinner knows very good and well that they are doing something wrong. They just don't know how to get out of the trap.
- Christ – always condemning the sin, almost never condemning the sinner – makes it clear that there is a way out.
- That way? It is called grace, the free pardon of God, open to all who will accept Him.

"You yet lack one thing…"

The most quoted example for this is the "rich young ruler." It isn't so much that his money is sinful; in fact, it's probably rather beneficial. It's just that it is in the way of devotion to Christ. Please note two things:

- First, this is a *decision*. It is not spontaneous combustion. This is a case of the good being the enemy of the best. The money stands in the way of following Jesus. Decide.
- The reward of the decision? It is simply Jesus himself. "Follow me," he says. See the transition – from a life in which I think I am in control, to a life in which he is in control.

But what if there is nothing lacking?

Born again

Jesus uses this expression only with Nicodemus. Peter repeats it[27] in a context which makes it appear that this happens to all Christians – but not that we must, but we are. So it appears that being born again is an adequate descriptor.

But see it in its original context. The one who is born again is truly free – see verse 8. So it is that Nicodemus is being asked to trust the one who completes the Law – and liberates those held in its grip.

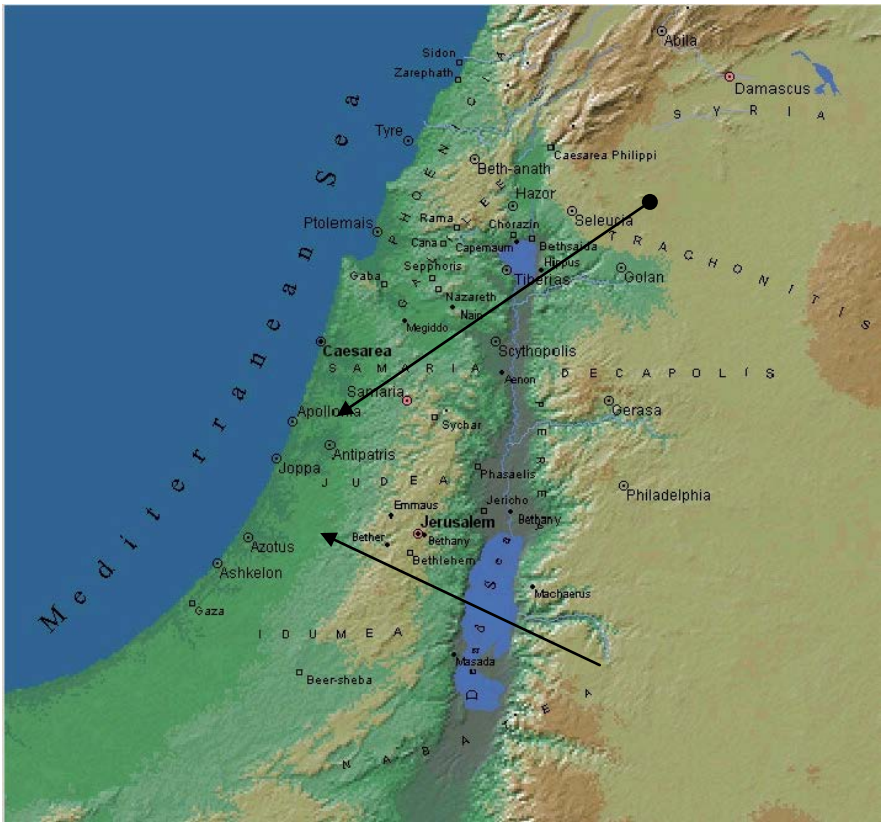
The Apostle John, perhaps, understood this most clearly. His favorite preaching was, "Little children, love one another." Away with all the rules and details; simplify life. The spiritual life does not consist of rules and regulations, but a ride on the wind of the Spirit. Love God, and do as you please.[28]

---

[27] 1st Peter 1:23

The Woman at the Well - John 4:5-42

It is not obvious that Jesus was obliged to go through Samaria – unless you have the map.



If you find Sychar, you will see that it's at the intersection of two valleys. One is a river valley coming out of the hills; the other is a rift valley, running almost north and south. Going up the rift valley was part of the shortest time path for returning to Galilee. Having just cleansed the Temple, Christ was looking for the shortest time path.

The problem, however, is that this path takes you right through the middle of Samaria. The Samaritans and Jews of this time had an enmity which rivals that of Jews and Arabs today. Jesus Himself used this fact in portraying his angel of mercy to be the Good Samaritan – knowing that his audience would take more astonishment from it.

The providence of God

Many Christians will use the phrase, "divine appointment." By this they mean an apparently chance meeting in which God provides special circumstance and activity. Older generations would use the word, "providence," a term no longer taught, evidently.

---

[28] Augustine.

There is a sense of connectivity in this story as well. The well is said to be Jacob's well. The idea would have connected both Jews and Samaritans to their ancient history. It might even be said to carry a certain sense that great things happen at the well the great man dug.

Jesus is weary

Let's look at the Scripture:

Joh 4:5-6 NIV So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. (6) Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

It is the mark of the strong that they may be truly gentle. Here the creator of the universe walks our planet, and is hot, dusty, thirsty and tired. Augustine, commenting on this passage, tells us that "the strength of Christ created you, the weakness of Christ created you anew." It is a common theme in the Bible that God, perfect in power, is also perfect in love, and therefore deals with us in our weakness, not His strength.

This is also a mark of his humanity. He did not float through this world without footprints; He partook fully of our human nature. He knows how we feel; He's been there and done that.

We may also note the comment about the sixth hour. John, using Roman reckoning, tells us this encounter happened at noon. In Palestine no one goes out to the well at noon; it's too hot. No one, that is, except a social outcast. But in this we may take heart: if Christ will speak to a Samaritan, a woman and an outcast from even that society, just who is He unwilling to touch?

The woman as a figure of the church

It is possible to view this entire encounter as a picture of Christ and His church; the church, obviously, being represented by the woman. This might just give us another way to look at this passage, and yield insights of its own.

Joh 4:7-26 NIV When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (8) (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) (9) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[1]) (10) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (11) "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? (12) Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" (13) Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, (14) but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (15) The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." (16) He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." (17) "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. (18) The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." (19) "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. (20) Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in

Jerusalem." (21) Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (22) You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. (23) Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. (24) God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (25) The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." (26) Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

The seeker at noon

However the woman saw herself, Christ saw her first as an object of pity. She is an outcast among outcasts, her every move criticized. Could our Lord have been unmoved by her plight? She is not only to be pitied, she is one who is ignorant of the truth. That's most of us before the church; wandering, outcast from God's love by our own doing, just trying to get by somehow.

Puzzled

It is a fact: Christ introduces Himself here in a way that claims some importance – in terms of "if you knew." But it's not a claim delivered in arrogance; just delivered in mystery. It's not until he gets down to personal detail that she begins to have some idea of who He really is. It is a mark of the love of Christ: he not only loves all of us, he loves each of us.

Call your husband

Jesus knows quite well she doesn't have a husband – so why does he ask her to go get the man? Perhaps He is teaching us about His relationship to the church. The church is pictured as the bride of Christ – and in submission to Him. (That latter is still in the Bible, last time I checked.)

Picture the woman as the seeker of truth; she has no one in authority over her. She is liberated – and lost. She's had five husbands, and now one live-in, and none of them have been the "right answer." That's the seeker, coming to the church. I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.

You are a prophet

Well, He is. But that's not all he is. This is a typical misunderstanding by the newly created church member. It's human to be that way; you typically don't understand anything completely the first time.

We may also see in this section the defensiveness she has about her sin. She's trying to change the subject from her sin to what appears to be empty theology. It's typical of Christ's response that He comes back with an answer which pulls her back to the point. It also gives her greater insight of God. It's a growth process.

Call of Christ

Here is a simple summary of evangelistic preaching:

- The time is now – not later, now.
- Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

- If you want into His kingdom, you must enter in spirit and truth, not ritual and dullness.

Service in the church

Saved to serve, as the Scots would have it. Despite her reputation, she starts spreading the good news. But see one thing: she doesn't hide her sins, or pretend that they are irrelevant. In fact, her testimony is the stronger for her sins, a phenomenon we see even today.[29]

Aftermath

Joh 4:27-42 NIV Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" (28) Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, (29) "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ[2]?" (30) They came out of the town and made their way toward him. (31) Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." (32) But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." (33) Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" (34) "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. (35) Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. (36) Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. (37) Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. (38) I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."
(39) Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." (40) So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. (41) And because of his words many more became believers. (42) They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

The woman

This woman is a beginner at evangelism; see, however, what the beginner should be doing:

- She is full of zeal for Christ – she leaves the water pot there. There is no sense of "wait until I have watered my livestock."
- She does not say, "See the Christ." She says, "see a man who told me everything…" She testifies to what she knows; theology later.
- She then asks her hearers, "Could this be the Christ?" In short, she testifies and then asks them to make up their own minds.

The disciples

It's clear that the disciples aren't clear on the subject, but the lesson Christ wants them to learn is zeal. He personally disdains food; the will of the Father is more important. Man does not live by bread alone.

When they finally get the question in edgewise, Jesus gives them the view they should have. They see a woman, a Samaritan and an adulteress – three strikes. He sees Samaria as ripe for the

---

[29] See Chuck Colson for an example today

harvest. They see slim opportunities; He sees fields in need of workers. Sometimes we just don't recognize what we're looking at.

The Samaritans

We might see ourselves as not able to harvest; but see what this woman has done! Her evil reputation actually works *for* her in the kingdom as well as the community. No one would have believed her if she began to talk about how she was sanctified; but for her to admit her sins – and that Jesus knew them all – is a very different attitude. This is credibility – if you can stand being honest about yourself.

The other Samaritans? They take it personally. They take her up on the offer to "come and see." Then there is no need for her further testimony, for they have met the Master. Meet the Master – and never be the same again.

Authority, Sins and Sinners - (Matthew 9:1-14)

This lesson, like last week's, rests upon the authority of Jesus Christ. I must therefore begin with a few preliminary observations about the nature of authority:

- All authority ultimately comes from God, the author (hence author - ity) of creation itself.
- When used properly, in the kingdom, authority and power flow together. If God gives you the authority to heal, he will give you the power to heal as well.
- God has handed over this authority -- all authority -- to Jesus.[30]
- Authority is often best seen not in the enforcement of rules but in the adjustment of those rules to the circumstances at hand.

And with that as preliminary, we shall see the use of authority in the hands of the Master.

(Mat 9:1-8 NIV) Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. {2} Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." {3} At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" {4} Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? {5} Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? {6} But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." {7} And the man got up and went home. {8} When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

(Mark 2:1-12 NIV) A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. {2} So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. {3} Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. {4} Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. {5} When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." {6} Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, {7} "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" {8} Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their

(Luke 5:17-26 NIV) One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. {18} Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. {19} When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. {20} When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." {21} The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" {22} Jesus knew what they were thinking and

[30] Matthew 28:18

hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? {9} Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? {10} But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . ." He said to the paralytic, {11} "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." {12} He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? {23} Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? {24} But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." {25} Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. {26} Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Authority to Forgive Sins

One of the most interesting facts in Scripture is this: we often see faith as the enabler of God's power, or the lack of faith as its limiter. We have already seen how Jesus could work no major miracles in his home town because of their lack of faith. This limit sometimes puzzles the new Christian, for it seems that it contradicts the omnipotence of God. I make these observations:

- God *voluntarily* limits himself -- to achieve his own purposes. If you want your kid's room picked up, rent a bulldozer. If you want the kid to pick it up -- ah, that's a bit more difficult.[31]
- Likewise, God *voluntarily* enables us -- who are intrinsically powerless -- to do great things. He usually (but not always) requires us to have faith, however, to do this.
- One of the reasons God so enables us and limits himself is that he wants us to practice intercession for others. All through the Scripture the mighty works of the saints and prophets are not designed to inflate their egos but rather to build up his kingdom.

Such faith, and such intercession, are seen in this example. We are not told that the paralytic had faith; rather, that his friends did. They had to clear away a thatch roof (no small task) and lower him down on ropes to get him to the Healer. This was at no small risk to themselves, both in terms of physical danger and in terms of what the house owner might say about his roof! Here we have a true example of intercession - faith in action on behalf of others.

---

[31] A note about argument here. Just because I put the words "God can" in front of an English language sentence does not necessarily make it something possible. Give me enough cement and I can make a rock so big I can't lift it.

Jesus responds to this act of faith. In healing, he torques the Pharisees beyond the breaking point. Reading their minds, he replies as we have seen. Let's look at the Pharisee's argument in more detail so that we may understand Jesus' reply:

Suppose that I decide that you need a good punch in the nose. Being a man of action (and rather limited sense) I decide to carry out this plan, and I bop you in the face. You (being a superb Christian) now have the Christian privilege of granting me forgiveness. Let us suppose, however, that Satan arises and tempts you to petty vengeance, namely, you decide to bop me in the nose. The fight seems to be on, but (let us further suppose) that Graydon Jessup steps between us. He directs you to cease and desist, because, he says, "I have forgiven him."

Now, being the logical sort of person you are, and greatly given to debate as opposed to combat, you decide to reason with Graydon. "Hold on, preacher," you say, "if I want to punch his lights out (in a decent Christian manner, of course), why, that's my business. What right do you have to forgive him and let him off the hook?"

You see the argument, of course. You have the right to forgive, because you're the one I punched in the nose. I didn't punch Graydon, so he doesn't have the right to forgive me on your behalf. Right? To turn this into a principle, only the person who is offended has the privilege of forgiving.

But in any such argument there are two people (at least) who are offended. God is the other one, for he has ordained peace among his children. When I hit your nose, I break God's law. He too is offended. More to the point, it usually happens that I don't flatten your face for no reason; somehow, you probably offended me. In short, we are usually "both wrong." God is the only one who is truly righteous. He also is the ultimate judge; we are both debtor to him (see the parable of the two debtors). Further, as we are Christians, we are both at his command, for his authority is absolute.

What is his command? That we forgive one another. What is his promise? That if we do, He will forgive also. I trust it is clear that God has such authority?

Now you can see the Pharisees' objection. Only God has such authority. By claiming to forgive this man's sins, *Jesus is claiming to be God*. His hearers certainly understand that point.

There is a point of logic here that must now be stated. Many people look kindly on Jesus of Nazareth as a super nice guy. He was no such thing. He most explicitly, in word and deed, claimed to be God in the flesh. That leaves us with only three options: the lunatic, the Devil -- or the Son of God.

There's a marvelous old movie, *Miracle on 34th Street,* that revolves around a lawyer's attempt to prove that his client is not insane. The defense? That his client is, as he claims to be, the one and only Santa Claus. It is a charming film, but the logic is entirely the same. The evidence for Jesus is now to be presented.[32]

---

[32] See also John 10:31-38 for an eerie version of this argument.

Jesus' reply is fairly simple. You have no way to check up on me if I say that God has forgiven your sins. How do you know that I have such authority? It is impossible -- unless I link that forgiveness to something which clearly comes from God (like a miraculous healing). Forgiveness is not something you can check. Healing -- that you can see with your own Missouri eyes.

Sin and Disease and Guilt

The ancients commonly believed (see, for example, Job's friends) that sin caused disease -- and therefore committed the common logical fallacy that since sin causes disease, all disease was the result of sin. A more correct view is this: that sin and disease are both parts of our fallen nature.

We are not usually interested in sin and disease without the subject of healing. One reason that forgiveness is associated so often with healing is that God means to restore this world to its sinless state when Christ returns. He will "make all things new." In that sense, the miracles of healing are miracles of anticipation. As such, sin may not be the cause of any specific disease (see the instance of the man born blind), but forgiveness is necessary before healing.

Modern man tends to separate the two (see how we have reacted to the AIDS epidemic -- as if moral standards had nothing to do with it). As such, we have developed our defenses against disease (medicine) and guilt:

- "There's no such thing as sin -- everything's relative anyway."
- Wine, women and song, and drink away your troubles. The next girl will be better anyway.
- "At least I'm not as bad as some people I know."
- "You need to deal with this guilt complex you have" (I love it; psychiatry used to make you feel guilty about feeling guilty.)[33]

The truth is found in the simple statement: you need to know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins.

And to forgive sinners, too.

Authority to call the sinner

(Mat 9:9-13 NIV) As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. {10} While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. {11} When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his

(Mark 2:13-17 NIV) Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. {14} As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. {15} While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners"

(Luke 5:27-32 NIV) After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, {28} and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. {29} Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. {30} But the Pharisees and the

[33] The incident at Beverly Hills when I missed the meeting.

disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" {12} On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. {13} But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. {16} When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" {17} On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" {31} Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. {32} I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The ancient connection between sin and disease would have been apparent to the readers here. God grants Jesus authority to heal; that is, authority over sin. He therefore has authority over sinners as well -- including the ultimate turnaround, changing from sinner to disciple. I venture this point for two reasons:

- Some of us prefer our church comfortable. There are people we don't like; or those that are not quite our style. It's almost as if you were a doctor who couldn't stand sick people. Matthew is such a man, at once a traitor and a cheat.
- Some of us insist on (purely socially, of course) a certain moral cleanliness before allowing someone into the church. It is a subtle thing.[34] But note that our Lord permits us to judge only those who are in the church, and then only for their own good.[35]

Matthew himself is a solid example of why this is so. No "good" person would associate with him. Yet even in such a man there can be a good example:

- He turns from everything he knows to follow Jesus. Peter and John can go back to fishing if they have to (and they do, after the crucifixion) but Matthew has no turning back. So it should be with each of us.[36]
- Even as a new follower, he has the excitement and sense to know he has latched on to the best possible thing. What does he do? He calls his friends -- men like himself -- to meet this Jesus. There is tremendous power in forgiveness.

The lessons for us

Many things could be derived from these short passages -- the life of Christ is so rich, and we have barely begun. But I bring to you three precepts, all of them in imitation of Christ:

- Like the friends of the paralytic, we must intercede for others -- and do so in faith.
- Like our Lord, we must be willing to extend God's forgiveness (and our own).

---

[34] Sandi Barone and AIDS
[35] 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 is worth reading in this context, if we have time.
[36] An instructive passage on this may be found in Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

- As with Matthew, there will be those we just don’t like -- and all the more reason to bring to them the grace of God.

The Call of Matthew - Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2;13-22; Luke 5:27-39

Preceding Miracles

In this short section of Scripture we omit several miracles which Jesus has performed. He has gone from place to place, healing and preaching the kingdom of God.

This explains why the call of Matthew is so abrupt; we tend to see it as an isolated event; but Christ's fame in the area would have reached even the tax collector's ears. So when Christ comes to Matthew, the appeal is short and sweet.

In a sense, however, it is a miracle of its own right. The men called by Jesus up to this point have been sturdy and honest men, working in the open air to make their living honestly. Matthew is a tax collector; like Zaccheus later, he has some repentance to do. Christ has rescued him from a life of greed – as powerful a sin as any that fostered a twelve step program. The price Christ paid for this at the Cross makes it an expensive rescue. "Christ died for sinners, of whom I am chief."[37]

Attack of the Pharisees

Before we actually come to the Scripture, we might see that the Pharisees – who have also seen this string of miracles – do not attack Jesus directly. Their case rests not on the will of God but the perception of the common man. They intend to split off some of the disciples. Without ceremony, Christ answers the attack. It is a lesson to us – seek the truth in the Scriptures, depend upon the Holy Spirit and see if our Lord will not defend us.

Matthew names himself

There is an unusual literary event here: Matthew mentions his own name. In the custom of the time this would have been considered unseemly.[38] Matthew does it so that we might see him as he was: a tax collector for the invading Romans, a man universally despised. He does not hide his sins, but brings them out so that we may see that even the worst of sinners is not beyond redemption.

There is more to it than that. Here is a man who is accustomed to handling money, but we do not see him ever portrayed as handling the money for the disciples. It is possible to be drunk on money; do not tempt those known to have the problem.

Let us therefore see what has occurred.

Debate: Hospital or Health Club

Mat 9:9-13 NIV As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. (10) While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. (11) When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" (12) On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is

---

[37] Paraphrase of 1st Timothy 1:15
[38] See Mark 14:51-52 for a counter example to this.

not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. (13) But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'[1] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Within the church we have a conflict: what is the mission of the church? People see two views:

- First there is the idea that the church is a hospital for sinners. Her primary purpose is to seek and save the lost. No questions about whether or not someone is "worthy enough" should ever arise. The fact that it is full of sinners is a cause for rejoicing; we need not worry about our image to the world.
- The other idea, however, is that the church exists to build up the saints. It should be conducting training classes (like this one), and generally preparing the saints for life in the world but not of the world. Our appearance to the world is extremely important – for they are ever alert for hypocrisy. Sometimes my sin is seen as hypocrisy; "if you really believed you would …"

We shall see what each view has to recommend itself.

Hospital

Briefly put this position says that everyone is a sinner – and knows it. That last is the important distinction; we preach repentance to those who know they are, and being born again to those who are sure they aren't sinners. This concerns the sinner side, to whom we say:

- Despite what you've done, Christ is not ashamed to call you home to the family of God.[39] He died for your sins; He loves you and wants to heal you.
- The great example of this is the Apostle Paul[40] – who persecuted the church, even to the point of death. Christ called him – and you're certainly no worse.
- Importantly, the hospital church makes no distinction between the worthy and unworthy members.[41] She does not segregate her people, but welcomes all.

In short, the church says, "Repent."

The Health Club

The health club approach is rather opposite. The members are often those raised in the church; they do not consider themselves sinners in the same sense that hospital Christians do. They generally believe that they have done all required.

It is not that they are legalists. If you asked them what they thought the Old Testament Law required, they would tell you "perfection." They understand that no one can be saved that way. But they might point out:

- They are to be perfect.[42] They know that's impossible. So they must constantly seek forgiveness for failure to be perfect – to be a complete imitation of Christ. So it does appear that they say one thing and practice another. If you're not on the inside, this is hard to understand as anything but hypocrisy.

---

[39] Hebrews 12:2
[40] 1st Corinthians 15:9
[41] See James 2:1-5
[42] Matthew 5:48

- They are also commanded to do their good deeds in secret.[43] As a result, they again look like hypocrites for hiding the good things they do.[44]

As they care for the reputation of the church – which is greatly connected with evangelism – they are reluctant to deal with sin in public. The world therefore sees them like the athletes at the local health club. On display through one-way mirror glass, showing the world how trim and vigorous they are. The world sees this and reads it as "fat slobs need not apply." If you're not in shape, don't come to our health club. You'd embarrass us.

The resolution

How, then, are these pictures of the church to be reconciled? Only in Christ. It is in His person that we are one. He alone has the power to weld the church together – by methods that vary from age to age. But He does tell us to be both health club and hospital:

Mat 28:18-20 NIV Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[1] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We are to go and make disciples – and then teach them. There is room for both health club and hospital in the church – if we will only do as He commands.

A question of fasting

You might well ask how this union is going to come about. I answer: "In the person and power of Jesus Christ." See in this section just such a problem.

The disciples of John have been taught to fast; Jesus disciples do not fast (yet). Why?

Mat 9:14-17 NIV Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" (15) Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. (16) "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. (17) Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

John is the preacher of repentance. His disciples fast; it is a way of showing true repentance (among other things). It is something that is not required by the Law of Moses, but was commonly done as a spiritual preparation. So you can see the dilemma that the disciples of John have. On the one hand, their teacher tells them to fast. But on the other, the man whom John has identified as the Messiah does not fast. What gives?

In a real sense, John's doctrine is last and greatest under the Old Testament. The question is a powerful one, and I suspect they leaned forward to here the answer.

---

[43] Matthew 6:1-4
[44] But see Matthew 5:15-16 as well.

New wine

Christ gives us a metaphor which deals with the health club and hospital problem while at the same time dealing with the immediateness of the question. We must note:

- Christ has the personal authority to forgive sin. That's new.
- Such "newness" must be handled carefully. As it supersedes the Law, it cannot be contained in the old legal form. It must be given a new form.
- That form is the church.

What does this mean? Those under the Law at this time are very much "health club." Christ is telling them that a new form is coming, one which will include the "righteous" and the "sinners." Only the power of God could do that.

Two views

Two metaphors are given to us here to portray Christ.

- He is portrayed as the great Physician – seeking the lost as one would go to the sick. The Physician sees the world as full of sick people who need Him. He is the Lord of the hospital church.
- He is portrayed here as the Bridegroom – the one who presents to Himself the church as His spotless bride. His bride is the church of the health club.

Ultimately, these views are just that: views. They are vantage points from which the Bride of Christ can be seen – hospital for the sinner and health club for the saint.

Equality With The Father - John 5

One of the most frequent of heresies over the last two thousand years has been to declare that Jesus can not be equal to the Father. Those faithful to the Apostles' doctrine know better. This is a passage in which that truth is declared.

The Paralytic

To understand the statements Jesus will make to the Pharisees, we need the background of Christ's most recent miracle:

Joh 5:1-15 NIV The Healing at the Pool
Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. (2) Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda[1] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. (3) Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.[2] (4) (5) One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. (6) When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" (7) "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." (8) Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." (9) At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, (10) and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." (11) But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' " (12) So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" (13) The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. (14) Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." (15) The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

A picture of baptism

Those of us who have read the end of the book see clearly that this episode is a picture of the baptism to come. Let's take a look:

- This incident portrays the renewal that comes through baptism. Those whose sins bind them – and this man is a sinner – find release of bonds at baptism.
- Interestingly, the paralytic wants this baptism; he sees it as almost magic. But Christ exceeds that.
- The fact that Jesus doesn't throw him in the water, but raises him up tells us that the ceremony itself has no power – but the indwelling Spirit does.

There is a difference between the result wanted (healing) and the method proposed. This man sees the method; Christ controls the result.

Character of the paralytic

We may learn something from this man:

- First, he's been at this for 38 years! Perseverance indeed! Wait upon the Lord, my friends.

- He has endured most of this in solitude; he has no friends who are willing to wait around for the water to be stirred.[45]
- He is an obedient man; he does what he is told.
- He is a thankful man – Christ finds him in the Temple, not the market.

What Jesus didn't do

Sometimes we can learn from what Jesus didn't do as well as from what He did.

- Jesus did not challenge the man's faith. His healing seems to be pure gift. This is encouraging to those with little faith; now matter how unfaithful we might be, He is faithful and just.
- Jesus did not reveal who he is. He melted into the crowds. Why? First, to have the man's testimony be taken as truth. He's been there 38 years, people know who he is. It's also possible that Jesus did not want to give the Pharisees any greater scope for envy – which we shall soon see.

Equal to the Father

Jesus now makes some of the most amazing statements to come from human lips:

Joh 5:16-30 NIV So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. (17) Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." (18) For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (19) Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. (21) For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (22) Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, (23) that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (24) "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (25) I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. (26) For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. (27) And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. (28) "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice (29) and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (30) By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

How the Jews understood this

Passages like this are sometimes dismissed as mysticism, which (as we all know) can never be understood anyway. Jesus' enemies show us that they we easily able to understand what Jesus was saying.

---

[45] Verse four, which describes the method of healing presumed at the pool, does not exist in the oldest of manuscripts. It is therefore considered a late addition not part of the original Scripture.

- "My Father" – if I claim to have human parents, I'm claiming to be human. The claim is clear; Jesus is saying that he is divine.[46]
- He claims also to be Lord over the Sabbath – immune to the guilt of doing work on the Sabbath.

Interesting; you can always rely on the testimony of your enemies to make your point. How, then, does Jesus justify this?

Equality of works

Jesus immediate defense of this claim is relatively simple. God is at work; I'm doing the same things; by their fruits you will know them. Indeed, Jesus does nothing new, nothing out of style – only what the Father has given. It may be easier to see if we break it down a bit:

- There is a divine style to works. Rage in clearing the Temple; gentleness in forgiving sin. Water becomes wine, stones do not become bread.
- There is a divine purpose in those works. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost – even the Pharisees. So He gives one and all a season to repent. Later, we shall see the great work of Christ – the Crucifixion.
- The Father loves the Son – and it shows, especially in the type of working miracle He favors.

Resurrection and Judgment

As if to make the point that this is serious indeed, Jesus tells them that all judgment has been given to him. To attack the honor of the Christ is to attack the honor of God Almighty, for they are one in the same. Judgment is given to the Son of Man because He is one of us – He knows our needs and weaknesses.

But there is more. The Son has "life in himself" just as the Father does. We, in short, borrow existence from God. That borrowed existence returns to God when we die.[47] But that life is available to us now – if we will hear and heed His voice. (Note that this is post-Resurrection; we have been shown who has the power of life and death.)

So it is that the church has always taught the resurrection of the dead. Some to the praise of their deeds, others to the hell they have chosen. Did you really think that God is finished with Adolf Hitler?

Reasons to Believe

Joh 5:31-47 NIV "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. (32) There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. (33) "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. (34) Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. (35) John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. (36) "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. (37) And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, (38) nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he

---

[46] The concept of being a child of God seems be a New Testament development. Until the firstborn of God frees us, we are servants at best.

[47] Ecclesiastes 12:7

sent. (39) You diligently study[3] the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, (40) yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (41) "I do not accept praise from men, (42) but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. (43) I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. (44) How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God[4]? (45) "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. (46) If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. (47) But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

The logical question – unasked, but implied – is simply, "How are you going to prove it?" Christ gives us three general answers:

Human witness

Christ makes it clear that no ordinary human can be a completely valid witness for him – but such witness does have its place. It is not completely perfect because the humans in question are not completely perfect. Indeed, in our day the miracle-working charlatan is an all too common site.

But we cannot totally discount human witness. We are taught that we are to be the light of the world. We may not be proof of Christ's divine nature – but we can testify to what we know and have experienced. Even the Pharisees listened to John; they "enjoyed his light" by choice. We, then, may perform a similar service.

The works of Christ

Jesus does not necessarily talk his way into our hearts. But we should look at the evidence given:

- First, there are the miracles performed. It is fashionable today to argue that these must all be myths; Christ's contemporaries had no such argument. Look at what he has done, and ask – who but God could do that?
- Add to that the Crucifixion. Why did this man voluntarily submit to crucifixion? Only the love of God could endure that. Only the love of God did.
- Finally, there is the Resurrection. Of all things in history, this is the one event that changes everything.

The Scriptures

We also have a written record to deal with. The Old Testament, in hundreds of passages, points to the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So why is it that the Pharisees, the experts in this, missed it?

Simply enough, the Scriptures must be read with the love of God in your heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." If you read them this way, He will do great things in your life. But beware: if you've read them, you will be judged using them as a standard. Thus it is that we seek the mercy of the Cross instead of judgment.

The Beatitudes - Matthew 5:1-12

It is certainly a well known passage of Scripture:

Mat 5:1-12 NIV
Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, (2) and he began to teach them saying: (3) "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(4) Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
(5) Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
(6) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
(7) Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
(8) Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
(9) Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
(10) Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(11) "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. (12) Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Prologue

The opening verses are usually neglected, but they do provide us with some insight:

- Jesus, seeing the multitudes, went up into the mountains, evidently to find a spot where He could be heard by them.
- He sits down – the gesture of a teacher in command, in those days.
- His disciples come to Him, so that they might be closest.
- The NIV does not have this, but in the original it's "He opened his mouth and spoke…" – a formality which lends dignity and weight to the teaching.
- The word "blessed" in the following verses carries a connotation of "extremely blessed."
- The pattern strongly resembles the "Psalms of Ascent" in the Old Testament – psalms in which each verse was chanted on a particular step up towards the Temple. They are intended to be handled publicly.

Does it not, therefore, oblige us to take this study in the most serious way? It is clear that Christ meant these to be our rule of life; as is His wont, He provides us blessing rather than warning.

The Beatitudes

The poor in spirit

There is a very good reason that this blessing comes first: it is opposed to the worst of all sins, pride.

- "Poor in spirit" opens the heart's door to the Holy Spirit, and the renewing presence of God.
- Note, please, that this is a voluntary humbling. We might well ask just how one is to do this; it does not seem obvious. But may one suggest that if you care for others first, this is indeed humbling? It says that others are more important than I am – my brothers and sisters, not my competitors.

We may take a clue from St. Ambrose (AD 340-397): "In the eye of heaven blessedness begins there where misery begins in human estimation." Perhaps our catastrophes are really blessings – if we know how to look at them.

They that mourn

I suspect this refers not so much to mourning at funerals as it does mourning for our sins.[48] It's a good question: do we regret and mourn our sinfulness, or hide it and hope the subject doesn't come up?

Of course, it also includes mourning for those taken from us; we expect the Lord's comfort at such times. But the greatest comfort will be at the resurrection of the dead. In the meanwhile we can remember that "God's mercies are always greater than our troubles."[49]

The meek inherit

The NIV uses meek; other translations may have "gentle" for this word. "Humble" is occasionally seen as well. The testosterone inflicted see this as being impossible; we should remember that our Lord was a meek and humble man. It is a characteristic of Jesus; all authority is His. At His return He will deal with this little matter.

In the meanwhile: see how quick we are to anger – and about such trivial things. We should always be ready to ask, "Can I concede this point, for Christ's sake?"

Hunger and thirst after righteousness

The old soldiers among us will recall MRE's – Meals Ready to Eat. A glance at the ingredient list would show it started with "recycled cardboard." It took a fair bit of hunger and privation before we would consider opening one.[50] That describes the hunger needed for righteousness. The most intense of desires must be there for righteousness. We must "seek first the kingdom."

So what if you do? The word translated here as "filled" is the same one used for "fatted", as in fatted calf. If you seek, you will find – and find plenty. Most of us want it to seek us and bless us. We should not be concerned with getting justice, but rather giving it.

The merciful

The lesson is repeated in the Lord's Prayer: the only way we are assured of mercy for ourselves is to be merciful. It is a form of bearing each other's burden; if my brother sins against me, I can lift that burden from him by forgiving him, and bearing the consequences myself.

---

[48] Still, a funeral for a Christian acknowledges death, the result of sin in a fallen world.

[49] Chrysostom

[50] The well prepared soldier carried a small bottle of Tabasco sauce in his cartridge belt for just such occasions. One wonders what the equivalent might be to pour over spiritual hunger.

But is that not what Jesus did at the Cross? Did He not bear our burdens there? See what a favorable exchange we have been given! We give the mercy of mere mortals and receive in return divine mercy, which greatly exceeds our own.

The pure in heart

It is true: the conniving want to connive with God. It's the only method they think will work.

But Christ tells us differently. If you want to deal with God in mercy, you must do so from a pure heart. He is righteous and pure; you're going to have to talk to Him on His own terms. Such a pure heart comes only through the Cross.[51]

But if you do this, one day you will see Him face to face, in the world to come. This is something like a telescope. If you want to see stars, you use a telescope. It's the proper instrument. But you have to keep the lens clean!

The peacemakers

Make peace? With whom?

- Peace with God – that our salvation might be secure.
- Peace with ourselves – so that no brother accuses another of harboring hate within himself.
- Peace with the world – that they might see the glory of God in our ways of living.

How can this be done? Only through Christ, our peace:

Eph 2:11-14 NIV Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- (12) remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. (13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. (14) For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

Thus we have peace with God, and the Spirit's assistance in obtaining peace within us – which leaves us the world to deal with. In peace. We are told that we are fellow heirs with Jesus, and like Him we must be willing to pay the price the peacemaker always pays. Strife seems to demand no sacrifice; peace demands sacrifice that is often painful. Such pain will be rewarded in His time.

Persecuted for righteousness

The kingdom of heaven is promised to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. It's a good way in this world to tell the white hats from the black hats. It is not so much the persecution as its motive – and it doesn't matter who is doing the persecuting. What matters is why!

Does it strike you as strange, American Christian? Permit me one example: if you pick up your picket sign, paint "Save the Whales" on it, and go down to picket and protest at the nearest (for example) oil refinery, you'd be viewed as a courageous, heroic sort by this world. If your sign reads,

---

[51] See Psalm 51, of course, especially verse 10.

"Stop Abortion," you are going to be arrested. Free speech only goes so far, you know. But see in our own time where the limits are drawn – at the door of righteousness.

When men revile you

Christ promises blessing when you are reviled. But note there are two conditions to this:

- It's for His sake, not your own. It's a matter of whether you receive your reward from Him, or the world.
- It must be false.

Note that Christ does not tell you that He will lift this oppression. In some times He does so; in others, not. No matter; your reward is secure – and great.

Summary

Things I'd like you to go away with:

- This is the Christian's "Code of Conduct." It's not Prohibition, but blessing for the behavior God wants to see in you.
- To do this, you will need humility. And mercy. And purity.
- It's the Christian's call to peace and righteousness.
- The world is going to find this strange – and attempt to stamp it out. Blessed are those persecuted for His sake.

You Have Heard It Said - Matthew 5:13-48

Salt and Light

Mat 5:13-16 NIV "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. (14) "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. (16) In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Salt of the Earth

Christ's first hearers would have had a different view of salt than we do. (My primary view is wrapped up in the phrase, "low sodium diet.") They would instantly have thought back to the Scriptures where they would see two references:

- The Covenant with Israel was a "covenant of salt."[52] The preservative nature of salt would be a picture of the eternal nature of God's covenants.
- All offerings were to include salt. The only exception was the "thank offering" – one for which there was no obligation. Every other offering needed the purification of salt.

Salt, it may thus be seen, is a preservative, but is also used to cleanse and purify.[53] So it is that the Christian is to cleanse and purify the world around him. How are we to do this?

Col 4:6 NIV Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

By our ready answers we are to persuade, by the grace of our speech we are to cleanse.

The light of the world

The rule of conduct for the Christian is the imitation of Christ – who is the light of the world.[54] What does this mean? Surely it is our example he is speaking of. His metaphor is carefully selected:

- There is no such thing as "dirty light." Light does not come from corruption. Therefore, we are commanded to be pure.
- Light is seen even when the world doesn't want to see it. Even when the Christian is persecuted, the example still shines – and some would say the darker the world, the brighter the example should be.

But we are not just an example to be seen; we are a way of life to be followed. The example is not just external obedience, but flows from contact with the One True Light. We are to be light in thought as well as action.

Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets

Mat 5:17-20 NIV "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (18) I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from

---

[52] Numbers 18:19
[53] See 2nd Kings 2:19-22 for an example of this.
[54] John 9:5

the Law until everything is accomplished. (19) Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (20) For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Seeing the obvious

Let's take the obvious answer to the obvious question, "How can Christ fulfill the Law and the Prophets?"

- First, He fulfills the prophecies concerning the Messiah.
- Second, He fulfills the Law as the ultimate atonement.

But as we shall see, He now extends the Law from the realm of action to the realm of the heart.

Extending the tradition

Christ is about to give a series of commandments which exceed the Old Testament Law – though they are found in the Scriptures even there. How can He do this? He speaks in the same vein of knowledge, for He is the author of the Law.

Let me give you an example. My favorite composer is Johann Sebastian Bach. He wrote about a century before Beethoven. If you examine their music, you will see that Beethoven extends the scope of music – by staying within the same artistic tradition of Bach. Anyone in that tradition (of music) may extend it. But sometimes we get a Schoenberg – one who scraps the tradition for "bold new ways." Schoenberg isn't heard very much today, though he was all the rage in his lifetime. Christ is the Beethoven of the Law, not the Schoenberg.

So it is that He extends the Law, but does not go against it. Righteousness is still righteousness; Christ extends righteousness of action into righteousness of heart. It's already there in the Old Testament; now it comes to the forefront.

Heaven and earth

How, then, can Christ say that the Law endures until He comes again, and heaven and earth pass away? Because He is the author of the Law, the founder of the Church – and the creator of the New Heaven and New Earth. All three steps are part of the plan made before the creation of the universe.

"But I say…"

We may now see how Christ extends the Law in three ways:

Thought, word and action

Mat 5:21-26 NIV "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,[1] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' (22) But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother[2] will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,[3]' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. (23) "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (25) "Settle matters quickly with your

adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. (26) I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.[4]

It is a fact of life that "you can't go to jail for what you're thinking." For the police department, action, not thought, alone can be controlled. There are two reasons for this:

- It is a practical necessity. The thought police are rather arbitrary, but our police need to find a known violation of the law. Anything more is tyranny.
- It is required by the fact that judges and juries are composed of sinful people. The law deals with action because this is what juries can really judge.

But God can extend this, for He alone sees the heart. The pure heart gives rise to pure thoughts, which give rise to noble deeds. That, however, is not the starting point of natural man:

Jer 17:9-10 NIV The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it? (10) "I the LORD search the heart
and examine the mind,
to reward a man according to his conduct,
according to what his deeds deserve."

So we come to the paradigm Christ gives us here: train your thoughts – and your words will be pure. Train your words – and your deeds will be pleasing to God.

Vows

Mat 5:27-37 NIV "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'[5] (28) But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (29) If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. (30) And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.
(31) "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'[6]
(32) But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.
(33) "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' (34) But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; (35) or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. (36) And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. (37) Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

(I regret to add this note as vital predecessor. We must remember that marriage is an oath – remember the phrase "wedding vows?" Thus it is that Christ upholds such a vow not only as one's solemn, sworn word, but also upon the original intentions of God. To put it in summary, it is the teaching of the church that divorce has no cause except adultery; and that adultery in any circumstance is sin. To make the matter clear, anything to the contrary is the work of an apostate. An "apostate" – well, look it up. It will do you good.)

The oath (then and now) has an intrinsic problem: lawyers. The temptation is to find a way of phrasing your oath so that it sounds like you mean what is right – but always with loopholes. This has not changed much over the last two thousand years.

For the Christian, we must remember that we will be called to account for our oaths and vows – called to account by God Almighty. This puts the matter in a clear light: the oath is a dangerous thing. Therefore, take them as seldom as possible – and fulfill them completely.

Be perfect

Mat 5:38-48 NIV "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'[7] (39) But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (40) And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (41) If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (42) Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.
(43) "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[8] and hate your enemy.' (44) But I tell you: Love your enemies[9] and pray for those who persecute you, (45) that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (46) If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? (47) And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? (48) Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Christ begins by defining our response to an unholy trinity: violence, material possessions and money. The response seems so improbable to us now. But consider this carefully: why did the Law say, "eye for eye?" Both for the servant[55] and the neighbor[56] this is given as proper punishment. Why? Not so that we would have more eyes poked out, but fewer. The certainty of swift punishment is a great motivator. This is the Law: dealing only with actions. But Christ here lays out the law of love: do not pick up the weapons of Satan – revenge and violence – but the weapons of God. Those weapons are forgiveness and mercy, and unconditional love.

Have you thought of it as an example of light and salt? If you love your enemy, you will forgive them – a startling example, unable to be hidden. The question is quick to come: why? The answer is the imitation of Christ.

Of course, the reaction is that I can't do this; I am not capable of it. How can I be perfect? I give you two answers:

- The perfect imitation of Christ is God's own work. God's work, done in God's way will never lack for God's supply.[57]
- You are God's child; will your heavenly Father fail to give you any good thing – especially when it causes you to grow more like Him?

---

[55] Exodus 21:22-27
[56] Leviticus 24:19-20
[57] Hudson Taylor, approximately.

The Secret Saint - Matthew 6:1-18

If there is a sin which is taught against in this passage, it is vainglory – a word no longer in use around the church. But consider what our Lord did here:

He roots out in what remains the most tyrannical passion of all, the rage and madness with respect to vainglory, which springs up in them that do right. (Chrysostom)

Vainglory – defined by Noah Webster as "Exclusive vanity excited by one's own performances; empty pride; undue elation of mind" – is a word seldom heard these days. It is not even a "church word;" the concept has disappeared from the average Christian's mind. The sin, however, has not so disappeared. Let us see our Lord's words on the subject.

Giving

Mat 6:1-4 NIV
"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Our local university recently announced some grand news. It seems that a Mr. Steven G. Mihaylo (pronounce that once or twice) has given the school thirty million dollars for its College of Business and Economics. To no one's surprise, the school renamed it the Steven G. Mihaylo College of Business and Economics. As this is a secular university, we may assume that Mr. Mihaylo has, or will, receive whatever reward and recognition intended. We may also assume he will receive most of the recognition from the school.

The Christian, however, receives his rewards from God. This places a different outlook on the giver. Sometimes he must accept that his reward will not be given to him in this life; other times, that he will be rewarded greatly in this life – and all proportions in between. There is no sin in this – unless the Christian performed his charity for the purpose of being recognized and rewarded. We may see the steps by which this comes about:

- People tend to praise good things – and this is as it should be.
- People are motivated by praise. If you praise me for doing a good job, it's likely enough that I will try to do a good job again.
- So where does the sin creep in? When I begin to do my good deeds just so that I will be praised for it.

There is only one solution to this: humility. As we shall see, this is greatly aided when we remember the phrase, "to God be the glory."

Praying

Mat 6:5-8 NIV "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (6) But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray

to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (7) And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. (8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Again, we have a question of motive – are you doing it for the sake of being praised by others? Why would we do this? Perhaps it is simply that we do not believe that God will really reward us, and we see the praise of others as a substitute. It's a poor one. For both on earth and in the world to come the Father is quite capable of rewarding you – if you will not doubt.

We are then told not to "keep on babbling like the pagans." We must presume that this is meant to apply to (among other situations) the number of magic prayers circulating on the Internet ("don't break the chain!")

He knows what we need; why then do we pray at all?

- It is certainly not to teach him our wants and desires – but rather to prevail in our walk with Christ.
- We certainly become closer to Him the more we pray.
- Perhaps least desired and most useful, in prayer we are humbled, being reminded of our sins.

Fasting

Mat 6:16-18 NIV "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (17) But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, (18) so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew Henry called it, "the humbling of the soul." For many years relegated to footnote, it has achieved a certain popularity in the church. Unfortunately, this advice seems to have been neglected by some. Vainglory, again.

So one might ask: just how is it that the Christian can be both light to the world, and hidden from the world as well? If you wanted to hide a book – you'd put it in a library. If you wanted to hide a leaf, a forest. A man, a city. And if you wanted to hide the light that shines before men, do so in a lighthouse – a church full of those whose good deeds are evident and rewarded by God.

Upon these preliminaries we may now examine the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

Mat 6:9-15 NIV "This, then, is how you should pray:
" 'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, (10) your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us today our daily bread. (12) Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors. (13) And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.[1]' (14) For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Preamble

Chrysostom shares this with us:

For who calls God Father, in that one title confesses at once the forgiveness of sins, the adoption, the heirship, the brotherhood, which he has with the Only-begotten, and the gift of the Spirit. For none can call God Father, but he who has obtained all these blessings. In a two-fold manner, therefore, he moves the feeling of them that pray, both by the dignity of Him who is prayed to, and the greatness of those benefits which we gain by prayer.

We have come to the root of western civilization: the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. In Christ we find equality; in Christ we find kinship and kindness to each other; in Christ we find the moral compass that distinguishes the civilized from the barbarian.

Consider the opposite view: the idea that we are all mere animals, the products of unknowing evolution. This justified Hitler's racial ideas – the best animals should rule over the others. This justified "family planning" – whose roots were in the idea that abortion for black mothers should be most encouraged (racial inferiority, you know.) This justified the millions of deaths at the hands of Stalin and Mao-Tse-Tung, as those who did not support the higher goals for the people. It is also the chief prop of American liberalism; the barbarians are within the gates.

This is also a reminder of our sins; it's our Father *in heaven*, not Washington DC.

Hallowed be your name

Would you drive out vainglory? Do it with the glory of God. If He is lifted up, no one need see me.

His name – not just (as we would have it today) a label conveniently attached. It is, rather, a statement of His nature – I AM. In that name we baptize; in that name we forgive. What is bound up on earth will be bound up in heaven.

Your kingdom come

- If we are the sons of the Great King, God Himself, should we not ask for a kingdom appropriate for the children of such a king?
- If we do so pray, does it not imply a high confidence? For if we pray for such a kingdom, we certainly pray therefore for the judgment which will arrive with it. Are we so confident?
- But if we do pray for His kingdom, are we not kindling the desire to do what is right – here on earth?

Your will be done

- When you pray for His will to be done, are you not surrendering your own to Him? Or at least you should be.
- But note: it's not just me, I'm praying for everyone on earth to do this. It's a form of unselfishness; I want everyone to know my joy.

The prayer now shifts; we may begin to ask on our own behalf.

Our daily bread

- Note that it's "this day" and "our daily bread." There is no thought of my retirement fund – for we must be taught to trust our Lord.

- It's bread. It's not chocolate frosted jelly donuts. He knows our needs – and also the wants that distract us. See what we are to pray for!
- Why so? Again, He wants you to learn to trust Him. Day by day, not just "someday." Nor "any day." Today.

Forgive us our debts

We might as well face it: there is no sense in the New Testament that forgiveness is offered on any other terms than forgiving others. Forgiveness of God is divine, and beyond price – and we are offered this at the price of our own forgiveness.

It is but a specific instance of a general rule: by what standard you measure, you will be measured. If you are one who forgives easily, considering offenses against you as light and transient things, then our Lord will see your sins in the same way.

Lead us not

- First things first: just to pronounce these words is to admit our own weakness as sinners. We need not just forgiveness but protection against the next temptation.
- Having said that, it also is an admission that His power is sufficient to keep us from temptation – if we will follow.

The end is translated "deliver us from the Evil One." In this the reality of Satan is proclaimed; in so proclaiming we pronounce ourselves inferior to him – and claim the leadership and protection of God against him.

The world looks different, when viewed from the foot of the Cross.

Treasure - Matthew 6:19-34

If is a curious thing: the richest people in the world, the citizens of America, seem obsessed with the idea that they do not have enough. Enough what? Enough of anything of value at all. It is with some trepidation, then, that we present an opposing view:

Mat 6:19-24 NIV "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (22) "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. (23) But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (24) "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Treasure in heaven

As my wife's father advances in age, we have found it increasingly difficult to explain to him why we don't chase money the way he does. In money he finds his life's worth; therefore, the only form of charity which is acceptable is giving money. There can be no value in living in holiness (poverty or not); only in wealth. Why do we chase this thing called money?

- For some of us, it's a matter of security. We want to be OK now, but especially OK for the future. We have nightmares of starving at the county poor house. More commonly, we have visions of being dependent upon our adult children. For some, that's an issue of security; for others, pride.
- For others, it is a tool of vainglory. It is how I show my neighbors which of us has arrived. I suspect that better than half of all full size pickups are purchased for that reason. As one car salesman explained it to me, they come in, they see it and they buy it as quickly as possible – before reality sets in.

The problem for the Christian is the impact this desire has upon the devotion needed to be a real Christian. We want to compartmentalize our lives – but then we find that all the compartments are part of the same ship.

The light of the eye

This particular expression needs some explanation. In Greek thought of the time (which would have been commonplace to Christ's hearers) seeing was done by the eye projecting a ray into the darkness. So the listener would have understood this to be a metaphor for spiritual sight.

- To the pure, all things are pure.[58] So it is that they see clearly in matters spiritual.
- The spiritually corrupt are always looking for a loophole, or a hidden meaning, or some sort of fraud. Since the Gospel is "too good to be true" they're sure it isn't.

Do you see, however, that the difference here is NOT the Gospel – but the perception of the individual? If your view is warped by the love of money and obedience to its dictates, things soon look out of shape. That's why the Scripture is so often described as bring light.[59]

---

[58] Titus 1:15

In modern thinking, two problems arise which might not have been apparent at the time of Christ:

- First, is it possible to change my view of the world at all? Isn't it something which is just "there?" The answer is yes – but sometimes requires a twelve step program.[60]
- Second, can I have a world view which is different from everybody else? It's a problem the Christian faces in a number of places; for example, there are still Christians who believe that divorce is, in general, morally wrong.

Two masters

There is an important insight here: if you have the mind set on things above, the spiritual mind, it will free your body from sin. But the love of money breaks that mind, trying to get you to serve both God and money. Satan knows you can't do that; he knows that you cannot serve two masters. He just wants to be the one you will serve.

Note, please, that the mere possession of money is not what is at issue. You can have very little money and pursue it greatly – which still makes you greedy.

There is one thought for you: if you think money has not mastered you, what is your reaction to the next giving opportunity? Do you find yourself making excuses about why you can't give, or praising God for the chance to give?

Do Not Worry

Mat 6:25-34 NIV "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? (26) Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (27) Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life[2]? (28) "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. (29) Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. (30) If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (31) So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' (32) For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (33) But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (34) Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Getting priorities straight

In an absolute sense, food and clothing (and other things) are a necessity. You don't want to be running around in a Wisconsin winter with no clothing; crossing Death Valley, you'd probably want to pack food and water.

---

[59] Psalm 119:105
[60] I have yet to see such a program dealing with greed.

But notice something: most of us don't buy "food." We may buy Buster's Amazing Potato Chips, however. We don't buy "clothes." We may buy the elegant tuxedo recently marked down to 29¢. So when we complain that we don't have the money to (for example) give, we are actually saying that we don't want to make the sacrifices necessary to do so.

I submit that the reason our priorities in giving are so badly in disarray is that we are making the wrong comparisons. We are contrasting "food" and tithing when the true comparison is potatoes chips and tithing. We are contrasting "clothing" and evangelism when the true comparison is the fashion designer suit and evangelism.

Most often, the problem is not that we have our priorities askew – it's that we never set any, at least not regarding the spiritual realm. The reason we don't want to set them is fear – we don't want to test our faith against the harsh realities of this world. We have, in short, no confidence in the providence of God.

God's providence

Reciting all the times in Scripture in which God provides by his providence would make a long list. The thought that God would provide for His own work was a commonplace among our ancestors, at least through the 1950's. Today, no one speaks of it. Then we shall speak of it now.

There are three general types of providence by which God brings about His will:

- Direct providence – as when God fed Elijah by the ravens – is one in which it is easy to see the source of the providence. This is probably the least common.
- Instant providence – just when it seems everything's falling apart, God provides. It's not miraculous – but the timing is extremely significant.
- Overriding providence – it looked like Joseph would end his days as the lowest of slaves. There was no hope, except in God. God overrode the world's intention.

Can God – or will God?

OK, He can do it. But will He? Why is it that my life is not littered with such providences? Is it not due to your unbelief? For this Christ tells the crowd to open their eyes. They are quite aware of the birds and the grass; they just haven't drawn the proper conclusions.

We have, in effect, set up our own barrier to God's providence. We will not trust Him. Why not? Because we are busily trusting our money. We have taken two masters, and we are stretching ourselves down two different paths. Sooner or later, we must decide which leg hurts the most. How much better, then, to make that decision consciously in calm waters than at sea in the storm!

Seek first the kingdom

Christ promises us, in effect, that our needs will be met if we make the decision to follow him. This does not mean I'll get a new sports car. It means, "needs." Indeed, it is not unknown to Christendom to have those who intentionally enter "holy poverty." But that is not the normal method; if we get our priorities straight, we shall find ourselves with no lack of what we need. So what should our priorities be?

- Seek first the kingdom, He tells us. Seek to understand; seek to enter; seek to participate (that will require obedience!); seek to serve. You can't store a touchdown if you're not on the team.
- Then seek God's righteousness. Do what is just and fair; stand up for those who cry for justice to wooden ears; be honest in all your dealings. This will do for a start, but we all know what the completion of righteousness is: the blood of Christ. If you're in, you need to be in 100%.

Do not worry

It is a command of your Lord: don't worry about it. He gives us two varieties of "non-worry."

- First is in the matter of material things. Did you think God Himself does not know our needs? When you were a little child, did you have to write out the grocery list? Nor do you need now to write out your list of worries and wants; He already knows you need same. Trust Him for it.
- Next – and by far the more pernicious – is worrying about tomorrow. Worrying about your daily bread is a rather limited focus; worrying about what "might be" in the future is much greater. After all, there are only two outcomes for the bread – yes and no. Tomorrow contains far more to worry about.

All we have is the present

We cannot change the past; we can only repeat its mistakes or repent of them. God has not privileged us to go back and clean up our mistakes. As Stalin once said, "The past is history – and history belongs to God."

We cannot really control the future; only the now. You think not? If you have stocks you are likely to have a stock broker. This is a person whose working hours are dedicated to choosing stocks for her clients; yet even with the best of advice the market will often just do as it pleases. You can control what you invest in now – but not the price of the stock tomorrow.

All we have is the present, where time and eternity meet. Today is the day, now is the hour. Therefore "take no thought for the morrow" – because you've got enough troubles today.

Golden Rule - Matthew 7

It sometimes escapes our notice, but the passage now known as the "Golden Rule" is set in a particular context – being judgmental. It is instructive, therefore, to remember that thought as we examine the remaining portion of the Sermon on the Mount.

Judge Not

Mat 7:1-6 NIV

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. (2) For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (3) "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (4) How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? (5) You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (6) "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

Paradox: condemn sin or judge not?

It seems at first blush that Christ is telling us here that we are never to condemn sin, but always consider ourselves as much more guilty. In fact, however, there are two concepts we must keep in mind as being of use in dealing with another Christian's sin:

- The first is church discipline. This is commanded of us, and also done by example. But in our instructions for this, it is always to be done in love and care. We are specifically cautioned not to do this should we ourselves be weak in the sin concerned. In short, firm in purpose, gentle in love.
- The second is judgment, which is forbidden here. But surely we can see just what is happening. Christ's comparison of speck and plank tells us first that the judgment is being made on trivial things. (Holier than thou?) He also makes it clear that this is being done in pride, not in repentance of heart.

The yardstick principle

To see just how damaging this judgment is, Christ points out that He will use our own yardstick to measure us. Can we safely assume that you wish to be judged by trifling things? I think not; in my own case, I'm certain of it.

But I must admit the righteousness and fairness of the procedure. This is important, as it provides motivation to stop judging. It also provides a clear answer as to just what Christ will do with me and my judging.

However, it must be admitted: sometimes the judgment goes on without the slightest thought of problem. It seems very natural at the time.[61] But to do so without thinking is to do so in hypocrisy. That is a very deadly business.

---

[61] If you've ever had to deal with the "fashion police" types, you know this.

Pearls before swine

There is another point to be considered. Sometimes we feel judgmental towards someone who is not really a Christian. The temptation to rise up and straighten out that individual (with a short list of Bible verses) is overwhelming. We soon learn that it doesn't work. The carnal man cannot understand what the spiritual man is saying.[62] Whether just or not, judgment by another human being rarely impresses the non-believer. That is God's work, through the Holy Spirit. We are taught to "shake dust"[63] in such circumstances.

Warning signs

How do we know when we've slipped into being judgmental? The first clue is that we do it from our own understanding, not asking God anything. It is natural, therefore, that our man-created words do not fulfill the purposes of God. In fact, they are usually offensive. If we persist, it will not be long until the word, "Hypocrite" is thrown about, and the charge be made against the church as well as its member.

So what should we do about this?

Ask, Seek, Knock

Mat 7:7-12 NIV "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (9) "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? (11) If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (12) So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The real shortfall in being judgmental is this: to do so, we rely on our own understanding of things. Once stated, it becomes obvious that we should be bringing these things to God. Why don't we? Perhaps it is this:

- The things we're being judgmental on are in fact trivial, and we "don't want to bother Him" about it, or
- We're afraid He will point out just how trivial they are, and just how much hypocrisy we are in.

This process will at least sort out the important stuff. If we will bring the matter to Him first, it saves much time and effort – and allows us to focus on what is important to God.

What does it mean

Nor are we to do this in a trivial way. Indeed, it is instructive to examine the original Greek words for this:

- Ask – the word can also be translated as "desire" or even "crave." We are not asking of idle curiosity but out of sincere love for our brothers.
- Seek – the word is otherwise translated as "worship" – as in, "to seek God's face."

---

[62] 1st Corinthians 2:14
[63] Matthew 10:14

- Knock – means knock.

So even in the way in which we are to seek God's will, we are to be in earnest and completely committed.

"So, in everything,"

May I point it out? The Golden Rule is a *conclusion* of the chapter so far! Its first use is in dealing with the judgments of man. If you don't like having others treat you judgmentally (and who does?) then be fair: don't be judgmental towards them.

Rather, we should follow God's example of forgiveness and generosity. He will equip us at all points required if we will simply rely on Him instead of our own understanding. Follow Him – and follow persistently.

The Narrow Gate

Mat 7:13-29 NIV "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (14) But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.
(15) "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (16) By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (17) Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (18) A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (21) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' (23) Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'
(24) "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (25) The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. (26) But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. (27) The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (28) When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, (29) because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

The narrow way

It is an unfortunate characteristic of human beings: wishful thinking. How often have you heard someone say that God will let them into heaven because the good they have done, or because God isn't judgmental, you know? Our society has succumbed to the idea that all religions are equally true (hence, of course, equally false), so it doesn't matter what you believe (or even what you do), God will let you into heaven.

Christ here tells us that this idea is false. For though the way of life is open to all, it is a very strict one. The idea that Christ is "the way, the truth, the life" seems, somehow, unfair. But life is like

that too; most things have only one road of truth. The path is easy to find – and easy to be distracted from.

False Prophets

We must, therefore, pay some attention to the distractions along the way. Keeping with the theme of being judgmental, Christ points out one group that can be very judgmental: the false prophet.

It's a pretty clear point. The false prophet has to have somebody to be "against". Otherwise, he'd be expected to preach the Gospel as found. It's much easier to preach against. But this very attitude tells you who is the false prophet: the one whose words and actions strive against the harmony and love of the church. Their words sound pious, but they create strife everywhere they go. And that's how we are to recognize (and avoid) them.

Confusion in this comes because we look at the entire effect of a given leader. He might not be eloquent as a pastor, but he works hard and brings people together, for example. We look at the false prophet with a tendency to excuse him because he is so good at:

- "Lord, Lord." He may be an eloquent man, and be fond of public prayer which seems to exalt the Lord.
- Prophecy. He may pose as one to whom God has given some special revelation.
- Demons and miracles. He may appear to perform miraculous healings, and drive out demons.

Surely, we might think, such a man must be sincere. Think again; do any of these things sound familiar?

Two ways

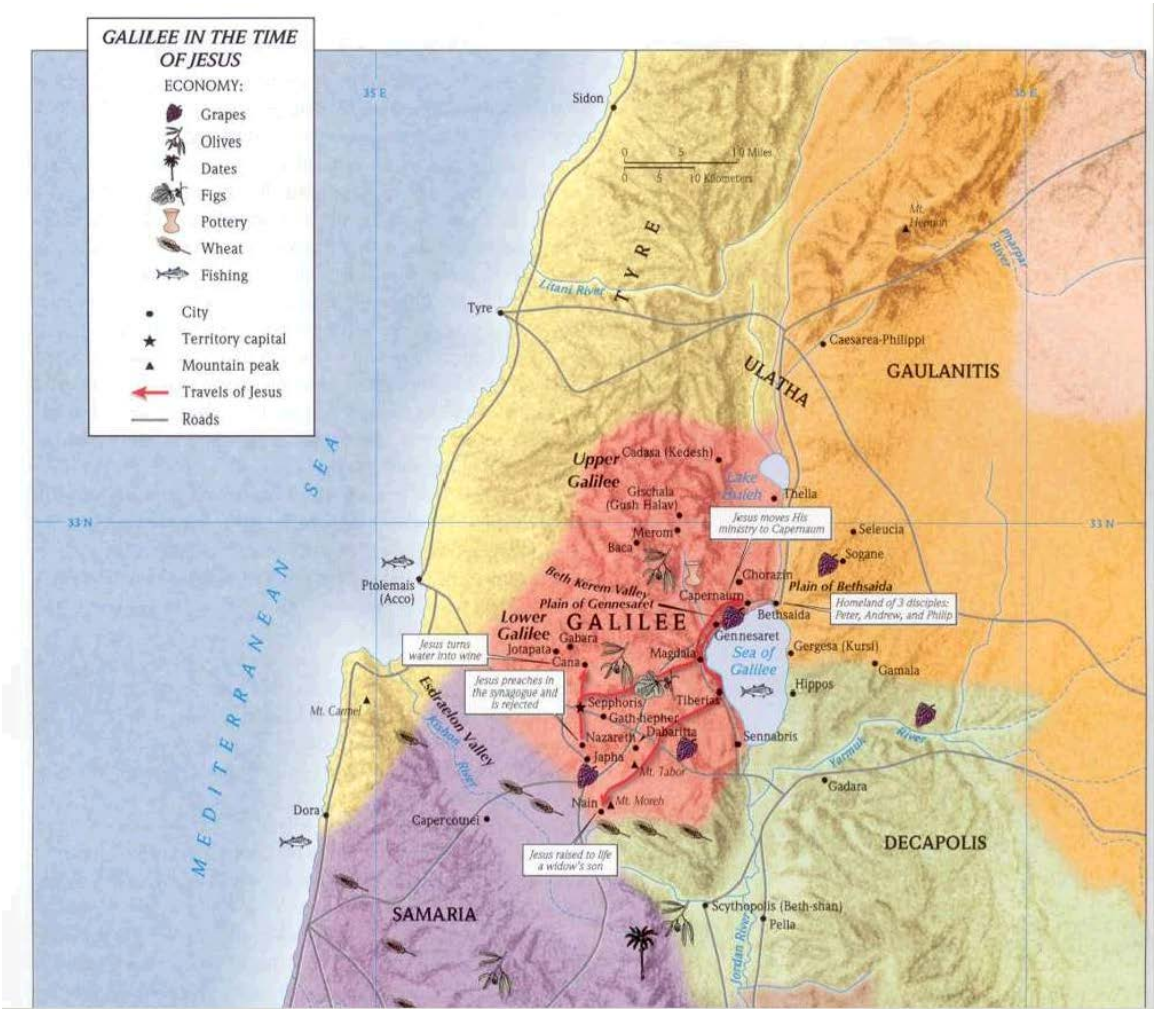
It comes to this. There are two ways before us. One is hard, narrow and long. It requires sacrifice, devotion and obedience. The other is wide open and easy to stay on. It's just that it leads you to hell. The narrow way is not hard to find, and it is open to "whosoever will." The problem is not with our road map; the problem is with our desire to choose the pleasant way over the right way.

Faith to Doubt - Luke 7

The incidents we shall examine in this lesson are not normally grouped together. Their only connection, it would seem, is that they happened in sequence. But taken in that sequence we see three expositions of faith:

- The centurion of great faith.
- The widow of Nain, who shows no faith at all.
- John the Baptist, who exhibits doubt instead of faith.

The incidents happen in Capernaum and Nain; the map may be of some use.



We may begin, therefore, in Capernaum.

Great Faith

Mat 8:5-13 NIV	Luk 7:1-10 NIV
When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. (6) "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." (7) Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." (8) The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. (9) For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (10) When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. (11) I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (13) Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.	When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. (2) There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. (3) The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. (4) When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, (5) because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." (6) So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. (7) That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. (8) For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (9) When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." (10) Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Christ brings out faith

It is a fact: Christ often acts to bring out the faith we already have. The centurion wants Christ to heal, but – being a Gentile – sends the Jewish elders to ask Jesus for this work. Jesus could simply heal the servant, and send them on their way, but He doesn't. Christ's reply is somewhat startling: He will go into the house of a Gentile (and thus become unclean ceremonially). Think what an encouragement that must have been!

The centurion reacts in kind. His faith has been called upon, and on it he will lean.

Authority and faith

The key perception we need here is in one word. The NIV translates the centurion's words as "I myself am a man under authority." The NASB and the KJV use, "I also." The key is not that the centurion is under authority, or even under Christ's authority. The key is that the centurion sees in Jesus a man *under authority just like himself.* It is a simple leap to ask whose authority; the answer is God the Father. This, then, is what drives the centurion's faith.

We will do well to remember some things about authority:

- All authority is given to Christ; therefore all legitimate authority on earth must be connected to Him somehow.
- Authority is given for the benefit of those in submission to it.
- If you use authority given to you, you must acknowledge the validity of the source.
  Such authority is best used in humility; veterans will recall "salute the uniform, not the wearer."

On his own terms

Christ, having encountered such a man, deals with him in his own terms. He does not explain why it would be better if Christ actually went to the house; the centurion is willing to take his word for it. The uncleanness is avoided, the man goes on his way. He doesn't ask Jesus to come anyway – "just in case." To those in authority, Christ responds in authority.

No Faith Required

Luk 7:11-17 NIV Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. (12) As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out--the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. (13) When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." (14) Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" (15) The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. (16) They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." (17) This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea[1] and the surrounding country.

The faith formula

It is perhaps surprising that in the last section I did not encourage you to have the faith the centurion had. It would be a wonderful thing, of course, and the requirement of such faith is often preached. But faith is not a magic potion to get what you want; want of faith is not necessarily the reason you're not driving a Mercedes.

Make no mistake; God loves such faith. He rewards it, too. But that does not necessarily imply that He will do nothing in your life without it.

The compassion of Christ

We need to know that the "coffin" referenced here was probably nothing more than a couple of boards which held the body, wrapped in linen. The mourners would be in somewhat of a hurry, as they were required to get the body into a grave before nightfall. Jesus halts the procession, which probably

irritated them. But note what he does next: He comforts the widow. He's about to raise the dead, and He comforts her in her grief. Why not get to the action?

Perhaps it is this: real friends are not those who have laughed together as much as those who have cried together. The heart of Jesus went out to this woman's grief, and the Son of Man therefore need to comfort her – if only for our example. I think it much more than that.

Then He gives her back her son. Love precedes divine power. It is the very nature of God that He is love, and Jesus will not neglect it.

Reaction

As there was no trial of faith here, the results no doubt surprised the crowd. Their reaction is a lesson to us:

- They were "in awe." The word in the Greek is *phobos*, from which we get our word "phobia." Other translations make this, "Fear gripped them." Well it should; consider the power they suddenly discovered.
- They praised God – how often we forget to praise Him after thanking Him
- They acknowledge that "God has come to help his people." It's not just a statement of the obvious; it's obvious and I will acknowledge it anyway.

Doubt and Uncertainty

Mat 11:2-6 NIV When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples (3) to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (4) Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: (5) The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy[2] are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. (6) Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."	Luk 7:18-23 NIV John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, (19) he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (20) When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' " (21) At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. (22) So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy[2] are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. (23) Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Doubt happens

It is a fact. Many of those who doubted are recorded in the Scripture. Elijah, Gideon, Peter and doubting Thomas are among them; so doubt is a fact of the faith. What causes such doubt?

- Circumstances. John is in jail, a very depressing and lonely place. A dark dungeon challenges your memory of the light.
- Impatience. Just because God hasn't done it yet, we fall into the thought that He never will.
- Other voices. If those around you deny that you could have heard in the darkness, it's more difficult to shout it from the housetops.

Courage is easy on the parade ground. In battle, at three AM in the morning, things are a bit different.

How Christ deals with doubt

First, note two things that Christ does *not* do:

- He does not just reassure John. Jesus never does answer John's question directly; nor should He.
- He does not criticize John either. There is no blame for the doubt; Jesus knows what's going on.

Jesus answers by simply pointing out the facts.[64] Listen to what He says:

- Old Testament prophecy is being fulfilled.
- The poor hear the Gospel; it is brought to the lowly, not to the rich who could fill the coffers of his pledge drive.

Then we see the gentle encouragement in verse 23.

Who I am; who you are

Permit me some personal experience. When God deals with my doubt, He does it this way:

- He confirms the task to which I have been set. Even when I think my efforts futile and my direction wrong, He will not permit that error for long.
- He adds to such tasks those things which seem fitting for my growth. It is not just a laundry list, but a vote of confidence.

Finally, He reminds me that I am a child of God, and my Father will refuse me no good thing. It is His good pleasure to build the kingdom of God, and He has been kind enough to share that pleasure with me.

---

[64] Hence apologetics today.

Rest for the Weary - Matthew 11:20-30; Luke 7:36-50

At first this appears to be a strange connection of events; but perhaps not as strange as at first glance.

Judgment – its basis

Mat 11:20-24 NIV Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. (21) "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (22) But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. (23) And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.[4] If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. (24) But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

While it is a maxim of law that "ignorance is no excuse," we are partial to the idea that those who hadn't a clue should face a lighter sentence than those who were knowledgeable. So is our Lord. The pygmy who has never heard the word should be judged on what he knew, not what he didn't. But what about us? Are our circumstances the same? Let us explore this by questions.

What were you taught?

Many of us have the benefit of growing up in a church family. We went to Sunday School; we sang "Jesus Loves Me." Does this not imply a greater judgment at our Lord's return?

Sometimes the teaching is not in the classroom, but in the example before us. It may be nice to have a grandfather who was a preacher; but did you walk in his example? If you've seen it done right, were you taking notes?

Perhaps most telling of all is this: what did people expect of you? Did those around you expect sterling conduct? It's a good measure of justice, that. We know who should behave themselves; indeed, the expectations of others are often a strong support of good behavior.

What did you say?[65]

Your own words set a standard of judgment; they also can be evidence against you. For example:

- "They're all hypocrites." At least, then, you admit that you know what a hypocrite is, and condemn same. But if you act the hypocrite, is this not a greater judgment on you?
- "My evil is just another chance for God's grace and goodness to abound." (Yes, there are people who are like that.) God will forgive; it's his hobby. Even you don't believe that. You certainly wouldn't accept this as truth from somebody else.
- "Other people in this church have such puny faith." It is not their faith that is in question; their lack can never bring God to be faithless. His faithfulness is sure; theirs is really not your affair; you have enough trouble with your own. (I sure do.)

---

[65] See Matthew 12:36-37, where the principle is concisely given.

What did you see?

We often think that if we could just see one solid, genuine miracle our faith would instantly become a solid rock. Remember the Israelites under Moses: a string of miracles and a people with no real faith.

Mostly, however, our problem is not in what we see – it's in our refusal to see. For example:

- Do we fail to see the sin in our own lives – or in the lives of those we love?
- Do we fail to see the signs of the times? The warning lights flash; do we heed them or try to beat the train to the crossing?

Willful ignorance is not only no excuse; it is folly.

Rest for the Weary

Mat 11:25-30 NIV At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. (26) Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. (27) "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (28) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Praise to God

Take a look at what Christ praises the Father for. It seems rather odd, that the "wise and learned" should be allowed to be ignorant. But there is an important thought in here:

- The "wise and learned" are those who consider themselves self-sufficient in dealing with God. Since they are of that opinion, God humors them in this. The wisdom of men is available in great quantity; all you need do is study. It's only when you admit you can't know it all that God will graciously reveal these things.
- Those who are not self-sufficient must perforce rely on God. They have no choice – but God knows that, and pours Himself into them.

Is this praiseworthy? It is for the God who makes the blind to see. He needs no learned scholar to tell Him what is truth – but rather pours out truth to all who will listen.

All things are committed

Christ now reminds his hearers of just who He claims to be. See how Paul puts it:

Col 1:15-20 NIV He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (16) For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. (17) He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. (19) For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

It is worth remembering that Christ has all authority, and in particular no one comes to the Father except through the Son. If Christ doesn't reveal the Father to you, there is no hope of your getting through. He is the way, the truth, the life. So, should we prepare ourselves for an arduous struggle to prove ourselves worthy of such access?

Yoke is easy

Now you see the apparent contradiction: Getting to the Father comes only on the narrow way – but if you will come to Christ the burden will become much lighter. How so?

- Burdens are lighter when carried in love. Ask the average Orange County Republican just how burdensome is the welfare for an unmarried mother, and you will find it greatly so. But if that mother is your daughter, the child your grandchild, is it really so burdensome?
- It's easier to carry a burden for which Christ has made you strong. To give a simple example, the first time you do a hospital call is an emotional experience. But after a while, you become a welcome visitor – and one who fears the visit far less.
- Sometimes we've had a problem that we now discover in someone else. Because of our experience, we can bring comfort to others. Often, there is someone available to comfort us, too.

The invitation issued, we see one who will take Christ's offer with her whole being.

The Sinful Woman

Luk 7:36-50 NIV Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. (37) When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, (38) and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. (39) When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner." (40) Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said. (41) "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,[4] and the other fifty. (42) Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" (43) Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said. (44) Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. (45) You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. (46) You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. (47) Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." (48) Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." (49) The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (50) Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

We have gone from the worldly knowledgeable to the worldly woman – a woman whose sins are before her. Most ancient writers agree that the expression given here means that the woman was a prostitute.[66] The reaction of the Pharisee is much more common than you might think.

What should we see in others?

Have you ever thought of this? We can deliberately refuse to see something in someone else. Why? So that our understanding is greater, and our love too. Paul put it this way to the Corinthians:

1Co 2:2-5 NIV For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. (4) My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, (5) so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Perhaps we might make the simple observation: we are all sinners. Just who did we expect to come through the church door? We need to see the inside, the heart, not just the exterior.

Parable of the debtors

May I point out something about the lender? It's clear he has written these two off – they're never going to have the money. But see; the greater debtor – whom the lender had more right to despise – will be the greater friend. That is how God does it; perhaps we should imitate Him in this.

It's my privilege to work in a ministry (Bill Glass) which goes into the prisons of America to bring the Gospel. I've noticed something; the most effective speakers are those who've been on the other side of the bars. The man who has been there and repented means a lot more to the prisoners.

Devotional life

If there is greater forgiveness, there is greater love. Taken to its logical conclusion, we have the actions of this woman: devotion. This is that rare act of devotion. From the world's point of view, what she is doing is wasting perfume. It's just not a practical thing to do.

Practical, however, is not what she had in mind. It's an extreme act, a devotional act – and not just in money. Her pride, her dignity, her life are being poured out before Christ. She could have given less.[67] But she broke the jar open and poured all out upon her Lord. The broken jar shows us the broken heart.

The devotional life, the totally committed Christian life, is extravagant living towards God.

---

[66] It should be noted that there is a similar passage in John's Gospel. The two are often identified as the same (chronologically impossible).

[67] Like the widow's mites – she could have given one.

Looking For A Sign -Matthew 12:22-50

It's a common complaint: "If only I could see one genuine miracle…" The human heart behind that complaint is not so straight as it might seem.

League with Beelzebub

Mat 12:22-37 NIV Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. (23) All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" (24) But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub,[4] the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." (25) Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. (26) If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? (27) And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. (28) But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (29) "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. (30) "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. (31) And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (33) "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. (34) You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. (35) The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. (36) But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. (37) For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

House Divided

For those who are fond of polite and thoughtful conversation, I recommend staying away from conspiracy theorists. A conspiracy theory is always provable – to those who believe. No evidence to support your claims? No problem; that's just a sign of how well the cover up was done. Which, of course, points to a more powerful set of conspirators. Add to this the deluded (the public, the press, National Geographic, etc.) and you have ample proof of whatever conspiracy you believe. Thanks to the internet, you can now swap evidence with other believers – which makes your case overwhelming. No doubt about it; Noah's ark was really a flying saucer.

How does one separate the real from the fake in this? I would suggest one test which might apply: the test is "might makes right." To form a conspiracy implies an evil purpose; those with evil purposes usually proclaim righteousness while implementing with the sword. Ultimately, their justification (at least to themselves) is that they needed such power to advance their noble cause. The rest of us look at it somewhat differently. It's a good test: can you see not only evil intent but also the self justification of "might makes right?"

But beware of one particular trap: the "it must have been" theory. Modern liberals "know" the Bible is false, therefore it couldn't really have been that way, therefore the Bible is false. It must have been like that.

Unforgivable sin

For our purposes in this lesson, this section is a detour. However, the matter is sufficiently important that we should explain it as best we can. People sometimes believe they have committed the unforgivable sin (which is very likely a sign that they haven't.) How so?

- It is called the "sin against the Holy Spirit." Therefore we must understand what could be such a sin.
- The purpose of the Holy Spirit in mankind is to convict the sinner of sin, righteousness and judgment to come.[68]
- To deny that one is a sinner, or to deny that righteousness exists, or to deny that judgment will come, is to sin against the Holy Spirit.

Think of salvation as a multi-step process. The first step might be to recognize righteousness; the next to be convicted of sin, following which there might be the recognition of judgment. Miss any of these steps, and you fall off the path of salvation – which quite obviously can't be forgiven. Such rejection soon shows up in conduct.

Words as fruit

We see here an instance of Christ telling us the obvious: what comes off your lips is simply the fruit of what's in your heart. Have you noticed…

- Hypocrites love to talk! There's no sense in being self righteous if you don't draw attention to it.
- The usual method is "comparative judgment." Something like, "I'm not perfect, but at least I don't act like…" And, usually, it's factual. Irrelevant, but factual.

There is only one consistent answer: we're all sinners. If we would but admit it.

Demanding A Sign

Mat 12:38-45 NIV Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." (39) He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (40) For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (41) The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one[5] greater than Jonah is here. (42) The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. (43) "When an evil[6] spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. (44) Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. (45) Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

---

[68] John 16:8

Seeking a Sign – a sign of evil

Suppose, for a moment, you could perform miracles. Can you imagine how friendly all the people you know would suddenly become? But go a little further; would it take very long for them to begin to take you for granted? Call you up each day with their laundry list of miracles for you to accomplish? How long would it be before you began to place limits on such things?

Combine this, please, with the fact that the miracle worker here is God in the flesh. All others who have ever worked a miracle did so because it was His good pleasure to perform such – but it would be a serious mistake to view God as our miraculous errand boy. The nature of God is such that he can condescend be "the servant of many" but the errand boy of none.

The desire to command miracles at our own whim is presumptuous – in that we treat Him like a tame animal. It is also sinful; we must recognize who God is (and who is not).

Science, magic and faith

But – let's suppose – you could perform one miracle any time you liked. You could rearrange the geography of the planet by throwing mountains into the sea. Thing of the reactions:

- Science would respond by studying it carefully. We would soon have "levitationologists" at every major university. But central to this new science would be the idea that science would eventually figure out how you do this, and repeat it. After all, you can repeat it.
- Those who believe in magic would ask for the exact wording of the prayer you use (or the incantation, or the command). Combine with Pentecostal fervor and you get the twin of science, magic.
- Those of faith would say, "if God wills it." Do you see how much weaker this appears to be? The scientist and magician can do it every time; faith depends upon God – who does it at His good pleasure. Is it any wonder we prefer science and magic to faith?

The worthlessness of self-reformation

There is one situation in which we desperately want to be in complete control: any situation where we aren't. Self-control is a noble goal, but it is foolishness to think we can obtain it without help. That's Christ's point about the demons. We rely on our own initiative to approach this goal – that and the fact that the one person we can easily deceive is ourselves.

But as the politicians say, you can't beat somebody with nobody. Relying on your own will power to reform yourself opens you up to Satan's attack. You will need something greater than yourself. Christ gives us the parable concerning demons; sometimes demons come in different sizes and shapes.

Future Tense

We mentioned that demanding miracles at our own convenience is sinful. But can there be any doubt that we are in a downward spiral of morality? Man now thinks himself greater than God, and feels the right to demand miracles. "I'll never believe until I see a real miracle" (and probably not even then.) Is the miraculous the grace of God, or the cheap change of the skeptic?

Liar, Lunatic or Lord

Mat 12:46-50 NIV While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. (47) Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."[7] (48) He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (49) Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. (50) For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

This entire section of Scripture, like many others, revolves around the question above all questions: just who is this Jesus of Nazareth. We may eliminate some popular answers right away:

- He is not "a good teacher who said some nice things." He consistently confronts his opponents with this. When someone calls Him good, he answers that only God is good.
- Or you can take the "Jesus Seminar" approach – we'll all vote on which of the things in the Gospels Jesus really said. And if we vote, that makes it so, doesn't it? Or at least true for us?

C. S. Lewis put it succinctly: "Liar, lunatic or Lord."

Liar

If He is a liar, he is the grandest, most successful liar of all time. He claimed to be God in the flesh – something even Hitler didn't claim. Do this man's words sound like those of a con artist? Do his actions look the same? Just what did this man cheat from others? There is no evidence for it – but then, see conspiracy theory again.

Lunatic

His mother rather thought this was the case:

Mar 3:20-21 NIV Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. (21) When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

One can appreciate Mary's concern. She's a Jewish mother, and the boy hasn't been eating right lately. Which shows us that Jesus had to convince the family as well. But if you go around claiming to be God, you'd best be prepared for this accusation.

But – one must ask it – are his words those of a raving lunatic? If this is insanity, it the greatest case of self-delusion in history. Do his words sound like this?

Lord

If I might repeat an analogy, Christ will let you sit on the fence in this issue – but the fence is sharply pointed. He tells you why:

- First, He tells us that no one comes to God the Father except through the Son – Himself. So heaven and hell hang on the answer to this question.
- He also tells us that all authority has been granted to Him – and that He will judge the living and the dead.

I can understand being careful in examining the evidence so that one might be sure about the answer. What puzzles me is why so many think the question to be relatively unimportant. Life and death? More important than that.

Who do you say He is?

Parables - Matthew 13:1-52

It is not correct to assert that Jesus of Nazareth invented the parable – the device itself goes back at least to the period of the Judges. But the parable certainly is the teaching device most associated with him. Perhaps it appears that the parable is simply an aid to the memory (which it is), but we may see certain other advantages in the parable which might cause us to pay more attention.

- Parables appeal to the simple – those who can't understand "theology" can understand the homelike example. Parables don't prove – but they do make things clear to those who listen.
- Parables often add an element of emotion to what might otherwise be a purely intellectual exercise. Wheat and tares come to life for the gardener engaged in a war against weeds.
- Everyone can understand parables – but no one is forced to. Your understanding depends on your willingness to listen.
- Those who will not hear thus bear their own burden – the literary device is so simple that virtually anyone can understand; rejection or acceptance is thus (obviously) with the hearer.
- It's also a great example for teachers, with the added educational advantage that your hearers pay better attention to parables.
- Parables lend themselves to self-examination; you can often see yourself in the mirror this way.
- Parables reveal whom God has elected to bring to faith. The rich, the powerful, the arrogant find the meanings hidden. This is what was prophesied; it's God's plan from the beginning.

In this lesson we shall see the parables Christ used and derive what may be learned from them with regard to the world, the church, and the believer.

The World

Mat 13:1-9 NASB That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. (2) And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. (3) And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; (4) and as he sowed, some *seeds* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. (5) "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. (6) "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. (7) "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. (8) "And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. (9) "He who has ears, let him hear."

Mat 13:18-23 NASB "Hear then the parable of the sower. (19) "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 on whom seed was sown beside the road. (20) "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; (21) yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. (22) "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (23) "And 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 a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

The distracted

One thing which is plain to a Christian of this century is this: the path is very wide. Many people are now like this. They hear – but pay no attention. It is a measure of the Gospel that Christ tells us to shake dust and move on. It sounds harsh, but we must remember that the hardness they have is a part of their nature, not God's. They don't want to listen – even though it might be their only chance at the truth. The hardness of heart makes it easy to remove the Word and any impact it might have. Before they can hear, God would need to plow up their lives.

The shallow

For the teacher, these are the most frustrating of people. Note that it's said they have "no root in themselves." So at first they look like true converts – thus setting the teacher's expectations. But if you have no roots, you get no moisture. Plants can survive like that; we call them tumbleweeds. People like this go from church to philosophy to some other system of belief, each time hoping that this will be the one that lasts. That's the frustrating part; they're looking for long term relationship with God, but they're not willing to change to have it.

How does this manifest itself? The shallow live only to get, not to give. It soon becomes evident that giving is part of the Christian life; then it's time to move on.

The choked out

This is the most common case today. People are perfectly willing to go to church, as long as it doesn't get in the way. What drives people like that?

- Worries, to start with. You don't have to be rich to have worries. Christ tells you to put your burdens on him – but even the poor often prefer to keep these things to themselves. Pride says you can handle this yourself, right?
- Riches are another problem. Some people have money, for others, money has them. It doesn't seem to be a matter of being rich or poor – just a matter of wanting "more."
- For others, there is the system of pleasures of this world. Often enough, it's drugs or alcohol. Sometimes it's sex; our youth now "hook up" first and then see if there is interest in a long term relationship. If that's your priority, the word of God will seem unimportant indeed.

The nature of the Church

These parables tell us of the church we should see as well. For example:

The weeds

Mat 13:24-30 NASB Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. (26) "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. (27) "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?' (28) "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves *said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' (29) "But he *said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. (30) 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will 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."'"

Mat 13:36-43 NASB Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." (37) And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, (38) 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;* (39) and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. (40) "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. (41) "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, (42) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) "Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

It is a fact of life in the church: there will be false Christians in the church. It is not generally good for us to go around identifying them; the time would be much better spent in making sure we aren't such. On specific occasions we may bring church discipline to someone. If we judge someone in the church, that is the process to follow. It is not given to us to judge and then look down our noses. We are to correct; we need not condemn.

Why? Because it is God's will that even the hypocrites will come to understand him, and be saved. I've known such; give room for repentance. But still, there will be those who are the weeds in God's garden. But grant God this: that he may delay his justice for the sake of his mercy, so that more might be saved.

The mustard seed

Mat 13:31-32 NASB 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; (32) and this is smaller than all *other* seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

There is a myth amongst the professional clergy: if only we knew the right formula, we could cause explosive growth in our church. The usual result of this was expressed in one pastor's words: "Our evangelism explosion just fizzled." Why? Sometimes we do see an explosion – but it's usually related to the circumstances rather than the method. We need to remember that God gives the increase. The growth of the church is normally imperceptible, day by day.

But isn't that the way all complex organisms grow? The more complex the species, the longer its growth time, in general. But see another advantage: growth this way produces a stronger result. The church that grows like a mustard seed soon becomes a haven.

We have forgotten the concept, but the church used to be viewed as a sanctuary from the world. It still is, or can be. It's a place for those who don't quite know how to get along with the rest of the world. They come to the church, and there they should find acceptance – with the rest of the sinners.

Yeast

Mat 13:33 NASB He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."[69]

The church is in the world, not of the world. That means we should not allow the world to change the church. But there is no good reason the church shouldn't change the world. How so? By our witness. We should change the world – it's obvious the world is in need of it.

The Christian

So what about the individual Christian. One thing we know: the real thing reproduces itself quite well. But what do these parables say about our faith?

The parable of the Pirate

Mat 13:44 NASB "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again;* and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

May we point out the obvious?

- First, that the faith is indeed a treasure. If salvation, justification and the joy of heaven are not treasure, then the word has no meaning.
- But we might point out: finding the treasure cost nothing. Obtaining the treasure costs everything.

Which asks the question: what are you willing to give up for the cause of Christ?

Pearl of great price

Mat 13:45-46 NASB "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, (46) and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

There is only one pearl of great price; faith, prayed and practiced. It comes to those who are looking for it, but it is so precious that it demands a high price. First, the price is the death of Christ on the Cross, so that you and I might live. Next, it is the price of everything we have and are, past, present and future. If we are not willing to pay the price, it will not be ours.

It is a paradox. The man who pays the price finds himself rich indeed; the man who wants to bargain it down to half price finds it is of no value. If faith is to be that pearl, you must put all you are and all you have down as payment. "Take my yoke upon you, for my burden is light."

---

[69] The use of leaven in the Old Testament to metaphorically represent evil has produced some strange interpretations of this verse. I believe this is the common sense version.

Traveling Healer - Mark 4:35 – 5:43

May we begin with the answer? Here is the doctrine which is underlying this lesson:

- Jesus of Nazareth is indeed God in the flesh.
- He is the creator and sustainer of the universe.
- His power matches his authority; and he has all authority.
- That power, by the providence of God, is available to all who believe.
- That providence is given for God's purposes, not necessarily ours.

It is so simple, isn't it?

Stilling the storm

Mar 4:35-41 NASB On that day, when evening came, He *said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." (36) Leaving the crowd, they *took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him. (37) And there *arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. (38) Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they *woke Him and *said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (39) And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. (40) And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (41) They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Why is he asleep?

If Jesus did not have a lesson to deliver, he could certainly have arranged passage on a tranquil night. So we may assume he had some purpose. Somehow, we may presume, his being asleep was part of this. From his slumber, can we learn?

- First, it tells you that Christ is fully human. Real human beings need to sleep (though not, please, during class.)
- There is another reason having to do with the weather. The disciples did not see the storm as supernatural, but an ordinary event. Jesus doesn't want to be awakened until the disciples are desperate.
- Likewise, he makes it clear to them that their lack of faith is no limit to his power. For this, he needs a well developed storm. Hence, he sleeps.

Why was the storm calmed "at once?"

Mostly because he didn't want them thinking it was just some sort of fluke coincidence. But we might advance a couple of other thoughts:

- Think of all the times in the Old Testament someone did something miraculous regarding water. Moses parting the Red Sea, Joshua the Jordan, Elisha the Jordan – all these used a talisman. Moses had his staff; Joshua the ark; Elisha had Elijah's mantle. Christ calms the sea with but a word of command. These others were given power; Christ has it in himself.
- It's also just possible that Christ had in mind something of a personal lesson. Note that there are other boats on the water – but only the disciples get the lesson. He thus obligates the disciples to explain this calm to those in the other boats. This will be an aid to humility, at least.

Lessons learned

Christ teaches by word, by parable and here by example. The first simple lesson is that we are not to be confounded by our troubles. Tribulation is an opportunity to go before the throne of grace. But how? With boldness, we are told.[70] We must learn and not repeat the mistake. We also need to see that tribulation comes so that our faith may be made stronger, not our panic.

But if there is one thing that comes through this for the follower of Christ, it is this: in the presence of Christ nothing but humility is appropriate. If we will not give it, he will provide for it.

Demons

Mar 5:1-20 NIV The Healing of a Demon-possessed Man
They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.[1] (2) When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil[2] spirit came from the tombs to meet him. (3) This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. (4) For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. (5) Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. (6) When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. (7) He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" (8) For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" (9) Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"
"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." (10) And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. (11) A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. (12) The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." (13) He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. (14) Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. (15) When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. (16) Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man--and told about the pigs as well. (17) Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. (18) As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. (19) Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (20) So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis[3]how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Do demons exist ?

It is common today, even among Christians, to say that demons don't exist; it's really just mental illness. But I would have you consider two pieces of evidence:

- The pigs. How does mental illness spread to pigs – and so fast?
- Missionaries. Ask those who work in third world countries, especially among those who are animists.

---

[70] Hebrews 10:19

Some, however, argue that demons *cannot* exist. They are, after all, not made of matter and energy, and all things that exist are made of matter and energy – because that's all there is in the universe. But let me give you a couple of counter-arguments:

- If, bear with me, we define the universe as all matter and energy in all times and places, then I submit that there must be something "outside." Why? Well, did the universe create itself? It is absurd. Whatever (Christians would say Whoever) created the universe cannot be a part of the universe. Therefore something "other" must exist. We call that spirit.
- If the universe ceased to exist tomorrow morning, would the Pythagorean theorem still be true? If it would, then truth exists "outside" the universe.

Nature of demons

We must begin with the fact that the demons are the servants of Satan – the father of lies. Anything we learn directly from the demons must therefore be viewed with great suspicion. What we can see in this passage comes down to:

- Demons seek to control or dominate those they can.
- Somehow, they need a body – even a pig.

Other than that, we know that they often try to deliver the results of magic. Magic is a cheap shortcut for science; but the purpose of both is the same. We want to manipulate the universe to our pleasure.

Worldview

The reaction to this deliverance is rather interesting. Consider:

- The herdsmen take fright, then flight. The fact that this man is now in his right mind counts very little against the bill for two thousand pigs.
- The locals therefore come to Jesus and ask him to leave – which, being the perfect gentleman, he does.

Sound familiar? Our world likes Jesus the gentle, but wants no part of Jesus the strong. We want our god to be a tame one.

Two petitions

Mar 5:21-43 NIV When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. (22) Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet (23) and pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." (24) So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. (25) And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. (26) She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. (27) When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, (28) because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." (29) Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. (30) At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" (31) "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " (32) But Jesus kept looking around to see who had

done it. (33) Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. (34) He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (35) While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" (36) Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe." (37) He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. (38) When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. (39) He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." (40) But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. (41) He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). (42) Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. (43) He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

The woman

We must deal with the woman first, for she sets the example for Jairus. Most clearly, she sets and example in humility. How so?

- She has been ceremonially unclean for twelve years. She's living in humiliation.
- She touches his garment from behind – not worthy to look on his face.
- She dares not ask the Master anything – just grasp.

Her faith is obvious, and is therefore an example. Christ rewards this by telling her to "go in peace." Compare that to the anxiety she has had. Not just healing, but peace from God – see then that healing has its psychological side as well.

Most of all, though, she is an example to Jairus, the synagogue ruler. But it leads one to ask: why did God have her suffer physically and as an outcast, unclean?

The Ruler

It is significant that Jesus takes sufficient time so that when he arrives the young girl is dead. This sounds cruel, but consider what it means to us:

- Which is a greater miracle, healing sickness or raising from the dead?
- We have hear an example of the resurrection of the dead – which is promised to us by the one who did it.

This man was most likely one of "ordinary holiness" – not super-saint but pillar of the church variety. Did he come to Jesus with anger in his heart, asking why such things happen to good people like himself? We don't know – but we do know he didn't ask. The tragedy before him and the example of the woman have combined to make him a man humbled before God.

Seek his face

Both of these came to Jesus, and give us an example when we go before the throne of grace:

- We should approach him in humility, remembering who we are. If you are too humble, God should be able to correct that fairly quickly.
- We should approach him in faith.
- We should approach him as one knowing him, and his power.

Do these three incidents have a thread between them? Yes; they show the power and authority of Christ:

- Power and authority over things natural
- Power and authority over things spiritual
- Power and authority over all our troubles

All is given to him; therefore, seek his face.

Sending the Twelve - Matthew 10

It is probably the most famous advertisement which never happened. Ernest Shackleton, the famed British explorer of the Antarctic, is quoted as placing the following ad in the classified help-wanted section of some newspaper:

"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success."

Whether he placed this ad or not, we do know that he got over 5,000 applications for something like 56 openings. As of this writing, no one has been able to provide the name and date of the newspaper. But apocryphal or not, he should have done it – it's the only way to recruit those who are willing to risk the Antarctic. In this chapter Christ shows a similar spirit.

Sending

Mat 10:1-16 NIV

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil[1] spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. (2) These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; (3) Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; (4) Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (5) These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. (6) Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. (7) As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' (8) Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,[2]drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (9) Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; (10) take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. (11) "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. (12) As you enter the home, give it your greeting. (13) If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. (14) If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. (15) I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (16) I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Nature and authority of the Apostles

To understand the nature of this mission, we must remember how authority is given in the kingdom of God:

- Authority is the natural result of the responsibility given. It is suited to the job; no less, no more.
- From responsibility there comes also the power to do the job. Sometimes this arrives miraculously; sometimes providentially – and sometimes it was there all the time.

We might note one thing: Jesus sends out not only the "worthy" apostles but the unworthy. Matthew makes just such a point here. Mark and Luke do not add the phrase, "the tax collector" to their list of apostles in this incident. That is grace in their writing; this is honesty in Matthew's. Even Judas was empowered. Which brings up the question: why was Judas included?

- First, it is to accomplish Christ's passion. Betrayal was necessary for this; the betrayer had to be one of the apostles, with the same experience as the others.
- It is also a superb example to us of Christ's suffering – he had to put up with this evil man, without complaint, for three years.

Traveling light

Christ is wonderfully specific to his apostles at this early stage in his ministry. How often we suffer under a boss who can't make up his mind, or issues vague instructions! These are a model of clarity; they tell the apostles:

- Where to go
- What to preach
- What to do.

These instructions have an objective: the Gospel is to be delivered in holiness. You can clearly see the moral instruction in freely received, freely given. In effect, Christ makes it clear that the Gospel is not for sale.[71]

Indeed, Jesus goes beyond that and liberates the apostles from suspicion and cares. How so?

- By sending them forth with no material means other than what they could wear, commanding them to accept hospitality from the first available house, he frees them from worry about material goods. They don't have any; they're not supposed to collect any – so why worry about any?
- He also eliminates suspicion for them. Who is going to suspect them of ulterior motives when they don't even have a bag to put the coins in? They may be seen as weirdoes, but at least they are sincere ones.

I shouldn't have to say this, but note the way Christ puts it: "for the worker is worth his keep." We pay preachers who work and are worthy.

Harshness of evangelism

Christ makes it clear to them: not all doors will be open to them. It is a compliment for a house to be chosen for this, but there will be rejection. For those who welcome them, their peace is upon the house. If not, shake dust – for the city will be worse off than Sodom and Gomorrah when the judgment comes.

That sounds a little harsh, but I submit that this is a harshness built into evangelism. There is only so much time in the day. Worse, there are hostile forces out there.

Be on your guard

Mat 10:17-23 NIV "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. (18) On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. (19) But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, (20) for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (21) "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have

[71] I am indebted to Augustine for this point.

them put to death. (22) All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (23) When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Shrewd and innocent

Life sometimes is a balancing act. In this instance we balance two characteristics:

- We must be shrewd. The enemy is not going to "play fair." We need to be alert to the schemes of the devil.
- But that does not mean we are to match scheme for scheme. On the contrary, we are to be innocent. The word for "innocent" used here can also mean "unmixed." Revenge is not ours. The straight arrow flies true.

Of course, there is this little problem of public speaking. We are told by some surveys that death is only the second greatest fear for most people; public speaking is number one. But God has that one covered for you. Not only what to say, but how to say it will come to you. The "how" covers your nerves; the "what " covers the content.

Trials and Tribulations

Christ is certainly not shy about letting the apostles know that trouble will accompany them. The more senior of us will recall Joe Btfsplk, Al Capp's incarnation of the world's worst jinx. He's the traveling companion for the apostles. Why does Christ tell them about their troubles to come?

- First, that they might know that He indeed does know the future.
- Next, so that they should not consider such trials as a failure of the power Christ has given them.
- Also, this prepares them so that troubles will not come upon them suddenly and unexpectedly. No surprises!
- It also prepares them in some ways for the passion of Christ – so that it will not seem so strange when the time comes.
- Most of all, it teaches them a new method of warfare. Force is not opposed to force, but good overcomes evil in Christ's way.

Reactions to persecution

So how are we to react to all this? First, we should expect it. It's the Christian variation of Murphy's Law. Your love for Christ is to be greater than your love of family – which is going to produce problems.

Next, we are given instructions to flee. Run away. Go someplace else – and continue to preach the Gospel. This sometimes provokes a proud reaction in some Christians – they consider it cowardly to run away. But consider:

- If you stay, you are announcing yourself as a candidate for martyrdom. It is utterly presumptuous of you to accord yourself so high a distinction. This is pride, which is still a sin.
- Sometimes, it takes greater courage to appear to be a coward than it does to be a hero.

Either way, the test is simple: endure to the end. Those who do are promised salvation.

Servant and Master

Mat 10:24-42 NIV "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (25) It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub,[3] how much more the members of his household! (26) "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. (27) What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. (28) Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (29) Are not two sparrows sold for a penny[4]? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. (30) And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (32) "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. (33) But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. (34) "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to turn

" 'a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - (36) a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'[5] (37) "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; (38) and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (40) "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. (41) Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. (42) And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Not above

There is a very blessed point here. It is very tempting, when in the company of non-believers, to feel that there is something shameful about being a Christian. “You believe what?” The temptation is to compromise, telling ourselves that they wouldn’t really understand the whole Gospel; let’s try a fragment that agrees with them. But if you are really a disciple of Christ, you must recognize that Christ never did such a thing. You are not in the position to pick and choose which bits of the Gospel you think worth proclaiming. He sacrificed his pride to the point of the Cross; is yours still in the way?

For this he refers to us as his household – in other words, his family. It is a powerful thing; we are not alone. It therefore is upon us that we must see that he is not alone either. He suffered; and he is God. Why do we refuse?

Darkness and light

Dwight Eisenhower relates a story from his youth. It seems his father came out one day to find some other kid chasing Dwight around. Dad asked why he was running; he answered that dad had forbidden him to fight, and he was much more afraid of dad than he was of that other kid. His father

promptly told him, “Chase that kid out of this yard!” Ike did. We’re like that sometimes; we fear the social pressure but not the God of the universe.

How do we deal with this? By our contact with God, our actions “in the darkness.” These are the times of prayer, meditation and study of the Scripture which are solitary. God seems so clear in these times alone. But we seem so hesitant in the light!

The reason for this is our failure to see how much God loves us. In public we feel we’ve been left alone. That’s why Christ tells us about the sparrows. If his eye is on them, how much more is it upon us!

Indeed, the hairs on our heads are counted. This would have particular meaning in this time. Anything that you counted, you watched carefully. (Remember, no computers). You counted farm animals; size of your crops and your coins. God cares for you so much that he does the same for the hair on your head.

And what does he ask? That you confess him in public. The literal translation would have this be, “confess in him.” You do so in the strength of Christ.

No peace, but a sword

Think back to your history lessons about the American Civil War. The bloodiest of our wars, it pitted father against son, brother against brother. What could possibly have been so important that families would be split? For some it was defending their homes; others saw it as liberating the slaves; still others found their motivation in preserving the union and its democracy, so unique in the world. It is the same with us in our families. The love for Christ should be greater than any earthly love – and when it is, division is often the result.

Rewards

But not all seems bleak here. If the forces against us can do such harm, surely there must be some compensation. And indeed there is; Christ’s love is such that his rewards are out of proportion to our suffering.

Note, please, that we do not receive our reward from the one we serve. If we receive the righteous man, we get his reward – but not necessarily from the righteous man. Yes, it’s delayed gratification.

But even in this we see Christ’s love. Perhaps you don’t have the means to entertain the traveling preacher. But surely you can give a cup of water to a small child? If you do this because you are a disciple of Christ, your reward is sure.

And why not? If someone treats my granddaughter well – he certainly earns my favor. It does not matter that my granddaughter is short and unable to reward; if you do it for her, you do it for me. How much more will Christ reward those who care for his little ones?

For action

- Travel light – you're just passing through.
- Know that trials and troubles are bound to come.
- Remember – you are the light of the world, whatever the trials.

And may the Lord reward you richly when he comes.

Bread of Life - John 6:22-71

It is of some comfort to note that Jesus spoke things to ordinary people – who just didn't get it.

I am the bread of life

Joh 6:22-40 NIV The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. (23) Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. (24) Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.
(25) When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" (26) Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. (27) Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." (28) Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (29) Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (30) So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? (31) Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'[3]" (32) Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. (33) For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (34) "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." (35) Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (36) But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. (37) All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (38) For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (39) And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (40) For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

We may note that many of Christ's most difficult moments concern his desire for the crowd to know who He really is – God in the flesh. He will express this thought in many ways; the phrasing "bread of life" is one of the richest of those ways. But, as always, the transmitter sends and the receiver receives.

Contemporary attitude towards truth

We may think our attitude toward truth – especially that there is no absolute truth – is unique to our time. It isn't. What is unique is that those who should know better (philosophers and thinkers) now agree with the mob, formalizing their mental laziness into philosophical principle. See if our contemporary attitude shows in this vignette from two millennia before:

- We no longer discover truth; we decide it. Even in matters technical. We are the arbiters of truth (which is why something can be "true for you" but not for me.)
- Not only do we decide truth, we decide the criteria for truth. Certain subjects are now incapable of truth (see intelligent design, for example).

- Once we have decided, we are rather paternalistic about "our truth." We defend it not so much because it is true but because it is our truth.

These people are not so different from us, after all.

"Give us this bread"

Let us be clear: one of the biggest reasons these people don't get it is that they're not looking for it. As Paul put it,

Php 3:18-19 NIV For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

Gluttony – for that is what this really is – has always been recognized as a sin. But you might well ask why they couldn't see that He was not talking about baker's bread. The answer, I'm afraid, might well be known as the "familiar mud hole problem." We tend to stay in our own little realm of thought, no matter how dirty it is.

It takes a supreme incentive for most of us to break out of the mud hole. See, therefore, the incentive Christ gives – eternal life! The resurrection of the dead! The coming of the Lord of Glory! Mercy at the Judgment Seat! Shake, rattle and roll – and some still stay in the mud hole.

Bread of Life

But if you do "get it," there is still a problem here. Some would read this passage as being a clear teaching of predestination. The argument goes that God has called certain ones, the elect, and not others. All who are predestined are saved for sure; all others are surely bound for hell. But this has its little problems:

- First, the passage can also be read that we need the Father to draw us to himself because we could never make it on our own. As Chrysostom put it, "the words do not take away our free will, but show we need assistance."
- Second, if we are completely predestined, how can blame be attached to those who sin? They had no choice in the matter; is it just to send them to hell for that which was impossible to change?

We may, however, say with certainty that the Father's power to draw us to Himself through Christ is all-sufficient. Those who are drawn to him, no power on earth or heaven or hell can bar the entrance.

We may note one other thing. Christ gives us a work to do: believe in Him. To modern minds this sounds like no work at all. But the ancient knew better. To believe is to do. Belief is work, because belief implies commitment and action. Belief is the necessary foundation of good works. It is not "academic only."

Missing the Metaphor

Joh 6:41-59 NIV At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." (42) They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" (43) "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. (44) "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (45) It is written in the Prophets:

'They will all be taught by God.'[4] Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. (46) No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. (47) I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. (48) I am the bread of life. (49) Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. (50) But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. (51) I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (52) Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (53) Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. (54) Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (55) For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. (56) Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. (57) Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (58) This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." (59) He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Prophecy, not weather forecast

One has only to look at the number and variety of interpretations of the book of Revelation (all of them true, at least for their authors) to know that prophecy is not necessarily easy to get right. Often enough, the language is pictorial or metaphorical – and the correct interpretation is only known after the fact. We say, “Ah, that’s what He was talking about!”

But this does not relieve us of our responsibilities in regard to prophecy:

- First, we must do the best we can to understand it – even while admitting our failures.
- Second, such prophecy has within it moral lessons, and these we should understand and learn even when we are unsure of the prophecy itself.
- And whatever else you do, believe in what the Scriptures tell you. I may not understand it, but I know it is true. My stupidity does not negate his truthfulness.

Nature of Christ

In this section we see clearly some of the nature of Christ. It is sufficient to point out three areas which Christ makes plain – and his hearers muddle.

- First, He is come from heaven itself. The virgin birth is not a footnote; it is essential if Christ is to be both perfectly man and perfectly God.
- Second, He makes it clear that He is superior to Moses – the highest authority in the Jewish faith.
- Third, he promises to raise up the believers on the last day, giving them eternal, bodily life.

This, we might point out, is a lot to grasp at any one time. Fortunately for us, Christ repeats himself.

Bread of Life – Metaphor

If you like fuzzy logic, listen to our modern liberals re-interpret this section. There are a couple of questions we need to answer.

First, just how are we supposed to feed upon Christ? How do we eat the bread of life? I submit that there is an obvious answer: Communion.

1Co 10:15-17 NIV I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. (16) Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (17) Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Next, just how did this ceremonial meal acquire such significance? How can this be effective? Christ himself makes it clear that the connection is his sacrifice on the Cross. By that sacrifice he makes himself available to feed on him. Just as the priests of the Old Testament fed themselves on the sacrifices brought to the altar, so the royal priesthood feeds itself symbolically on the sacrifice of Christ. The one who spoke and the worlds began now says, "This is my body."

"Feed on me, for I am the food of a grown man."[72]

To Whom Shall We Go

Joh 6:60-71 NIV On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (61) Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? (62) What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! (63) The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit[5] and they are life. (64) Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. (65) He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." (66) From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (67) "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. (68) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (69) We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (70) Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (71) (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

Why is this so hard?

From our side of the Resurrection, this appears to be straightforward, allowing for the paths of metaphor in the mind. Why was it so tough then?

- It is offensive. It is an abhorrent thought – some form of cannibalism. More importantly, it means that we need to acknowledge Jesus for who he really is. That offends; we'd like to be in charge. The stone of stumbling and the rock of offense are always with us.[73]
- Some of us live in the flesh alone. Something can't be spiritual as long as there is a physical interpretation; pass the bread, please.

It is a problem. Christ's hearers put their problem into a verb. The King James says "hear" – as if it's a problem with our ears. The New American Standard says "listen" – the problem is that we won't pay attention. The New International uses "accept" – we understand what's said; we just don't buy into it. The Contemporary English says "understand" – it's beyond our mental abilities. Perhaps it is all the above. Sometimes, a lack of desire is a lack of hearing, listening, acceptance and understanding.

---

[72] Augustine

[73] 1st Peter 2:8, quoting Isaiah. This phrasing is from memory in childhood – the King James. Eloquence is now out of fashion.

Problems with those who do stay

It would be nice to state that this exercise in metaphor separated the sheep from the goats. The actual process is a bit simpler, and less final.

- "If I don't understand, I don't stay." Teachers know this student. He's lazy. When it's at all hard to understand, he tunes out – and blames the teacher for not making it clear.
- Often, the problem is that of the herd. One leader or two, and hundreds of people who get along, go along. And if the leader leaves?
- Worst of all, there is the devil within. Jesus knew what Judas would do. It's a lesson for us; the wolves in sheep's clothing are ever with us.

Just because someone stays in the building doesn't mean he's in the church.

"Will you also go?"

We may note from this remark that Christ gives his disciples the choice: they may come or go as they please. But it would please him to have them stay. Free will is rampant, in Christ's eyes.

But in the eyes of Peter, at least, this is not much of a choice. There is no option B. Interestingly, the "words" here are not *logos*, but another Greek word meaning "something said." It is precisely the exposition that Christ has been giving that Peter finds irreplaceable.

Why? His eyes are set on the goal: eternal life. No where else can such be found, whether Peter understands it all or not.

The late Bill Blodgett, a student of ours, often found himself in the position of not knowing just what the Scripture meant at various points. His solution was not to leave until he got smarter, but to say, "I don't understand – yet. But I do believe." Words for all of us.

Tradition - Matthew 15; 16:5-12

Tradition, in our local congregation, has a bad reputation. Preaching against tradition is a rather safe thing to do; it attacks nothing in particular and makes people feel that they are modern, cool and with it. Fossils are never trendy, we think.

But I submit that tradition has its advocates, and is not to be lightly ignored:

- The orthodox Jew begins his prayers with, "Our God, and the God of our Fathers." His prayer is grounded in tradition, and thus not easily moved – but also grounded in him personally, and therefore is as alive as he is.
- Tradition is the vote of those not walking the planet at the moment. We often choose to forget that the church is composed of all God's children. So unless you'd like to eject St. Peter and St. Paul from the church on the pedantic grounds that they are dead, their words must be considered. So it is with many other saints awaiting the resurrection.
- As such, tradition is often the solution to a problem – which means that if you throw out the tradition, you will have to find a new way to solve the problem. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Tradition, therefore, has its value. It is given to us to keep us on track. Therefore when it is misused the sin is all the greater. But often enough in our time when tradition is attacked as being legalism (think of the old hymns) we should make an effort to discern between traditions favorable and unfavorable. That distinction, we shall see, is not always seen by every eye.

Tradition of "How"

Mat 15:1-20 NIV

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, (2) "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" (3) Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? (4) For God said, 'Honor your father and mother'[1] and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[2] (5) But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' (6) he is not to 'honor his father[3]' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. (7) You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: (8) " 'These people honor me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me. (9) They worship me in vain;

their teachings are but rules taught by men.'[4]" (10) Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. (11) What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.' " (12) Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" (13) He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. (14) Leave them; they are blind guides.[5] If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (15) Peter said, "Explain the parable to us." (16) "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. (17) "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? (18) But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. (20) These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.' "

Traditions here at Eastside

If you were to ask the staff or eldership of Eastside what our traditions might be, they would proudly tell you that we have no traditions. They subscribe to the view that tradition equals legalism. Indeed, our senior minister has often told us that his father (also a preacher) was very legalistic. Breaking away from his father's way of doing things (his family tradition, if you will) is, in his view, a rejection of legalism.[74] But is it really true that we have no traditions?

- Like many evangelical churches, we do not use wine in communion. We use grape juice. This is a tradition which dates back to the late 19th century; before then, no church would have used anything but wine. (Which, to be fair, traveled better and stored longer in the days before bacteria were understood.)
- We also have "Adult Bible Fellowships" – which bear a strong resemblance to what used to be called Sunday School classes. For the last fifteen years I have been told that these will disappear soon, as "life groups" (meeting in individual homes) will supplant them. Life groups have the advantage that they are so small that they depend upon lessons prepared by others; thus control of doctrine and practice becomes easier. But, alas, the ABF shows no signs of dying out; we keep forming new ones, in fact.

So perhaps our commitment to anti-tradition is not as strong as we thought! So then, how do we distinguish the good, the bad and the ugly?

Pharisees

We may take note of the fact that these particular Pharisees came from Jerusalem. They therefore had a great deal of prestige and authority – and with that greater responsibility. They come in judgment; those who come in judgment had best have clean hands. They don't.

It's not hard to see why. Christ gives them one particular example. Suppose you were a young, wealthy Pharisee who had elderly parents. In those days, parents were *supposed* to be a burden on their children; but often enough the child would decide that this was financially inconvenient. The trick used was to formally dedicate (to God) whatever resources which should be used to help mom and dad. The actual transfer, of course, would happen when the young man grew old and died. By then, matters could be reversed. It must have set a lovely example.

But see in the Old Testament that the commandment is so strong that the one who dishonors his father and mother is to be put to death![75] So this is not trivial. But it was traditional.

I submit two characteristics for tradition gone bad:

1. It sounds very pious and godly. (The old hymns, the old ways.)
2. But it subverts the commandment of God.

---

[74] There is no doubt some deep and profound psychology of father and son here. I leave this as an exercise for the student.

[75] Exodus 21:17 and further examples.

The reply

Jesus, you may note, doesn't seem to mind offending the Pharisees. Indeed, worse than that, He begins by answering their thoughts and intentions, not the question they pose.

Christ doesn't just answer them; he warns the crowd against them. It is a very public stand. But consider: doesn't a leader have the obligation to those who follow – an obligation to warn them of danger, especially danger so grave?

Lessons

Walk away from this with two lessons which might not be obvious.

- What you understand depends on how you listen. The Pharisees heard the same words that the crowd and the disciples did. They were listening for a chance to trap Jesus; they wanted to best him at argument. If you listen for loopholes, you will surely hear them – and miss the main point.
- Tradition is, in most instances, good. But it is not necessarily the best thing to do. Examine the tradition; do not blindly oppose it.

Tradition of "Who"

Mat 15:21-28 NIV Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. (22) A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." (23) Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." (24) He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." (25) The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. (26) He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." (27) "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (28) Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Background

It should be noted that Christ has withdrawn to this region to seek time alone with his disciples. The region is part of the ancient land of Israel, as allocated by Moses, but at this time is in the hands of the Gentiles. Christ in his ministry never left the bounds of the ancient land as defined by Moses. This woman would be considered a Gentile, and therefore no conversation should take place.

The woman

If she is to break down the tradition of the Jews not even speaking to the Gentiles, it will take a heavy hammer. Note how she swings it:

- First, she calls him "Lord." She acknowledges his right of rule; in effect, she acknowledges him as God. But she also calls him Son of David – proclaiming him to be man as well, and by right descent king of Israel, and therefore by right ruler of the land on which she lives.
- She asks for mercy – for herself. She does not plead her daughter's pitiful condition as if it *deserved* the mercy of God. She begs mercy for herself solely on the ground that God is merciful.

There's a lesson in here: great faith springs from great humility.

Christ

Jesus' behavior here may seem rather strange. But remember that the Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would come to Israel first. If God is to keep his promises, the Messiah must minister to the house of Israel alone. A child of Abraham has standing before the Messiah; others do not.

So it is a new thing that our Lord would minister to a Gentile. Indeed, Christ so proclaims it. Look at it in the literal translation:

Mat 15:28 LITV Then answering, Jesus said to her, O woman, great is your faith; let it be to you as you desire. And her daughter was healed from that hour.

The phrasing, "let it be" is an echo of Genesis ("let there be light.") It is the opening of a new creation: the church of both Jews and Gentiles.

The disciples

What are we to learn of this? There is the obvious lesson: some of our traditions prevent certain people from approaching Christ. (You have to wear a suit and tie, right?) The disciples here might have sympathized with the woman at first, but they wound up being definitely annoyed by the woman. Their solution was simple and direct: get rid of her.

But she teaches them a lesson: better a dog at the table of the Lord than proud of being self-reliant.

Tradition of "Why"

Mat 15:29-39 LITV And moving from there, Jesus came beside the Sea of Galilee. And going up into the mountain, He sat there. (30) And great crowds came to Him, having with them lame ones, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others. And they flung them down at the feet of Jesus. And He healed them; (31) so that the crowds marveled, seeing dumb *ones* speaking, maimed *ones* sound, lame *ones* walking, and blind *ones* seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel. (32) But having called His disciples near, Jesus said, I am filled with pity on the crowd, because they already have remained with Me three days and have nothing they may eat. And I do not desire to send them away fasting, that they may not faint in the way. (33) And His disciples said to Him, From where in a deserted *place will come* to us so many loaves as to satisfy so great a crowd? (34) And Jesus said to them, How many loaves do you have? And they said, Seven, and a few small fish. (35) And He ordered the crowds to recline on the ground. (36) And taking the seven loaves and the fish, giving thanks, He broke and gave to His disciples, and the disciples to the crowd. (37) And all ate and were satisfied. And they took up the left over pieces, seven lunch baskets full. (38) And the ones eating were four thousand men, apart from women and children. (39) And sending away the crowds He went into the boat and came to the borders of Magdala.

Mat 16:5-12 LITV And His disciples coming to the other side, they forgot to take loaves. (6) And Jesus said to them, Watch and take heed from the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (7) And they reasoned among themselves, saying, Because we did not take loaves. (8) And knowing, Jesus said to them, Why do you reason among yourselves because you took no loaves, little-faiths? (9) Do you not perceive nor recall the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many hand baskets you took up? (10) Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many

lunch baskets you took up? (11) How do you not perceive that *it was* not about loaves that I said to you to take heed from the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees? (12) Then they knew that He did not say to take heed from the leaven of bread, but from the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The tradition of thought

Has it ever occurred to you that we have a tradition of thought? I submit that we do:

- Like the disciples in this instance, we prefer to take the most literal view of the Scripture possible. For example, our interpretation of Revelation, when compared with the other main methods, is highly literal. It is a point of pride that we reject allegory completely (except when Christ tells us specifically how to interpret.) This is viewed as avoiding the errors of the past – of which, of course, we are thoroughly ignorant.
- We place our limits on God when we refuse to conceive that he could have a better solution.[76]
- We also permit ourselves to be taught what can and cannot be touched from the pulpit. We tell ourselves that there's no sense in preaching against adultery; no one would listen anyway. Only polite topics can find their way to the pulpit (or the teacher's podium, perhaps).

Men of little faith

The reason for this? We are convinced that "nothing can be done." But see this example: first the healing, then the bread – the power of God is unabated by our refusals. He is the Creator of new possibilities as well.

Questions from Christ

To make this clear we must see the parallel account in Mark for a couple of verses:

Mar 8:17-18 NIV Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? (18) Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?

I would point out for questions for us today:

1. Don't you understand? Is the Scripture really so complicated that you cannot see what He's trying to tell you? Open the eyes of your hearts!
2. Are your hearts hardened? Has the weariness of day to day living convinced you that nothing is possible; all that can be done is to go to church to be uplifted – and then return to the grind of daily impossibility?
3. Do you have eyes to see? Not just eyes – eyes to see, He's looking for those who will look at Him with "forever eyes." It is easy to see that nothing can be done; to see the Creator's own possibilities means to see with eyes open for what is not done – yet.
4. Don't you remember? Have you forgotten the power, wisdom and mercy shown by our Lord? Consider his ways; consider his deeds; then commit yourself to his cause.

---

[76] OK, so you want an example. Look at our Imagine campaign; the staff thought up the answer and no alterations have been permitted to date. God's will had better fit our building plan.

Who Is This Man? - Matthew 16:13-17:21

An old friend once put it this way: "There is only one question: Who do you say that I am?" Your answer to that question determines your eternity.

Who do you say that I am?

(It should be noted that Christ asks this question after leaving the contemporary boundaries of Judea, perhaps so that his disciples might answer freely.)

Mat 16:13-28 NIV When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (14) They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (15) "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" (16) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ,[2] the Son of the living God." (17) Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (18) And I tell you that you are Peter,[3] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades[4] will not overcome it.[5] (19) I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be[6] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be[7] loosed in heaven." (20) Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Jesus Predicts His Death

(21) From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (22) Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (23) Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (24) Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever wants to save his life[8] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (26) What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. (28) I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Who do men…?

There is a contemporary ring to the answers the disciples give. See if you recognize some of the answers likely to be given today.

- He is *someone good.* The names mentioned are great ones from the Old Testament; to be called such would be a great honor for ordinary mortals. It's easy to see Jesus this way. It's also false. This is a common view, for though one must honor a good man, we needn't worship and obey him.
- He is *someone powerful*. These men had miraculous powers and great message. We see even today those who carry talismans related to Christ, convinced that good luck is the limit of his power. Good luck never incites fear or awe.

But these are far below who He really is. The gospels make it clear that Christ did not present himself as either good teacher or lucky charm, but as the Lord of all creation. "Liar, lunatic or Lord," as C. S. Lewis put it.

Who do you…?

The difference between the two views is obvious. But perhaps not so obvious are these thoughts:

- The disciples know Jesus much more closely than the crowd does. Their answer is therefore hits the mark. But do you not see that a closer knowledge also implies a greater responsibility? The crowd may be excused; the disciples could not.
- Truth, in the kingdom of God, is first revealed, then taught. You cannot know God unless he wishes to be known, and reveals himself. After revelation, then comes teaching. Experience will confirm the teaching – but the revelation comes first. The son of Jonah is mortal; the Son of God is immortal. This is revealed, then taught and ultimately will be experienced.
- The Father reveals the Son – just as the Son reveals the Father. Even in revelation they are one.
- Revelation, when you get it, is a blessing.

The revelation

It is well for us to state just what has been revealed here:

- First, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, prophesied of old.
- As Chrysostom put it, “On this faith and confession I will build my Church.” The early church had no idea of Peter as Pope.
- Despite Peter’s objections, the establishment of the church requires the crucifixion of Christ.
- Some of them with him will see the kingdom come. This could mean either that some will see the Transfiguration, or that “some” means “all the apostles except Judas” will see the start of the church.
- Ultimately, Christ will return and reward all for what they have done in this life.

Transfiguration

Mat 17:1-9 NIV The Transfiguration

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2) There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (3) Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. (4) Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (5) While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (6) When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. (7) But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." (8) When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. (9) As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Why was there a transfiguration at all?

As noted above, some hold this is the fulfillment of Matthew 16:28, that some would see the kingdom. Perhaps more important, however, is that the Transfiguration is a confirmation of the great confession Peter has made; it certainly was powerful evidence that Peter got it right.

Most important, perhaps, there is this: the Transfiguration is the assurance needed to know *per crucem ad lucem*, "from the Cross into the light." The disciples were about to go through hard times of mental anguish and despair; this incident grants them the insight that God's purpose will prevail.

Why these three apostles?

The first and obvious answer is that they were preeminent among the apostles. They are always listed in the first group of four names; they play prominent parts in the early church.

For Peter, however, there is a special reason. He is the one who challenges Christ concerning His death. Christ has rebuked him for this – and now provides a better reason for His death.

The number itself has significance; the Old Testament calls out that matters subject to testimony require two or three witnesses to be made sure. There are three witnesses to the glory of God (Peter, James and John) and three witnesses to the apostles concerning Jesus (Moses, Elijah and the Father).

Perhaps most important is this: the apostles needed the mountain top experience, but they also needed to learn to come down from the mountain top. They wanted to stay, but there was work to be done in the valleys below.

Why Moses and Elijah?

The answer would have been clearer to them than to us:

- They represent the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). Thus, they are the complete Old Testament witness to Christ.
- They represent the living (Elijah, who never died but was transported to heaven) and the dead (Moses). Thus, they are the witness of all humanity.
- They bring unity to the disciples. No longer does the Old Testament say this and Christ say that, but they now know that Christ is the ultimate end of the Old Testament. Everything they knew from the Law and the Prophets points to Jesus Christ.

The glory of God

The glory of God is revealed in the Transfiguration. It remains for us to see why this should be so:

Php 2:8-11 NIV And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death--
even death on a cross! (9) Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The Transfiguration tells us of the glory of Christ – glory he earned at the Crucifixion. Praise is due Him by right, for what He has done for us. We can well understand, then, why Peter could say, "It is good for us to be here."

"Getting it"

Of course, we see this in the light of the Resurrection. It wasn't so obvious at the time:

Mat 17:10-21 NIV The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" (11) Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. (12) But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." (13) Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

The Healing of a Boy With a Demon

(14) When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. (15) "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. (16) I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." (17) "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." (18) Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. (19) Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" (20) He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."[1] (21)

Coming down the mountain

If you want to understand the second coming of Christ, it is best to look at the first as the model and example. The disciples are puzzled; they have been taught from youth that Elijah would come to prepare the way for the Christ. Jesus tells them they got it right; they just didn't recognize the one who played the part of Elijah – John the Baptist.

Most scholars hold, therefore, that Elijah will precede the second coming of Christ. How so?

- It could be that there will be one who will play the part of John the Baptist, a great preacher who will put the choice of heaven and hell before the world.
- Or – remember that Elijah never died – it might be Elijah himself. Some hold that he and Enoch (never died either) are the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation.

So what should you do about all this? The same things as before:

- Rejoice in the grace you have been given.
- Watch and pray, so that you will not be taken unawares.
- Reach out to those who still have not believed.

Demon possessed son

It's important to note that the disciples with insufficient faith are those who were left behind, not Peter, James and John. Christ addresses himself to the crowd, whose faith evidently the problem, as Mark puts it:

Mar 9:21-24 NIV Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. (22) "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." (23) " 'If you can'?" said Jesus.

"Everything is possible for him who believes." (24) Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

The problem has not disappeared; even within the ranks of Christians there are many whose faith is placed in many things before it reaches Jesus. Like them, we are a "perverted generation." The word means, in the original, "distorted." We have things out of proper perspective.

Mustard seed faith

Christ's answer: Mustard seed faith. Much has been written about this, but we can see it shortly:

- It is faith that lives – and therefore grows. But only when in contact with its nourishment, Jesus Christ.
- The seed is small, but living. Large and dead means dead.
- According to some accounts, this faith includes prayer and fasting (verse 21, omitted in most modern translations, taken from Mark 9:29).

What shall we do?

A short summary is in order – just what does Christ expect us to do about all this?

- Take up your cross and deny yourself (Matthew 16:24).
- Do so in faith and hope.
- Watch and pray for his return.

Greatness in the Kingdom - Matthew 17:24-18:14

It sometimes confuses the new Christian to discover that the church has an inverted organization chart; those who would lead must serve. It is a consistent point of Christ's teaching, and some attention must be paid to it.

The Temple Tax

Mat 17:24-27 NIV After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax[2]?" (25) "Yes, he does," he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes--from their own sons or from others?" (26) "From others," Peter answered.

"Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. (27) "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

Taxes

We may note that the tax collectors in this instance are rather modest souls; the inquiry goes to Peter, not to Christ. Perhaps this is because the request is rather out of season – by about six months. Perhaps they felt this was the only time they'd have the chance to ask.

The tax itself dates back to the Old Testament[77]. It is considered an atonement tax, and thus the amount is not determined by your wealth but fixed equally for all. It can be considered, thus, a ransom tax; the Jews would have seen it as such.

The problem, of course, is the sovereignty of Christ. He is the atonement; how then can he pay the atonement tax?

"Lest we offend"

Note, please, that Jesus speaks first – before Peter has a chance to ask. In this way he shows His omniscience (a useful reminder at delicate times) and his courtesy – Peter does not have to present this awkward demand to him.

He points out that, as King, he pays no taxes. He doesn't owe this money. But there is no reason *not* to pay this tax; it satisfies the word of the Law (as interpreted later). Closer to home, failing to pay this tax might offend – or even cause to go astray – these tax collectors. Is Jesus to be considered a "holy revolutionary?" Not at all. Bureaucrats tend to see themselves as high and mighty, though – so Christ arranges a demonstration for them. The method of obtaining the money must have struck them as unusual, at least.

There is a relationship between power and poverty in the kingdom of God. The Father is gracious about letting the rich (including almost all Americans) participate in the kingdom. He tells

---

[77] Exodus 30:11-16

them[78] to be generous in their charity, both in what they give and how often they give it. But it is to the poverty stricken that power in the kingdom is given. The example is Christ himself. It is an example not to be missed.

Lord of all – with humor

The method of our Lord in this instance is a providence; from the root word, provide. As in God will provide for us. It is not technically a miracle – but it does stretch the laws of probability a bit. It is an example to us so that we may know that God provides for those who trust in Him.

He shares the coin from the fish with Peter; by example, then, it is a shared ransom. Just as we share the Ransom with Peter.

We may take the example of Christ as this: pay whatever you owe, do whatever you must do as long as it does not contradict the command of God. But don't take it too seriously, will you?

Who is the Greatest?

Mat 18:1-5 NIV

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (2) He called a little child and had him stand among them. (3) And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (4) Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (5) "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.

Background

The question must be seen in the context of the previous section. It may have appeared to the other disciples that Peter is being treated with favoritism here. But, to their credit, the disciples do not grumble about it, but take the question directly to Jesus. Just how does one become great in the kingdom?

In his reply, Jesus uses a word which can also be translated "infant." The picture might be that of a toddler – that most independent of dependents.

Purity and innocence

One thing about little children: they lack the ability to be hypocrites. What they are is what you hear. In that culture, such a child would have been at the lowest social station. "Children are to be seen and not heard." "Do what you're told, when you're told, how you're told." Except for new army recruits, they are the lowest of the low.

But have you ever seen the eagerness with which such a child "helps" daddy? It is the service of the humble and innocent. The connection of the two is important: the humble ask the privilege of serving. But leadership in the kingdom of God is servant-leadership, for which humility is essential. And a pure innocence is needed for humility.

---

[78] 1st Timothy 6:17-18

You might well object that humility is something acquired or given; I think rather that it is chosen. Once chosen, it may be difficult to achieve; even the darkest paths start with a fork in the road, however.

Family

If you listen to modern advertising you will hear phrases like "family oriented" or "family friendly." You know without looking that they're not talking to grandma; they are advertising to those who have young children. The word "family" implies children, and by extension the family of God has children too – who must be cared for.

Remember, the Father is the head of this family just as the father is supposed to be the head of earthly families. This point is no longer taught in churches today, as the egalitarian ideal of marriage is now proclaimed to be eternal truth. Nevertheless, the Scripture has not changed. Therefore, if it is important to the Father, it should be important to us.

Even the lowest can be an ambassador of the highest. As my children act, so you judge me as a father. May God's children be a shining example of the least in God's kingdom.

Dad, we're headed home

Permit me one story about little children. (A true story, or so I am told.) Dad was driving; mom was reading the map. She was having difficulties with the task, as is common, so much so that her confused husband had to ask her: "Just tell me: are we headed north or south?" The five year old in the back seat piped up, "Dad! We're headed *home*."

We ought to know where we are going and how to get there. We also ought to know whom Christ cares for along the way.

Lost Sheep

Mat 18:6-14 NIV But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (7) "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! (8) If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. (9) And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.
(10) "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.[1] (11) (12) "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? (13) And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. (14) In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

Woe to the world

Sin is inevitable in this fallen world. (You might want to make a note of that). That means we're in for disappointment, let-down or even betrayal in those we love. The only qualification for being a Christian is that you must be a sinner first.

Some of us, however, reach the wrong conclusions about this:

- Sin is going to happen. So why should I put forth effort to be sinless, when I know it can't be done?
- Indeed, when I sin, God forgives. So when I sin more, God forgives more. That's a good thing, right?
- And this shouldn't affect others, because they're responsible for their own lives, right?

Wrong.

God's love is not an excuse for sin. Yes, it's going to happen – but you're still responsible for your own sin. If this is so, then how much greater is the offense when you cause (by example, perhaps) a little child to sin?

How God values the children

Surprisingly, our poor example to children is often completely ignored. The reason is usually our own egos; we're important, kids are not. We'll get around to them later, when they grow up.

Such an attitude says that children are worthless until they grow up – by which time they will have absorbed the lesson of your sin. (Ditto grandchildren). It's easy to look down on children in a condescending way; the same applies to new believers as well. But see how God regards them! Their angels have access to Him face to face; the ultimate example of being "in."

I hope you see the importance that God places on these children. He wants each and every one of them to come home to him – and woe to the one who leads them astray.

Lost sheep

May I leave you with two points?

- Hospitals are for the sick; the church is for the lost. Let us remember what we are about.
- We are to concentrate on our problems – be those personal or corporate – rather than congratulate ourselves on how well the remaining sheep are doing.

Christ came to seek and save the lost; if you cannot help, at least do not hinder.

Cost of the Kingdom - Matthew 18:15-35; Luke 9:57-62

(The reader may note that the placement of the section in Luke is induced, not stated. I am following Robertson's order, which seems as good as any.)

Church Discipline

Mat 18:15-20 NIV "If your brother sins against you,[2] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. (16) But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'[3] (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (18) "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be[4]bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be[5] loosed in heaven. (19) "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. (20) For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

The commandment of Christ

It must be recognized: much of our failure as Christians stems from sheer laziness. He commands us to do something; we find that it will be hard work and thus invent our excuses. Note that the imperative tense is used here; Christ is commanding His disciples.

- First, and most difficult, he commands us to forgive.
- He also commands that we correct the faults of our Christian brothers. (Am I my brother's keeper?)
- If need arises, we are to seek help in such correction, first in two-three others, and if needed the entire church.

Why?

See the wisdom of this. Christ could have commanded a "take it to the church first thing," but he didn't. He told us instead:

- Start in private – just you and your brother. This preserves your brother's sense of shame, and does not attack his conscience. It also enables him to repent without trying to defend his sinful behavior. By doing this discreetly, we also preserve the reputation of the church. But remember: you are going in alone – but not self-righteous.
- If that doesn't work, take along a couple of witnesses. This makes it easy to establish the facts (which may be in dispute). It also helps to prevent private revenge, and adds the grace of social pressure to the cause of repentance. If the matter should come out, it shows a good example to the church.
- But if you have to take it to the church, do so. If you have an unrepentant sinner who cannot be disciplined, you have permitted hypocrisy in the church. At that the reputation of the church is at stake. Use the greater social pressure as you can to bring the sinner home.

When the wronged seek reconciliation

You might think these are instructions just for the teachers and elders. It is not so. The first person to know of a brother's sin is usually a victim of it. This does not lesson the responsibility – but does increase the power of the example.

This we do in imitation of Christ; as we do so, we get the same results he does. If we forgive, it is forgiven on earth and in heaven. But a warning must be issued: reconciliation costs. As Christ proved on the cross.

The Duty of Forgiveness

Mat 18:21-35 NIV Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (22) Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.[6] (23) "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. (24) As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents[7] was brought to him. (25) Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. (26) "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' (27) The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. (28) "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.[8] He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. (29) "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' (30) "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. (31) When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. (32) "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. (33) Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' (34) In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. (35) "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Step One

As noted, step one in reconciliation is performed by the offended party, in most circumstances. Peter immediately sees the problem: what if it's a repeat offense? Jewish custom said to forgive – up to three times. Peter thinks he's being generous at seven.

But the Christian lives in the infinite love of God, not the finite love of man. It may seem too difficult to forgive so often, but remember that you are one in whom dwells the Holy Spirit – so when you cry for help in forgiving, know that you will be heard.

Principle: God forgave, so must you

By way of background, let us repeat the obvious:

- If you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven. Your forgiveness at the Day of Reckoning depends upon your forgiveness now. It's a heaven and hell issue.
- Such forgiveness fulfills the principle of the imitation of Christ ("What would Jesus do?"). To forgive is to become more like him.
- Such forgiveness is so rare that the world will be at a loss to understand how this could happen – and be an occasion to teach them about Christ.

- Perhaps you haven't thought of this: in forgiveness, you can share the "exuberance of joy"[79] that flows through heaven for the one in a hundred who returns.

Cast of characters

We might do well to examine the players in this drama.

First, we have the debtor himself. He is the model of the repentant sinner at first (thus, judge not). He humbles himself; admits his debt and begs mercy. Indeed, he is so humble that he dares not ask forgiveness – just a little more time. All in all, a likely candidate for mercy.

Next, we might look at the other servants. They are "greatly distressed" by the debtor's conduct. Well they should be; the man's a hypocrite, which should disturb the church. They report this, seeking justice not for themselves but for the other servant with the small debt.

Finally, there is the master. First note that he is settling accounts – there will be a day when God makes all come out even. This master, a picture of God, is quite willing to be a terror to his debtors; the fear of God is still the beginning of wisdom. The master is not at all unwilling to visit his punishment on the debtor's wife and children (highly motivational, I expect.) But he is merciful – when asked to be so. Indeed, his mercy exceeds the debtor's request for time. But in his anger at such hypocrisy, he reverses that and *increases* the debtor's burden.[80]

First place or no place

Luk 9:57-62 NIV As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." (58) Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (59) He said to another man, "Follow me."

But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (60) Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (61) Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." (62) Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Why is this connected? Most of us, when reading this passage, think it applies mostly to missionaries in Africa. We shall see, however, that this applies to all of us. Forgiveness is part of the price of the kingdom; here we shall see just what priority the kingdom has.

The scribe[81]

There is one sure way to identify pride. See what happens when it meets God; if there is pride, God will be given advice or even orders. This man underestimates Jesus, calling him "teacher" when the others call him "Lord." Jesus, in his reply, speaks to the heart. There is no material gain to be found here, and there is no plan to change that.

---

[79] Chrysostom

[80] It was the custom of the time, and Christ's hearers would not have challenged this, but just what good is torturing a man going to do to get your money back? Perhaps it was the example set.

[81] Matthew 8:18-22 identifies the speaker as a scribe, an expert in the Jewish Law.

Bury my father"

It seems a reasonable request. It's not exactly required by the Law, but custom so requires it. But Jesus sees beyond the funeral – to the reading of the will, and the division of property. This will be a great temptation to the young man.

So what does Jesus offer instead? The chance to proclaim the Gospel, which gives life. Over and again Christ calls for the one who will sacrifice all for his sake.

One curiosity remains: why did the man even ask? He thought it the right thing to do; why didn't he just tell one of the others there to let Jesus know? Perhaps it was that he knew the answer in his heart – and was hoping to avoid the meeting with the master.

"Say goodbye"

It sounds so trivial: I just want to say goodbye. Surely this can't be objectionable? It isn't; the objection is to anything, no matter how trivial and good, coming before service in the kingdom of God. Christ knows the heart of a partial follower.

Connection

What's this to do with forgiveness? Simply this: if the Gospel is so important and so commanding that it supersedes your father's funeral and even the ordinary courtesies of family life, how much more does it supersede your reluctance to forgive? If Christ would demand such things here, how much more the forgiveness he demands of you?

Parting Notes

I leave you with these:

- Count the cost. If you are a part of the kingdom of God, then you will need to imitate your Lord – even as He forgave on the Cross.
- Seek first the kingdom. Put all else secondary to it. Half-hearted Christianity is like jumping the Grand Canyon in two jumps.
- Once with the kingdom, forget about what might have been. There is no turning back on the road to heaven.

Taken in Adultery - John 8:1-11

The story is usually annotated as being absent from the earliest manuscripts. This is true; the early church writers explain that this is a valid part of John's Gospel, but left out to avoid giving the impression that Christ favored adultery. There is some doubt as to where it belongs in John's Gospel, but the present location seems as good as any. It comes after a series of arguments with the Pharisees during the Feast of the Tabernacles – and it is followed by another series of arguments. We're in the right church, if not the right pew.

Joh 8:1-11 NIV But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. (2) At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. (3) The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group (4) and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. (5) In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" (6) They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. (7) When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (8) Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. (9) At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. (10) Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (11) "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Modern and ancient views

Our view of moral behavior – even our view of whether or not it can exist – has greatly changed in my lifetime. It is therefore useful to review how the ancients viewed the sin of adultery:

- There were three things most noted for the death penalty in the Law of Moses: idolatry, murder, and adultery. Murder still seems arguable; idolatry in the old sense seems non-existent – but our view of adultery is very far from being worth the death penalty. Why, then, did they see it that way?
- We may submit two reasons. The first is that the family was the foundation of civilization, and faithful marriage was the only reliable way to produce strong families (including extended families). The modern man sees the individual as the basis of civilization.[82]
- The second is that God intrinsically tied faithful marriage to faithful worship. Israel is described as God's bride; the church is the bride of Christ. To condone adultery is to condone idolatry.

Perhaps easiest to see is this: it is one of the Ten Commandments. It therefore must be important, and indeed it is clearly so.

Closely linked to this is the concept of divorce. At this time, a woman could divorce her husband only under the rarest of circumstances. The husband, however, had a greater array of choices, depending upon which rabbinical school of thought was being followed.

- The school of Hillel held that the only ground for a man divorcing his wife was adultery. Jesus agrees.

---

[82] I leave to the reader the exercise of determining if this change is based in fact or fancy.

- The school of Akiva held that practically any "uncleanness" in the wife (including losing her face and figure) was sufficient grounds.

You can guess which school was more popular. But you can also see the adulterous woman's position a little more clearly. Her husband can get rid of her in favor of some younger woman just by writing out her divorce papers. She's stuck with him for life. This may explain her temptation, but it would still be wrong in the view of those crowded around.

Jesus actually is more strict about adultery, extending it to even so much as a leering look at a woman.[83]

The situation is quite different in our time. Adultery is seen as "an affair." It is considered to enhance a marriage.[84] If things don't work out, you can always get a divorce, right?

Indeed, the change in our views of marriage has another result: adultery is an expression of the woman's equality with the man. Since the church began teaching egalitarian marriage we have seen the divorce rate soar to the point where there is actually more divorce among Christians than among non-Christians. Adultery is now just a step in the divorce process; anyone who feels shocked, offended or betrayed by adultery is now counseled to "get over it." We are a great distance from the attitudes of these people.

It does bring up a question: what would Christ say today to someone who was "caught in the act of adultery?" If he said the same things, would she feel repentant, or justified?

Traps and Options

The Pharisees think they have Jesus in an unbreakable trap – that's why they sprang it on him. Here's how they might see it:

- If he stones her, he's a rebel against the Roman Empire (the Jews are not allowed the death penalty). Then let Rome deal with him. If he says no, he is disobedient to the Law of Moses.
- If he stones her, he loses popularity with the people – who can at least empathize with the woman. There's a reason she's not there with her lover.
- If he temporizes, he is co-opting himself into "the system."

Defense

So how does someone defend himself against such a trap? I submit two things are shown here:

- First, the defense of purity and innocence. If you see something evil as your option, don't do it. (Mom: "Don't do dumb things.")
- Second, remember what your mission is. Christ came to seek and save the lost. The woman falls in that category; Christ's actions show that the Pharisees and the crowd do too.

---

[83] Matthew 5:27-28

[84] In thirty years of teaching the Bible to adults, I have yet to see anything other than misery to come from adultery. I merely report the common idea.

The Woman

We may first note the preparation that Christ has made. He spent the night before on the Mount of Olives; we know that his habit was to pray most, if not all, the night. That's an example to us.

We may also note that he arrived at dawn. The virtues of promptness and making maximum use of your time are hereby proclaimed.

Finally, he began his teaching by proclaiming his authority – in the act of sitting down (customary in those days). He is in charge of the classroom.

Writing on the ground

Those of little patience might note that writing on the ground takes a little time. Christ wants the crowd to think, and the Pharisees to repent. He gives them a space to do so.

The Pharisees, at least, show no signs of repentance. Note that they "continued to question him." Patience, even in the din of criticism, is still a virtue.

Of course, the question always comes up, "What, exactly, did he write?" Many have speculated that he wrote down the sins of those standing around – starting with the oldest first, judging by who left first. But politeness of this time would have had the oldest leave first anyway. It is just possible that the finger of God wrote in the dust what it had written long before.[85]

Dealing with the sinner

May we point out the obvious?

- The woman knows that she is the sinner. She knows what she did, but presents no defense of the "how come I'm the only one you drag off like this?" Nor do we hear, "why didn't you bring the man?"
- She also has sense enough not to try to run away. Perhaps she sensed where this was going; but however she thought it out, she wound up trusting the Christ.
- Christ, as is his desire, is merciful. No longer dealing with condemnation by others, he seeks her repentance rather than her death.
- "Sin no more" seems to imply that he had her repentance.

Judgmentalism

We may take a moment here to comment on Judgmentalism, so well pictured here in the persons of the Pharisees. There are two instances in which we are counseled to judge:

- First, we are to judge ourselves. Take stock, repent and reform, and draw closer to Christ.
- Second, in the form of church discipline, we are to judge those who are in the church – but only within the steps of church discipline. In this process we are to be very certain that those who approach the wayward do so with clean hands,

But what we usually mean by Judgmentalism is that we are looking down on someone else, outside the church or outside the process of church discipline. This has several disadvantages:

---

[85] Exodus 31:18

- Whatever you use to measure others, God will use to measure you. If you can't stand hot-headed people, and you yourself blow your cork regularly, what is God to do?
- Judging others usually carries with it a failure to forgive. If you will not forgive, you will not be forgiven.
- Often enough, judgment is made so as to have a rationalization of our own poor conduct. "Well, at least I'm not as bad as …"
- Finally, done long enough, it hardens into a solid hypocrisy. Even you don't like that result.

We are told to hate the sin and love the sinner. We do this every day with the sinner named "myself." God simply wants you to be fair – apply the same standard to everyone.

Man Born Blind - John 9

There is something peculiarly modern about this tale. Christians of our day will recognize the reaction of the Pharisees to the outpouring of God's grace.

The Miracle

Joh 9:1-12 NIV As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. (2) His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (3) "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. (4) As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. (5) While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (6) Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. (7) "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. (8) His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" (9) Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man." (10) "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. (11) He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." (12) "Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

Who sinned?

In a debate that has long since vanished, the Jews of this time had developed a theory that allowed for some debate about "who sinned?" The question is universal; they allowed two answers:

- First, it's possible the parents sinned, and God punishes them by giving them a child born blind.[86]
- At this time, however, it was considered possible that the child had sinned before birth. Those who held this position also held the soul to be eternal. (It's not; you have a beginning, but this argument was yet to come.) It's an argument still carried forward in Hinduism – the reason you were born such a miserable Hindu is that you sinned in a previous life.

Christ, however, staggers the disciples with his explanation: it was neither. The child was born blind so that the glory of God might be revealed. Thirty-seven years of blindness is a high price; the glory of God must indeed be expensive. I suspect the blind man might have wanted to have an explanation of, "Why me?" Most of the rest of us would like that answered too. He didn't tell Job; likely enough he won't tell you and me.

Work of God

Christ tells us that we must do the work of God. This takes some explanation, particularly as it concerns why we get no explanation of what that work might be at any given moment.

---

[86] Deuteronomy 5:9 is cited in justification for this.

- Ultimately, the work of God is beyond our comprehension.[87] We cannot understand it all. But that is no excuse for a failure to try, nor is it an excuse for leaving the work undone. God's work includes that which has set apart for us to do.
- The simplest form of doing the work of God is obedience to his commands; indeed, the Ten Commandments are explicitly called the work of God.[88] To the faithful Jew, this would be the work that God had set before him.
- In the New Testament, Christ lifts our sights higher. The work of God is to believe in Christ.[89] If you believe, you obey. (But don't forget that to believe, you must obey).

So we see that the work of God is not something beyond our grasp, even if it is beyond our comprehension. Christ sets us an example here: we must do our part.

How are we to do this? Perhaps we can look to the beggar for a life example.

The Beggar

Imagine a life wherein you can only receive, and never give. That was the life of a blind man in this time; the only "occupation" he could fill was that of beggar. His ability to eat was dependent upon his ability to convince other people to enjoy the feeling of being generous. Give to the poor; God will bless you. It's the right thing to do. That was his sales pitch.

Curiously, it was also the sales pitch of the Pharisees. They too told you what God wanted you to do; they too would take your money and make you feel good in doing what God has commanded. The species seems to be with us still.[90]

It's a tough life, being blind. Think of your days in elementary school. Do you remember how cruel children can be? Think of what other children must have done to this man – leading him into who knows what embarrassment and humiliation. It probably developed his caution to the point of cynicism. It is all the more remarkable, then, that he is obedient to what this man Jesus tells him to do. It sounds for all the world that someone is playing a cruel joke on him – put mud on your eyes and send you off to some pool, with the mud there for all to see on the way. We don't know why he trusted Jesus; we only know that he did – and that counted for everything.

The Inquisition

Joh 9:13-34 NIV They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. (14) Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. (15) Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." (16) Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. (17) Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

---

[87] Ecclesiastes 11:5
[88] Exodus 32:16
[89] John 6:29
[90] By no means do I mean the fellow at the roadside with the cardboard sign. Look elsewhere; religious television, for example.

The man replied, "He is a prophet." (18) The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. (19) "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" (20) "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. (21) But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." (22) His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ[1] would be put out of the synagogue. (23) That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." (24) A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God,[2]" they said. "We know this man is a sinner." (25) He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (26) Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" (27) He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" (28) Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! (29) We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." (30) The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. (31) We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. (32) Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. (33) If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." (34) To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

The Pharisees

It's a lot of hard work to become a Pharisee in these days. Much study, much memorization and a great deal of contorted logic are involved. But just because something's difficult to attain doesn't mean it's worth attaining. Here's the logic that's driving the Pharisees:

- Healing is work. Jesus did it on the Sabbath. Work on the Sabbath is prohibited. Wait until next week.[91]
- Making clay is also work. That's two you owe us.
- Spit on the eyes is contrary to rabbinical tradition. (This might just explain why Jesus did it that way.)

With this logic, the Pharisees now confront the man born blind.

Simple man's defense

The beggar is certainly not capable of debating theology and rabbinical tradition with these Pharisees. Indeed, they expect him to agree with them. Instead, he presents the defense of a simple man:

- First, the facts. I was blind. Now I see. That much I know for certain.
- Second, you don't need to know much about theology to know that God isn't about to give such healing power to a hardened sinner. Even the Pharisees teach that.
- Besides, you're the experts. You tell me how this can happen.[92] All I know – and all I need to know – is that it did.

---

[91] The counterargument is given in Mark 2:27

[92] Picture the AFLAC duck, listening to Yogi Berra. "Huh?"

The personal attack

If you can't win the argument with logic and facts, do not despair; there are other techniques available. We have a good example here. Step by step:

- Wrap yourself in the mantle of something greatly respected – God, the flag, science, motherhood, apple pie. Make it clear your opponent is not opposing you, but the thing so respected.
- Don't attack the facts – at first. Only after failure of logic is this useful. Even then, be selective. Twist and distort. (Satan cannot create facts, only twist them.)
- Don't attack morality – just bend it to your own uses.
- Then – attack the person on the other side, personally. Explain the source of their error as being personal ("You're a sinner, a capitalist, a man…"); don't let the argument drift back to facts and logic.[93]

The great miracle

Joh 9:35-41 NIV Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (36) "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." (37) Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." (38) Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. (39) Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." (40) Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" (41) Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

"Lord, I believe"

There are two miracles in this chapter; the second one is curing spiritual blindness. This blind man started with the idea that Jesus is a man – of which there should be no doubt. Nothing more than that. God often deals with us so that we not told everything at once, but things are gradually revealed to us. The man becomes a prophet; the prophet becomes "Lord."

It's not obvious to him at the moment written of, but later writers see some very deep connections:

- "He made clay out of spittle, for the Word became flesh." (Augustine). Christ, being man, uses the things of this world for his purposes. In so doing he proclaims mud and spit fit for use by God, because Christ is God and Christ is in the world.
- Adam, you will recall, is made from the dust of the ground. No one else in Scripture ever healed a man born blind; indeed, some traditions hold that this is a sign of the Messiah. It is a new thing; as the creation of man was. It is therefore fitting to use the same ingredients.

For Judgment

Often enough Christ proclaims that he did not come to judge the world.[94] At his return, he will, but even now we can see how his simple presence is judgment. How so? Setting up a standard creates the possibility (and sometimes the requirement) of judgment.

---

[93] C. S. Lewis' portrait of "Bulverism" is a golden example of this.
[94] John 3:17

- Christ's perfection is one such standard. By this we know we are sinners, and in need of grace. If we judge ourselves by this standard, we will know to seek God's amazing grace.
- We often set up our own standards of judgment. God, in fairness, uses them to judge us.[95]

Christ will eventually, in his time, return to judge the living and the dead. In the meanwhile, however, the cockroaches still scatter when the light goes on.[96]

Blindness and guilt

May I submit that there are two kinds of spiritual blindness, each with its own cure?

- There is a natural spiritual blindness, such as happens for those who have not heard of Christ. The remedy is to preach the Gospel – to turn on the light for those who cannot see.
- There is a willing spiritual blindness; those who have it are condemned simply by stating that fact.

This teacher wears a patch over his right eye, for that eye distorts his vision. If you close your right eye, you're just as blind as he is.

---

[95] Luke 6:37
[96] John 3:19

Who Is My Neighbor? - Luke 10:25-37

In this familiar story of the Good Samaritan we find one of the experts of the Law asking Jesus a simple, familiar question. I suspect this answer is one taught by rote to young students, and Jesus turns it around to the man. They would be in benign, if simple, agreement if it were not for the lawyers drive to justify himself. It is a common fault. How often will the marriage counselor hear, "Tell him (her) that I'm right!" The problem here is the paradigm used, not the Scripture. It is known to all that to get the right answers you must ask the right questions. Less well known is this: even the right questions must be asked in the right way. Self-justification as a motive means you care about the questioner, not the question.

Luk 10:25-37 NIV On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (26) "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" (27) He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[3]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[4]" (28) "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." (29) But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (30) In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (31) A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. (32) So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33) But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. (34) He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. (35) The next day he took out two silver coins[5] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' (36) "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (37) The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Cast of Characters

We may begin in this drama by examining the cast of characters.

The traveler

The traveler was alone on the Jericho road – an act of folly even into the 20th century. It was much safer to travel in a group. To put it bluntly, our traveler is rather dumb. Worse, he was likely to be ignored because bandits would often waylay the lone traveler and then leave him on the ground, hoping to entice some other traveler into the same trap.

The Samaritan

The hearers of this story would most certainly have been shocked at the person who stopped to help. Samaritans and Jews hated each other. But give that a thought; this Samaritan stopped to help a man *whom he knew despised him.* Indeed, the Samaritan did so despite the fact that he was on a journey, not just a trip to Jericho. We may observe also:

- He came prepared – he had his own first aid kit. How often have Christians said, "I wasn't prepared – I had nothing to give?"
- He followed through, leaving nothing undone. He was not afraid to enlist the innkeeper's services at his own expense. He finished what he started. He got involved and stayed involved to the end of the matter.
- His credit was good!

The priest

Older and more literal translations tell us that the priest's arrival was "by chance" or "by coincidence." It was "just one of those things." We see strange sights along the roads of life, and often enough we look, cluck sorrowfully and move on. After all, it was pure coincidence that we were there, right? Or is coincidence actually the providence of God?

One thing we do know. If the traveler dies in the priest's care, the priest is ceremonially unclean for seven days. Which means he could not perform his duties as a priest. You can hear him thinking, "prior commitments, can't take the risk." Do we make our appointments subject to, "If the Lord wills it?"[97]

The Levite

We might examine two points here:

- "Passed him by on the other side" – took no risks. Did he congratulate himself on how astute that was?
- "Saw him" – the phrase literally means "stared at him."[98] The traveler was nothing more that a traffic accident; the Levite a rubbernecker.

Cost of Compassion

Pontius Pilate was merciful with Christ – until it got risky. We might examine the risks, and see if they apply to us:

- There is, of course, the risk of physical harm. The bandits might be lying in wait. You could get some terrible tropical disease on a short term missions trip, too. Does our compassion override our fear?
- There is also the risk of changing your "emotional distance" from the victim. Most of us would be happy to pick up the cell phone and call 911 to summon aid to the accident victim. But would you stop to help on a back country road in the middle of the night?
- There is the risk of "getting involved." You have other things to do, places to go, schedules to keep. Such an entanglement might cost you the opportunities you have claimed as your own.

Expense

If you do stop, it will cost you. Let's examine the expense report.

- At the least it means the use of your possessions. The Samaritan put the man on his own donkey – and walked. We tend to think our possessions really belong to us, and we hoard them well. Do we own them, or do they own us?

---

[97] James 4:13-16
[98] In all three cases, this is the verb used.

- As in this parable, we would probably part with some cash. This is often the easiest of sacrifices – until it becomes open-ended. Then it becomes a matter of faith.
- In our time, we would need to consider the impact on our credit rating as well. Do you really want this on your Visa?

Impact on others

Perhaps the greatest excuse is the impact our actions will have on others. It's not so much that I mind myself, but my family…

- Sometimes it affects our professional relationships. We like to live our lives in a well compartmentalized fashion. The office world should never even know, much less be impacted, by our charitable actions. It's as if we need the boss's permission to be charitable.
- Often, your actions obligate your family in various ways. Some children bring home stray cats; my daughter brings home stray people.[99]
- Your reputation is often at risk too. It's one thing to help build an orphanage; another to bail a friend out of jail. Both may be compassion; one is socially approved.

The Imitation of Christ

The rule of conduct for a Christian is now expressed as, "What would Jesus do?" But throughout most of Christian history this has been known as the imitation of Christ, and we shall use this older title. How does the example of Christ compare to our Samaritan?

No "respect of persons"

As James tells us,

Jas 2:1-9 NIV
My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. (2) Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. (3) If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," (4) have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (5) Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (6) But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? (7) Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? (8) If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"[1] you are doing right. (9) But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

We see it clearly: just because the one we are helping doesn't quite meet our standards, we are still bound to treat all as children of God. Indeed, our Lord tells us that if we do it for "the least of these" we do it for him.[100]

---

[99] And we're very proud of her for doing so. It means we have shown her God's path by the way we walk.
[100] Matthew 25:31-46

There is an even greater case. We are taught that the way to deal with our enemies is to show love to them.[101] Isn't this easiest when we have the opportunity to show compassion on them? Isn't this how we turn enemies into friends?

Merciful

"The one who had mercy on him." May I suggest that being the merciful is of great benefit, even when examined solely on the rewards to the merciful?

- Christ, our example, was merciful on the Cross – to us. We cannot hope to match this example, but we can imitate it.
- If we do, we are assured of Christ's mercy on the Day of Judgment.
- Besides which, the merciful sleep better at night.

Passing on the faith

The examples of such mercy is not lost on your family. Compassion, it seems, is hereditary. But it can also be acquired. Many of us have participated in prison visits organized by Bill Glass.[102] This is compassion; it is also passing the faith along.

But the great use of such an example is in the church itself. If I go to visit those in prison, that's an act of compassion. But if in so doing, I and those with me change the way the church sees prison ministry, then we have given compassion as a gift to the church.

The cheerful giver

There is a secret in this. Giving of compassion is like other forms of giving: the Lord loves the cheerful giver. How, then, am I to be cheerfully compassionate to those in need?

- First, act in kindness, not in disapproval. Judge not the sinner; be kind in remedying the fruits of sin.
- Do so in humility; it is the providence of God that you have the means to give.
- Do so with patience; a repentant sinner is still just that: a sinner. And likely to do it again.

If you will, please, examine the verb you use for this. If you are "contributing" that implies a limited commitment. It may be all that you can reasonably do, so there is no shame in that. The gift, however, is one way only. But if you see yourself as "sharing" then the gifts can flow both ways.

Finally, there is this: what we give was first given to us. In our compassion we take those things which God in his mercy has seen fit to give us, and pass them on to those of his children less blessed. Even if we are the Samaritan outcast, God's mercy will triumph through us.

---

[101] Matthew 5:43-45
[102] Bill Glass, Champions for Life. www.billglasscfl.org.

Dishes and Prayer - Luke 10:38-11:13

(The reader will note that combining the two instances given in sequence is somewhat arbitrary. They are believed to have happened in that order, but there is no specific cause and effect chain between the two.)

Mary and Martha

Luk 10:38-42 NIV As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. (39) She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. (40) But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (41) "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, (42) but only one thing is needed.[6] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Background

In these days of liberated women, Martha's complaint about Mary seems somewhat strange. We must therefore understand the times before we can understand the passage.

First, understand the duty of hospitality. Jesus was a "somebody." If he chose to come to your home, your first reaction would be one of welcome, for such a choice brings honor and credit to your home.[103] More than that, you would never think of asking him to go elsewhere, as hospitality was considered a sacred duty. Indeed, Abraham entertained angels without knowing who they were. That account would have been drummed into young girls as showing the importance of hospitality even to complete strangers. Besides, travelers from other places brought you the latest news – or gossip.

We must also take note of the fact that the home belongs to Martha – an unusual circumstance. Most likely she obtained it on her husband's death, the couple being childless. She has taken in her sister (presumably younger) and brother, Mary and Lazarus. This would imply they are orphans with little to no inheritance. This places an extra burden on Martha, as she is now a recognized head of household – and a woman. Society would be watching her to see that she fulfilled all her duties.

Indeed, she has the burden of duties beyond the role of women in general. At this time, women would have normally been excluded from a rabbi's lesson for a number of reasons. The most basic is that mingling men and women in that time often produced pregnancy before marriage. If a woman wanted to know what the rabbi said, she could ask her husband or other male relative. In particular, Mary is shown as sitting closest to Christ[104] and is most particularly out of place.

Mary and Martha compared

Martha is described by three words:

---

[103] Consider your reaction to, say, Billy Graham visiting your home. How much more our Lord!
[104] The point is clear in the Greek, I'm told.

- Distracted – the word in the original can be translated "pulled away." She's being pulled away from the center of life by the things on the periphery. How often are we distracted by the cares of this life and thus pulled away from our Lord? (As we shall see, this is a reason we have a devotional life.)
- Worried – how often our Lord commands us not to worry! It seems to consist of thinking about everything that can go wrong. (Remember: Murphy's law says "***anything*** that can go wrong…" not "***everything*** …"
- Upset – the word in the original could very well be used to describe the feeling you get when your nap falls victim to your neighbor's leaf blower. It implies someone in a commotion.

Mary would be seen, however, as the one with the problem.

- She'd be viewed as lazy. She chose not to help.
- She'd be viewed as rebellious. It's Martha's house; likely enough she asked Mary for help and was turned down. (I suspect Mary was the cute one – must have been some history in this).
- She'd be seen as taking a man's place. She is closest to Jesus; good manners would have her elsewhere. Even if invited to stay, she should have sat (or more likely stood; teachers sat) in the back of the room. This would give the men their proper place.

All this is the world's way at that time. Everything Martha wanted would have been seen as good. But the good is the enemy of the best.

The devotional life

There are dying denominations in America. They are dying because they are performing good works. For that? No, for neglecting the devotional life within. They have rejected the Scripture; thus they have rejected the Christ therein revealed. They have the form of godliness but deny the power thereof. They have no real devotional life.

Devotional life – why is it important?

- First, because it is supreme. Like Mary in this instance, the devotional life puts our eyes upon Jesus. He is Lord; therefore we are dealing with that which is supreme in all things.
- It is a hidden life which shows in our outward lives.[105] If we lack this, the absence will be clear also.

But by itself the devotional life is useless – for faith without works is dead. How then are we to conduct our devotional lives so that our works reflect our faith?

[105] Matthew 10:27

Prayer – in outline

Luk 11:1-4 NIV Jesus' Teaching on Prayer

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (2) He said to them, "When you pray, say:

" 'Father,[1]
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.[2] (3) Give us each day our daily bread. (4) Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.[3]
And lead us not into temptation.[4]' "

We may conveniently take this outline in three pieces: God, ourselves and others. Prayer is the core of the devotional life. It seems surprising at first that we need to be taught how to pray, but it is so.

God

We must commit ourselves to three things about God:

- First, that he is our Father. That implies his right to command us, for we are his children. It implies that we are to treat each other as brothers and sisters, for all other Christians are his children as well. And it implies that we are to behave as a family should – treating each other in love, welcoming new members likewise.
- Next, we are to "hallow" (keep holy) his name. I am particular about the misuse of my name, considering it an insult. How much more, then, is the misuse of God's name an insult to him? If we call him "Father" and "Lord," should we then insult him by misusing his name?
- Finally, we are to pray (and work) that his kingdom will come. There is work to be done, and we are to do it. We are not just to idle, but work and pray for the coming of the kingdom – both in the church and in Christ's return (even so, Lord Jesus, come).

Ourselves

- First, we are to ask for our daily bread. Note that we are to ask for the necessities; the Mercedes might not be as welcome a prayer. We are to ask for them daily, so that we may show our confidence that he will provide. Finally, we should remember that we are asking – not commanding. It helps to know who's in charge.
- Next, we are to ask forgiveness. This implies the acknowledgement of our faults and sins (tough enough). It also implies that we accept that he can forgive.
- Finally, we are to ask for the chicken's way out – lead us not into temptation. By this we acknowledge that in our own strength we cannot resist such temptation as we will encounter; rather we must be kept from it. We don't allow first graders to play with a Tommy gun.

Others

- Note, please, this prayer *assumes* that we forgive others. It's a statement, not a question.
- There's a good reason for that: we are offered forgiveness only on the condition that we forgive others.
- But perhaps you missed this one: how else can the "others" see the forgiveness of God unless they see the forgiveness of you?

Practical Persistence

Luk 11:5-13 NIV Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, (6) because a friend of mine on a

journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' (7) "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' (8) I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness[5] he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (9) "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (11) "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for[6] a fish, will give him a snake instead? (12) Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? (13) If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The duty of persistence

It sometimes comes as a surprise to the Christian that we are *told* to be persistent in prayer. It seems irrational; did we really think that God didn't hear us the first time? I submit that this persistence is required for instructional purposes:

- It teaches us the persistence of God. If we, being sinners, can be so persistent, how much more persistent will our heavenly Father be?
- It teaches us the "long view." If we know we are going to need persistence, it is fairly obvious that we should be prepared to wait for the things we ask for.
- It teaches us to consider our words – for we will be repeating them, a lot. Sometimes this teaches us that we should have thought before we spoke.

Ask, seek and knock

- Why does Christ tell us to ask? First, it's good manners. More important, it reminds us of the one of whom we are asking. Politeness counts, especially when asking things of the Almighty.
- Why does Christ tell us to seek? We need to make efforts on our own; prayer is not an excuse for laziness. Besides, God rewards those who seek him.[106]
- And if you're going to all that trouble, when you get to the end, knock.

That last is important. I discovered the principle when my daughter (then in the 7th grade) had a boy bicycle over to join her for a bike ride to a comic book store. 7th grade boys are not the most socially graceful of souls; he arrived, stood on the porch (but didn't ring the bell), and concluded that my daughter had already left. Since none of us had seen him arrive or leave, he was soon presumed missing. All this could have been avoided if he had simply knocked.

The gift of the Holy Spirit

The most valuable gift you can give is – yourself. I live across the street from a magnet high school – students travel up to forty miles to attend this school. The parking lot is full of old Mercedes (Daddy gets the new one), and the school is full of students whose parents are too busy to do anything but buy the affection of their children. The children are left to raise themselves, and a poor job of it they make of it.

---

[106] Hebrews 11:6

If this is so for the sinners, how much more true is it that the most valuable gift God can give you is – Himself. He has done this – twice. First at the Cross, then in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we do not see the value of the gift God gives to the persistent.

Indeed, our prayers are the province of the Holy Spirit, who brings them before the Father – in effect translating them from our poor phrasings and immaturity into the fullness of what the Father requires. It is the secret of the full and complete prayer life.

On Wealth and Worry - Luke 12:1-34

There is a curious succession of events given here. Christ's teaching on hypocrisy precedes his teaching on wealth. Is it possible that our Lord noted the behavior in which one wants to be seen as a generous giver, yet in actuality be stingy, as being hypocrisy?

Be on your guard

Luk 12:1-12 NIV Warnings and Encouragements

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. (2) There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. (3) What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. (4) "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. (5) But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. (6) Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies[1]? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. (7) Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (8) "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. (9) But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. (10) And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. (11) "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, (12) for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

Hypocrisy

There is a connection in here which most people do not keep in mind: hypocrisy is often rooted in fear. That the evil man does not want his evil discovered, and therefore becomes a hypocrite, is clear to us. But it is also true that the good man may not want his charity to be discovered, for this would mark him as a fool in the eyes of the world. This brings us to the twin difficulties with hypocrisy:

- Such concealment is, ultimately, of no use whatsoever. Even if it doesn't come out in this world – which happens most frequently – there is the Day of Judgment.
- Such concealment is unnecessary for the Christian. God has promised to provide for you.

The worst of hypocrisy is to deny your Lord. His teaching on this is simple: God will care for you if you proclaim him, and condemn you to hell if you don't.

Whom should you fear?

Christ quite understands that we are fearful creatures. Indeed, being afraid of something is often necessary; we are well advised not to play basketball in the middle of a freeway. But let's have a little sense of perspective, shall we?

In our area it is a common problem for those who have no legal right to work in this country to be defrauded of wages or even robbed. The police department then has a problem: if they receive such a complaint and do nothing, they are failing to do their job, and encouraging such illegal behavior. Therefore, the police usually state an open policy of not inquiring about immigration status from those

who are making such complaints. Why? Robbery and fraud take some of your money; but if the police turn you over to Immigration, you're on your way out of the land of milk and honey. We have a similar choice. Should we fear those in this world who can kill the body, or the One who can kill both body and soul?

Indeed, the actions of Christ force such a decision upon us. He claims to be the Son of God; to violate his commands is to place yourself on the wrong side of God. There is no sense in Scripture that you can "bow down in the house of Rimmon." There is no fence to sit.

Which brings us, then, to the "sin against the Holy Spirit." Many find this rather mysterious, but I think the matter relatively simple. If, before you become a Christian, you blaspheme the name of Christ, it will be forgiven, as will anything else. But the function of the Holy Spirit is, among other things, to convict the world of sin and judgment to come. If you deny this conviction, you cannot be saved. If you cannot be saved, you will not be forgiven.

Public speaking

For most of us, public speaking is something dreadful. It is certainly not something that "just comes naturally" to most of us. But it is something that can be practiced – if we can overcome that first fear. Its benefits are likewise clear: in so doing we can convince others of the truth of Christ, or even edge them closer to that conclusion.

So it is surprising, perhaps, that Christ tells us that we shouldn't worry about it. It's the function of the Holy Spirit again; the Holy Spirit who indwells you.

The Rich Fool

Luk 12:13-21 NIV Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." (14) Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" (15) Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (16) And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. (17) He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' (18) "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' (20) "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' (21) "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Greed – a barrier to God

The word for greed is *pleonexia* – from two root words. *Pleo* means "to have the majority of" and *nexia* comes from "to grasp". I submit for your consideration three senses in which we can interpret this word today:

- First, there is the simple desire for more than we have. There is never "enough."
- Second, there is the desire for "the most" – a competitive spirit often expressed in "he who dies with the most toys, wins."
- Third, there is the refusal to be content. We have a car, but it's not a Mercedes.

Planning the world's way

There is no shortage of financial advisors in this world. Note that this man "thought to himself" – this is premeditated greed, sometimes known as financial planning. You can see the folly of it in this: what did this man want to do with all that wealth? Despite the frequent commands in the Old Testament he wants to hoard all he can and use the rest to "eat, drink and be merry." (Some things never change.)

The problem with this? Just how many of us know the hour of our death?

Rich towards God

John Wesley addressed this problem by proclaiming we need to be "rich towards God." He gave three facets of this richness:

- We must live in faith – we will need it, otherwise we will begin to wonder just where the next million dollars would come from.
- Having done that, we must abound in good works.
- In all things, be filled with love. (The Lord loves the cheerful giver, and such cheer starts with love, not judgment).

Worry

Luk 12:22-34 NIV Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. (23) Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. (24) Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! (25) Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life[2]? (26) Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? (27) "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. (28) If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! (29) And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. (30) For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. (31) But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. (32) "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. (33) Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. (34) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

To the disciples

Please note that this section is spoken to the disciples only. Why?

- Without the power of the Holy Spirit the world simply cannot handle this.
- The disciples, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, *must* handle this.
- There is also a most practical purpose. The world won't do this; only the disciple. But it is by this that the world knows who is a disciple.

Give the money away?

That's what he's talking about:

Pro 19:17 NIV He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will reward him for what he has done.

May I point out some advantages of this technique?

- It deals directly with the problem of the poor – in a much more efficient way, with much more accountability, than government welfare.
- It makes you a witness for God – at least to the poor you help.
- Most important – it is the tool which allows you to triumph over your own greed.

Shoot the camel

May I offer a small illustration of what this all means?

T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") relates that the camel sometimes causes problems for the traveler. A horse will go on until it drops. But a camel will reach a point where it decides that it's through carrying things for the day. What to do?

Lawrence said that the method is:

- Gather all the other camels around so that they may see what's happening.
- Shoot the camel.
- Divide the load between the other camels.
- Cook and eat the camel.

So I must ask: is your wealth your camel in the road? Is it saying, "thus far, no more?" Does it prevent you from whole-hearted service?

If so, shoot the camel. Get rid of it. Give that which keeps you back to the poor, willingly, no strings attached. Then follow Him.

Waiting for the End - Luke 12:35-59

The Second Coming is always a lively session for debate. Interestingly, our Lord put little emphasis on when this would happen, but rather how to prepare for it.

Watchfulness

Luk 12:35-48 NIV "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, (36) like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. (37) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. (38) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. (39) But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. (40) You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (41) Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" (42) The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (43) It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. (44) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (45) But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. (46) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. (47) "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. (48) But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Tense-ness

One scholar, commenting on the first sentence of this section of scripture, said that it was in the "periphrastic perfect passive imperative third plural of the verb." This carries some truth to it, when you puzzle it out:

- Periphrastic – means that this sentence could have been reduced to a single word. What word? "Watch!"
- Perfect passive – it's written in the passive voice. The content is sufficiently sharp that it shines through that.
- Imperative – it's a command, not a suggestion.
- Third plural – it's not addressed to one person, or a group of people individually, but to all of us as a group.

The Return

It sometimes surprises us that our Lord intends to reward those who have done well. It shouldn't; we're motivated that way, and who would know that better than our Creator?

But sometimes motivation fails, especially if we can't see it coming soon. That's a problem for most of us; instant reward is what we crave. When we do well, we want to be rewarded right then. And if we brag about it enough, we will be.

It gets a little more difficult when Christ talks about due punishment. He gives us three cases:

- The steward who deliberately misuses his trust – for example, to line his own pockets with the offerings of the misled – will be cut to pieces and sent to hell.
- The steward who neglects his trust – no abuse, just doesn't bother doing it – will be severely punished.
- The steward who is ignorant of what he should be doing will be lightly punished.

Note that these apply to the leaders of the church. As is right, they will be more harshly judged.

Preparation

So what are we supposed to do about it?

- We're to keep our "loins girded" (King James). It's a powerful phrase for the people of Israel; this is also how they were to eat the Passover meal – ready to travel.
- We must have our "lamps burning" – our witness before men always a glory to God.
- Finally, we should be doing what we have been assigned to do.

St. Francis had a point on that. He was in his garden when someone approached and asked what Francis would do if he informed that Christ had returned. "Finish my gardening," Francis replied.

Fire on Earth

Luk 12:49-53 NIV "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! (50) But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! (51) Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. (52) From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. (53) They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Fire

Fire is often the symbol of the Holy Spirit. This passage is easily understood that way; for the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin and judgment to come. That is inherently divisive. If you know Jesus as Lord and Savior your response will be very different from those who reject Him.

One thing is certain: there will be no sitting on the fence. Not without a lot of splinters in your rear end. (Who do you say He is?)

Separation and Holiness

It is no great secret that Christians behave differently compared to others – or at least they should. This difference in behavior is called holiness – the setting aside by God of His children. This holiness produces two interesting reactions in the Christian:

- First is the hatred of sin, for sin cost the life of our Savior. (Not hatred of the sinner).

- Also, there is a reaction of fear and obedience. We are trying to please him, not ourselves.

What may not be clear is this: holiness forces a decision on others. You think not? If they know that your language is pure, listen to theirs when you walk into the room.

Peace without …

We desire peace – from a personal level up to a world level. But peace seldom arrives alone. We want it, but not unaccompanied. For example:

- Peace without righteousness has another name: oppression. Every tyrant promises peace – but on what terms?
- Peace without wisdom is disorder and evil practice. Oppression comes from above us, but disorder comes from within us. Such peace leaves everyone free to invent his own system – the author of chaos.

Signs of the Times

Luk 12:54-59 NIV He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. (55) And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. (56) Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? (57) "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? (58) As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. (59) I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."[107]

We are not totally clueless about the second coming of our Lord; he gives us some things to look for. But before we do, let's make sure we know his audience:

- This is for active Christians, not the idle inquirer who uses Revelation to shield himself from the other parts of the Bible.
- Such a study (of end times) is a proper part of a Christian's life – a part.
- The signs He gives are intended to unite, not divide the church.

Signs of the times

So just what are those signs? Here's a list of the more important ones:

- Apostasy. The church will find itself riddled with all sorts of man-made doctrine, contrary to the clear meaning of the Scriptures.
- The "man of sin" or the "man of lawlessness" will be revealed. Many nominations have been made for the job. The most common one is the Pope (either the papal system, or a particular pope to come.)
- The great delusion will come too – those whose hearts do not place Christ first will have a new system of beliefs.
- Most people will consider the faith something to be mocked.
- There will be tribulation; the true followers of Christ will be hated by all nations.
- Many will fall away from the faith and betray those who are still faithful.
- The Gospel will be preached to all peoples before the end comes.

---

[107] Greek lepton, which is also the Widow's Mite.

- The abomination of desolation will be made – and there is a great deal of debate about that.
- There will be signs in the heavens – taken literally or figuratively.

No man knows

No man knows the hour – but count on it, somebody has it pegged correctly in his Pearl Harbor file. Somebody being right by chance is one thing – but we shall not *know.* This does not, of course, prevent the boldly learned from trying.

We know there will be wars, rumors of wars, and all kinds of conflict before the end. We don't know from this if we are in that season.

Indeed, the end times will be marked by nothing so much as seeming to be normal. Like now. Which is a good reason to Watch!

Costly Banquet - Luke 14

With Christ we find that often the homeliest of examples carries the deepest of truth.

Banquet Rules

Luk 14:1-14 NIV

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. (2) There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. (3) Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" (4) But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. (5) Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son[1] or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" (6) And they had nothing to say. (7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (12) Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. (13) But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, (14) and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Background

To understand this passage we need to know something about the culture of the time:

- The most important guests were seated at the table nearest the kitchen. As the food was served, they got first choice. (Ever picked the cashews out of the nut mix?)
- Banquets were more common in those days, as it was a good way of using up the whole cow (no refrigeration).
- Whenever the cook had things prepared, the servants would be sent out to summon the guests. We'd give a time instead.
- If you think social structure is unimportant today, give a wedding reception.

It is against this background that Christ delivers his lesson on humility. We must first investigate just what humility means, however.

Humility

Humility is, at root, honesty with yourself. If you happen to be a rocket scientist, saying that you're really dumb is not humility – it's dishonesty. The baseline trick seems to be this:

- Use the same yardstick to measure you and others. If you're lenient with yourself about some particular behavior, don't be strict with others. Hypocrisy is not humility.
- If the facts are, for example, that you are smarter than the average human, treat that as a fact – not as pride. After all, where did you get your native intelligence? Are not your achievements a reflection of what God has led you and permitted you to do?

Of course, this is not particularly popular today. We teach our athletes (and other role models) to "trash talk." Arrogance is now seen as an important virtue. It may be fashionable; it is not right. The truth in ethics is not found in fashion magazines.[108]

There are two things, though, that we can attribute to successful humility.

- Humility leads to the pure heart – which enables us to see God.[109]
- Humility leads to a gentle spirit. How so? Think of it this way: are most of your arguments started by your pride? A gentle spirit needs no such; and humility displaces pride.

Inviting the poor

One of the curious results of humility is the change in those with whom you associate. For those climbing the corporate ladder it is important to associate with the right people, in the right way. It's OK to know the mail room staff, in a condescending way. But you don't want to play basketball with them; you want to go golfing with the executives instead.

This applies to banquets and dinners as well. The climber will carefully construct his guest list; the humble man will do the same. It's just that they have different criteria. The climber invites those who can help him succeed; the humble invite those they can help. This can cause interesting results, for some of those people are genuinely those who don't fit in.

Yorba Linda, a city near us, has the highest per capita income of any city in America. The city's motto is, "Land of Gracious Living." The important thing is to live in a particular style, it seems.

If I might bore you with a repeated story (a page of the web site www.becomingcloser.org):

We had a friend whose life was not "gracious living." One night my wife was on the phone with her, and our friend mentioned that she would not be eating tonight, as her Social Security check would not arrive for another two or three days. My wife offered to bring something over to her (the lady does not drive), an offer refused as being too much trouble. My wife replied that this was no problem, as she would simply bring over some "leftovers from ours."

---

[108] To take it to absurdity, "Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way. But I'm doing the best that I can." (Ray Stevens)

[109] Matthew 5:8

We remember this night because of that. The kids and I heard it differently: not “leftovers from ours” but (cue the science fiction music) “Leftovers From Mars.” The kids and I had a lot of fun with that; but wherever you get your leftovers, share them.

God’s Banquet

It should be noted that humility is a part of the Imitation of Christ. Consider how God handles his banquets:

Luk 14:15-24 NIV When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." (16) Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. (17) At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' (18) "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' (19) "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' (20) "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' (21) "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' (22) " 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' (23) "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. (24) I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' "

Excuses

It is instructive to look at the excuses given here – for they are the same ones we have in our modern lives. You don’t think so? Consider them this way:

- The first is the press of ordinary business. We are often warned that this should not be in the way, but the cares of this world do tend to drive out the things of God. After all, I have the rent to pay. God wouldn’t bother with that. Right?
- Even less valid is the press of new toys. I just bought an ATV; I need to take it out into the desert and try it out. It is a common tactic of Satan; let the new step in the way of the eternal.
- Finally, there is a phrase for the most powerful of roadblocks: the good is the enemy of the best. Your marriage is very important, and a good thing – but neither so important nor so good as the kingdom of God. Marriage is a part of the commandment of God; do not let the part replace the whole.

Evangelism – or, who should be invited?

One of the great problems of the church over the centuries is the strong tendency to fracture along the fault lines of wealth and respectability. James knew about it in the time of the Apostles[110]; it has not departed from us yet. So then, just who should we be inviting to our King’s banquet?

- May I suggest the usual suspects? All those folks who DO fit in with your church should be invited.

---

[110] James 2:1-9

- But consider the unlikely as well. Not just the physically crippled; the spiritually crippled as well. Whom? What about those suffering from divorce or death? Those just out of prison? Those whose biker/Goth/whatever lifestyle offends you?
- Indeed, invite even the enemies of God – the highwayman and the hedge robber.
- It says, "Whosoever will." Just about covers it, too.

Why?

This, of course, becomes rather uncomfortable. So we look around to find reasons to avoid it. Consider, however, the reasons to do it:

- First, it is obedience to God's command. Make disciples of *all* people, He said.
- Second, in so doing we honor the humility of Christ – by imitating it.
- Finally, it turns us into carriers of God's love. We are made a channel, where His grace is poured. As such, we bring glory to his name and his love to any and all.

Count the Cost

Luk 14:25-35 NIV Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: (26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. (27) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (28) "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? (29) For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, (30) saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' (31) "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? (32) If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. (33) In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. (34) "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? (35) It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

We noted earlier that the good is often the enemy of the best, the part the enemy of the whole. For some this appears to be a contradiction. If I am doing good works, how can God condemn me for that? He doesn't; but He may condemn you for doing them when you should have done something else.

Permit me a silly example. Let us suppose you come upon the scene of a horrific automobile accident. There are many things you could do; for example, you might talk to one of the survivors to assure them that they will be all right. But shouldn't you open your cell phone first and call 911?

It's an old example, but a useful one. If you are building a wagon, you build the wheels from the hub out – not the rim in. If the axle is in the right place, everything else will fall into place, or be so obvious that you know to fix it. You must seek to place all things in their proper order.

Even authority has its proper order – and Christ is at the "hub". Placing him first puts all else in order, or shows where the problem is.

Count the cost – in suffering as well as dollars

Christ has a grand sense of honesty. You're going to suffer and spend no matter what you do in life. But, as he makes clear, this certainly includes the Christian life as well as any others. Indeed, the Christian life carries a high price tag. It would be dishonest (common, but dishonest) to give the idea that Christianity is a lark in the park. You are going to pay for it.

But – to some extent – it's true with any life style. So why not get something for the suffering? How much better it is to suffer for the cause of Christ that it is to suffer because your latest "gimme" is denied you?

This is why Christ tells you to count the cost – and then take up the Cross. I can think of no better way to explain this than a quote from Thomas à Kempis:

TO MANY the saying, "Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me," (Matt. 16:24.) seems hard, but it will be much harder to hear that final word: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." (Matt. 25:41.) Those who hear the word of the cross and follow it willingly now, need not fear that they will hear of eternal damnation on the day of judgment. This sign of the cross will be in the heavens when the Lord comes to judge. Then all the servants of the cross, who during life made themselves one with the Crucified, will draw near with great trust to Christ, the judge.

Why, then, do you fear to take up the cross when through it you can win a kingdom? In the cross is salvation, in the cross is life, in the cross is protection from enemies, in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the cross is strength of mind, in the cross is joy of spirit, in the cross is highest virtue, in the cross is perfect holiness. There is no salvation of soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross.

Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life. He Himself opened the way before you in carrying His cross, and upon it He died for you, that you, too, might take up your cross and long to die upon it. If you die with Him, you shall also live with Him, and if you share His suffering, you shall also share His glory.

The Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32

It has been called “the greatest short story ever told.” The quotation is attributed to Dickens, Emerson, Twain and a variety of religious authors. It is certainly famous enough to justify the phrase.

Luk 15:11-32 NIV Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. (12) The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. (13) "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. (14) After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. (15) So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. (16) He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. (17) "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! (18) I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' (20) So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (21) "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.[2]' (22) "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23) Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. (24) For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. (25) "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. (26) So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. (27) 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' (28) "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. (29) But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. (30) But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' (31) " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. (32) But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

Background

This parable is given in the context of yet another argument with the Pharisees. Their complaint on this occasion is that Jesus has no sense of propriety about what kind of people a good rabbi would associate with. In particular, Jesus seems to have a fondness for tax collectors and other assorted sinners.

To this, Jesus tells three parables:

- First is the parable of the lost sheep. Sheep manage to go astray with very little effort. Here Jesus makes the remark that there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than there is for ninety-nine who don’t need repentance.

- The second is the lost coin. It didn't lose itself, but the woman still searches for it – and rejoices when it is found.

The rejoicing continues in this third parable.

The prodigal son

We may first consider the title character. It is convenient to look at him in three lights: before his repentance, during his change and when he comes home.

Before

One thing is clear: this is a boy in rebellion. He has looked at his father's style (i.e. hard work) and decided he doesn't like the look. He therefore wants out. Indeed, "I want" is often the source of sin. In this there is a curious cycle played out in every generation.

It is simply this: we want, we get what we want – and then we don't like the result.

The Change

May I point out one little, tiny variation of the theme usually sounded? It's easy to imagine the boy in a state of depression. We often picture this young man as making an emotional decision – largely because this parable is used so frequently in altar calls. But it's false. The decision taken here is taken rationally – when the boy comes to his senses.

Note, too, that this is a decision that results in action. It is not just coming to the front at an altar call; this kid has quite a hike ahead of him. As he is going on the way he is rehearsing his speech.

One thing we may point out: he has learned the futility of wealth. Every one is your friend when you are dispensing the gold; no one cares about your diet when you are broke.

After

The young man's repentance teaches us these lessons:

- He acknowledges his sin against his father – but also his sin against God. It is the nature of sin that it is an offense against God. Which might explain why his forgiveness is so necessary.
- He humbles himself. There is no hint of the more common method of coming home acting like you're a success.
- He knows what he deserves. He's prepared to take his lumps.

The Father

The obvious picture here is that of God the Father. It is an interesting parallel, which teaches much.

A long way off

That little phrase gives up some golden thought:

- If he saw him that far away, the father must have been looking for him. Think of the anguish; every day his eyes look down the road, looking for the one sight he desires most.

- As he waited, he waited with mercy, not punishment. The kid's speech was thought out beforehand; so was the father's response. It's just that they didn't match. Did you notice that the father never responds to the kid's speech?
- If God does that, how then should we pray for the sinners on our prayer list?

Running

"He ran to his son" – a simple statement, but with great implications for us.

- This is, as far as I can determine, the only instance in which God the Father is pictured as running. The Sovereign of the Universe packs up his dignity, runs down a dusty road and embraces the prodigal. It is love in action.
- Note that he comes himself – he doesn't send a servant to him. As Christ came to us, you may recall.
- His servants run with him. Our Lord runs to welcome the sinner home; his servants can do no less.

His loving mercy

We are about to encounter the older brother's reaction, so we need a little groundwork here.

- If they call it mercy, then you didn't earn it. Mercy cannot be given because you deserve it. Judgment can.
- There is no attempt here, or anywhere in Scripture, to distinguish worthy sinners from unworthy sinners. Even Christ never attempted that distinction. The only distinction given is between the repentant and those who are not.
- As is shown by Christ's remarks about Nineveh[111], even the greatest offenders have a place in the kingdom – if they repent.

Rejoice

Just in case you're not convinced of how overwhelming the father's reaction would have been, consider these items:

- The party was dad's idea.
- He went all out at the party – killing the fatted calf.

That's how sinners are welcomed home in the kingdom of God.

The older brother

Let us begin by saying that the older brother is not Snidely Whiplash.[112] He doesn't see things dad's way, but by our standards the boy is not getting a fair deal here.

His complaint

In his mind, the older brother has a fair grievance: he's being treated unjustly. The kid comes home and gets a party; surely fairness would dictate that he should have more than that? And what has he gotten?

---

[111] Matthew 12:41

[112] A cartoon character, a caricature of the villains of old-fashioned melodrama. Ties damsels to railroad tracks, etc.

A good part of this is the view the righteous take of themselves. There is a fair amount of sense in his position – but there is also a fair amount of envy, as well. He knows that the remainder of dad's estate will go to him; he knows that dad thinks well of him. What he wants is fair treatment – justice, in effect.

Take this from inside the brother's head. His view of himself is that he has done well and behaved righteously – and therefore is deserving of reward for this. His brother is a scoundrel; not only did he squander his inheritance, it looks like he's getting a hero's welcome for doing it! If spending all his money on booze and prostitutes gets you this kind of welcome home, what should the faithful son get?

Can you hear the envy of the sinner? Can you hear the contempt for his brother?

His father's reply

Perhaps you didn't notice this, but the father came out to his older son – because the son wouldn't come near the house. It's the same as with the prodigal.

He doesn't deny that his brother has sinned, as well as being rather foolish in the process. His reply is simply this: the most important thing is neither the righteousness of the older brother nor the sins of the younger one. The most important thing is the love of the Father.

Lessons

May I point out:

- The father goes out to sinners – even the self-righteous ones. Should we not do the same as we can?
- To receive mercy means that you didn't deserve. If you are saved by grace, you are a sinner. No one earns mercy.
- Forgiveness: the mercy of God towards us. Which he then commands us to give to others.

Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16:19-31

It is a famous passage of Scripture, and therefore worthy of our attention for that alone. It is also a passage of Scripture which is seldom the subject of a sermon, at least today.

Luk 16:19-31 NIV "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. (20) At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores (21) and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. (22) "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) In hell,[3] where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. (24) So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' (25) "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. (26) And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' (27) "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, (28) for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' (29) "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' (30) " 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' (31) "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

"If riches are a curse, smite me!" (Tevye, in *Fiddler on the Roof*). That might just be the attitude of most American Christians. In this lesson, however, we shall see

- The perils of wealth
- How suffering perfects the saint
- That stewardship is the key concept in handling wealth.

Lazarus

We know little about Lazarus except that after his death he went to heaven. But we can infer something of his character from that.

Sins defeated in poverty

There are two sins which come to mind as afflicting this poor beggar. We can sympathize with them, but we must recognize them for what they are: sin.

- The first is envy. Why should the rich man have so much, be so flourishingly abundant, while I sit here begging at his gate? It sounds like asking for justice. It's really whining about what I don't have rather than what he (the rich man) does have.
- Blasphemy is the second. It is a sore temptation to blame God for your troubles, and accuse him of being unjust to you.

Affliction – a source of strength

Exercise has two characteristics: it's painful, and it gets you into better shape. Affliction has the same effect spiritually. What kind of affliction, other than medical, did our Lazarus endure?

- He had to deal with Judgmentalism. "Everybody knows" that he must have done something to deserve this; the question is simply, what?
- He had to deal with slander. He is in no position to defend himself in social circles – but slander he must have had. How else do you think that all the people going to all those parties must have justified ignoring Lazarus?[113]

Accepting chastisement

It is a common thought in ancient Christianity that Lazarus was being chastised by God. Sounds like punishment, right? They didn't see it that way.

- They saw chastisement as evidence that God loves you. Lazarus was being chastised so that he might become a stronger saint.
- One way this works: this is an opportunity for self-examination. Something which is commanded at communion, in such a hurry.
- It obliges the Christian to seek consolation from God, to hide in the shadow of his wings.

Thomas à Kempis put it this way:

> IT IS good for us to have trials and troubles at times, for they often remind us that we are on probation and ought not to hope in any worldly thing. It is good for us sometimes to suffer contradiction, to be misjudged by men even though we do well and mean well. These things help us to be humble and shield us from vainglory. When to all outward appearances men give us no credit, when they do not think well of us, then we are more inclined to seek God Who sees our hearts. Therefore, a man ought to root himself so firmly in God that he will not need the consolations of men.
>
> When a man of good will is afflicted, tempted, and tormented by evil thoughts, he realizes clearly that his greatest need is God, without Whom he can do no good. Saddened by his miseries and sufferings, he laments and prays. He wearies of living longer and wishes for death that he might be dissolved and be with Christ. Then he understands fully that perfect security and complete peace cannot be found on earth.

The Rich Man

The rich man and Lazarus

We may observe three important questions here:

- Why did the rich man see Lazarus at all? First, because the story is for our benefit, and we need to understand hell as torment, not just a "Christless eternity," as the modern phrase has it. Next, it is a form of punishment for the rich man to see Lazarus in heaven, knowing who made it to Abraham's bosom – and who didn't.
- Why did the rich man call out to Abraham? After all, he knew Lazarus, somewhat. For Abraham he might need a name tag. Perhaps it was because he considered himself a child of Abraham. But I think it more likely was this: he was ashamed to talk to Lazarus directly. Projecting his own motives into Lazarus, talking to him would bring a sneering rebuke. He may have felt that Abraham would have persuaded Lazarus to do as he asked.

---

[113] A parallel today is the conviction that all those guys with roadside signs are frauds. To whom can they go to obtain justice?

- Why did he see Abraham? Why not Moses, or other figure? Perhaps it was simply that God wanted to see before him a man whose hospitality was well known through the Scriptures – and that even one so exalted as Abraham could do nothing to ease his suffering.

What did he do to deserve this?

We take it for granted that the rich man got what he deserved. But it is useful to us to expand upon that question and ask, how did this happen?

- There was an unfortunate lack of misery and suffering in the rich man's life. He lived in luxury, and luxury breeds forgetfulness.
- His sins were those of omission. He might try to justify himself by his contributions to charity, perhaps – but he's in hell for what he didn't do.
- One key characteristic that is likely enough: he had no sense of thankfulness in his life.

That last is important. If you ask those who tithe why they do so, you usually get an answer that starts with shuffling a foot and ends with, "well, God has been so good to us…" The thankful heart opens the eyes.

Concept of stewardship

OK, just what should this guy have done?

To begin with, we need to understand what we mean by "wealth." There are two common definitions:

- One is "richer than …" Wealth is a competitive sport. I must keep up; I need a new boat. In this definition, no one is ever wealthy. But just a little bit more…
- The other results from comparison – my needs vs. my resources. If my resources exceed my needs, I am rich.

Taking the second one as a Christian should, most of us are rich. That is to say, we have been accorded by God a surplus of material things – and as you would expect, if he gives you the tools, he gives you the job. Stewardship – the rich man's true answer to wealth – means accepting responsibility of using all your wealth in God's way.

So it is then that we get commands like this:

1Ti 6:17-19 NIV Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (18) Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. (19) In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

(Note the last word in verse 17).

Rich man's requests

The rich man is not in a particularly good negotiating position. In fact, it sounds like he's begging. But we may see within some other facts.

Tip of my tongue

Please note again that he petitions Abraham. His life has been one of wheeling and dealing, and he doesn't want to ask the underling – especially one as low as a beggar.

Abraham simply tells him that he has received "your good things." That has a couple of meanings:

- "Your" means here that these are things you have earned (clear in the Greek.) You earned them, you could use them how you please.
- We should also note that they are "good things." It is not a case of the rich man's desire for evil, but his placing his desire for good things first.

The request is impossible to fill, for there is a "great gulf fixed" (KJV) over which no man can pass. This then provokes the second request.

Send Lazarus

The rich man first asks on behalf of number one, himself. That failing, he turns to his family. Surely his brothers would repent if Lazarus walked in the door, right? So he asks Abraham (again) to send Lazarus back to the world of the living, with the message.

Abraham tells him that this is not necessary; they have the Scriptures. What more evidence do they need? He puts the matter to the extreme: even if someone came back from the dead, they would still not believe. This point is about to be proven in a most practical manner.

If you were…

We need to ask the hard questions:

Suppose you were Lazarus. Could you

- Put aside envy and blasphemy and accept your lot in life?
- Would you accept this affliction as being from God, and thus for your benefit?

Suppose you were the rich man. Could you

- See past your own wealth and use it to be generous?
- Could you accept the roadside beggar as your brother; then be generous to him, expecting nothing in return except the favor of God?

The Resurrection and the Life - John 11

Prologue

To place this correctly in sequence, we must need to know that we are very close to the final week of Christ's life. As can be seen by the ending section, the Pharisees will make the decision that Christ must die "for the good of the people." So he did, but not quite in the sense they imagined.

Jesus has raised two others from the dead.[114] Those accounts, in Luke, are very brief compared to this – from which we may conclude that Jesus had some lessons in mind here that would have been premature before this. Martha is the one here who makes the first Great Confession, for example.

It is worth noting that this event occurs only in John's Gospel, a fact which has led liberal scholars to expunge this passage as being a later addition. Grotius, a late medieval scholar, provides the logical explanation. When Matthew, Mark and Luke were writing their Gospels, Lazarus and his sisters were still alive – and subject to persecution. John wrote much later, after all were dead.

The Disciples

Joh 11:1-16 NIV The Death of Lazarus

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister
Martha. (2) This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured
perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. (3) So the sisters sent word to Jesus,
"Lord, the one you love is sick." (4) When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end
in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." (5) Jesus loved
Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (6) Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed
where he was two more days. (7) Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." (8)
"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back
there?" (9) Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day
will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. (10) It is when he walks by night that he
stumbles, for he has no light." (11) After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend
Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." (12) His disciples replied,
"Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." (13) Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his
disciples thought he meant natural sleep. (14) So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,
(15) and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."
(16) Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we
may die with him."

Purpose

This entire chapter has but one original purpose: to glorify God. Just what does "glorify God" mean?

- In another context, it is an injunction to tell the truth.
- Here, however, it means to praise God because praise is due Him.
- It is also an expression of our adoration of God.

---

[114] Luke 7:12-15, 8:49-55, the widow's son and Jairus' daughter, respectively.

We may note that glorifying any member of the Trinity glorifies them all. So to glorify the Son is to glorify the Father. It's a phrase no longer in common use, which is a pity. If you wish to walk with God, you should begin with praise and adoration – which are merely a form of recognizing who He is.

Purpose conquers fear

It's a curious remark by Thomas – the doubting Thomas, that is. It shows us, however, two possible ways in which we can use the purpose of God to conquer our fears:

- If that purpose is strongly rooted in us, we might ignore the fear of mortal things to accomplish that purpose. (Type A personalities take note.)
- For the rest of us, that purpose of God allows us to overcome fear. Fear him who can kill the body and condemn the soul.

Either way you take it, this is a good example of the maxim that those who have nothing worth dying for have nothing worth living for. Thomas shows us that he is willing to die with his Master.

The true disciple

Most of us would quite naturally say that this is what we would have done, too. But it seems a little strange to say, "let us die with Him." We may see how Thomas achieved this:

- The disciple who doesn't understand, asks. It seems like a change in policy, and a rather dangerous one. Please explain! Jesus tells the disciples that time is a-wasting, and we'd best get on with the work. It's an answer – but not necessarily a complete one.
- The disciples don't get it. But the issue is not one of intellectual clarity; it's one of obedience. Results, not excuses.
- Thomas makes clear the risk – in the process of accepting it.

It is a curious thing. This is the first time in the New Testament at which Jesus gives his disciples a destination. Perhaps this is a measure of how much Jesus wants his disciples with him.

The sisters

Joh 11:17-37 NIV On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. (18) Bethany was less than two miles[1] from Jerusalem, (19) and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. (20) When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. (21) "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. (22) But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." (23) Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." (24) Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (25) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; (26) and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (27) "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ,[2] the Son of God, who was to come into the world." (28) And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." (29) When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. (30) Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. (31) When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. (32) When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (33) When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also

weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. (34) "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied. (35) Jesus wept. (36) Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (37) But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Mary and Martha

We are already familiar with the character of Mary and Martha.[115] Mary is the rather emotional sort, impulse driven – which is good with the right impulses. Martha is the one who is both constrained by and liberated by facts. In a curious reversal of roles, Martha is the one who comes out to meet Jesus. Mary only comes after Martha tells her that Jesus wants her. It appears that Jesus will reveal the most thundering of thoughts only to those who think. Hence, Martha.

The Great Confession

We must set the stage with Martha's combination of reproach ("if you had been here") and confidence ("yet even now…"). This is a serious underestimate of Christ – it treats him like some virtuous prayer warrior - but he knows the Martha within. He need only bring it out.

He does this in steps:

- He begins with what she knows clearly: her brother will rise from the dead. The orthodox Jew believes in the resurrection of the dead. Martha confirms her belief in the resurrection.
- He then startles her with, "I am the resurrection and the life." In any other mouth this would be startlingly absurd. But Christ is the one who created the universe and all its life; his personal authority and power are well beyond this little problem.

So Martha spits out what has since been called the Great Confession. If you want a relationship with Christ, you must first know who he is. Martha gives us three primary points:

- He is the promised Messiah. As the prophets of the Old Testament foretold, one day the Messiah would appear; she knows that Jesus is that Messiah. (There are hundreds of prophecies specifically concerning this.)
- He is the Son of God, or God "in the flesh."

What more remains to be said?

Raising Lazarus

Joh 11:38-44 NIV Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. (39) "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." (40) Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (41) So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. (42) I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." (43) When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (44) The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

---

[115] Luke 10:38-42

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Action in faith

There is a certain economy to God's miracles. Jesus turns water into wine – but only after the servants fill the water jars. The same idea is here: Jesus knows what will happen – but sees no reason to move the stone himself. That little bit of faith is better in the hearer than in the Christ.

Of course, the amount of faith here in those who knew Lazarus is rather small. Martha, ever practical, points out that there will be the odor of death and decay – and a lot of it. She would know; it was the special duty of women in this age to handle the dead bodies – which would make the men ceremonially unclean, of course. Hence, the women do the dirty work.

Instructed or reminded?

Christ's reply shows us that he has already told her the answer – but he reminds her again. Martha and Mary remember, but the crowd doesn't, of course.

Hence Jesus announces his oneness with the Father in public prayer. His object in doing this, of course, is so that the crowd will believe. You would think that raising someone from the dead would be utterly convincing. But remember last week's Lazarus? Even a man back from the dead won't convince everyone.

Christ has another memory lesson for these witness. He has them take off the grave clothes, in particular the long thin linen strips (like an Ace bandage) around the hands and feet. That which you do and touch stays in memory longer than that which you have seen only.

Lazarus, come out

There is a divine style to miracles. He who spoke and the worlds began now commands Lazarus out of the tomb. He is not just creator but also sovereign. By his very word he commands death to release its grip – and Lazarus comes out.

It is possible that Lazarus is actually getting the short end of the deal. He has spent the last four days in Paradise; just how eager do you think he was to go back to a world of pain and suffering?

Reactions

Joh 11:45-57 NIV Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. (46) But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. (47) Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

"What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. (48) If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place[3] and our nation." (49) Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! (50) You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." (51) He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, (52) and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. (53) So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

(54) Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. (55) When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. (56) They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?" (57) But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

Pharisees

Politicians. We continue to have them and we continue to curse them – it seems like some things never change. The Pharisees acknowledge the miracles of Christ – Lazarus must have been difficult to ignore – but they are unaffected. The reason is that they are politicians – power hungry politicians – and they see in Jesus of Nazareth a threat to that power.

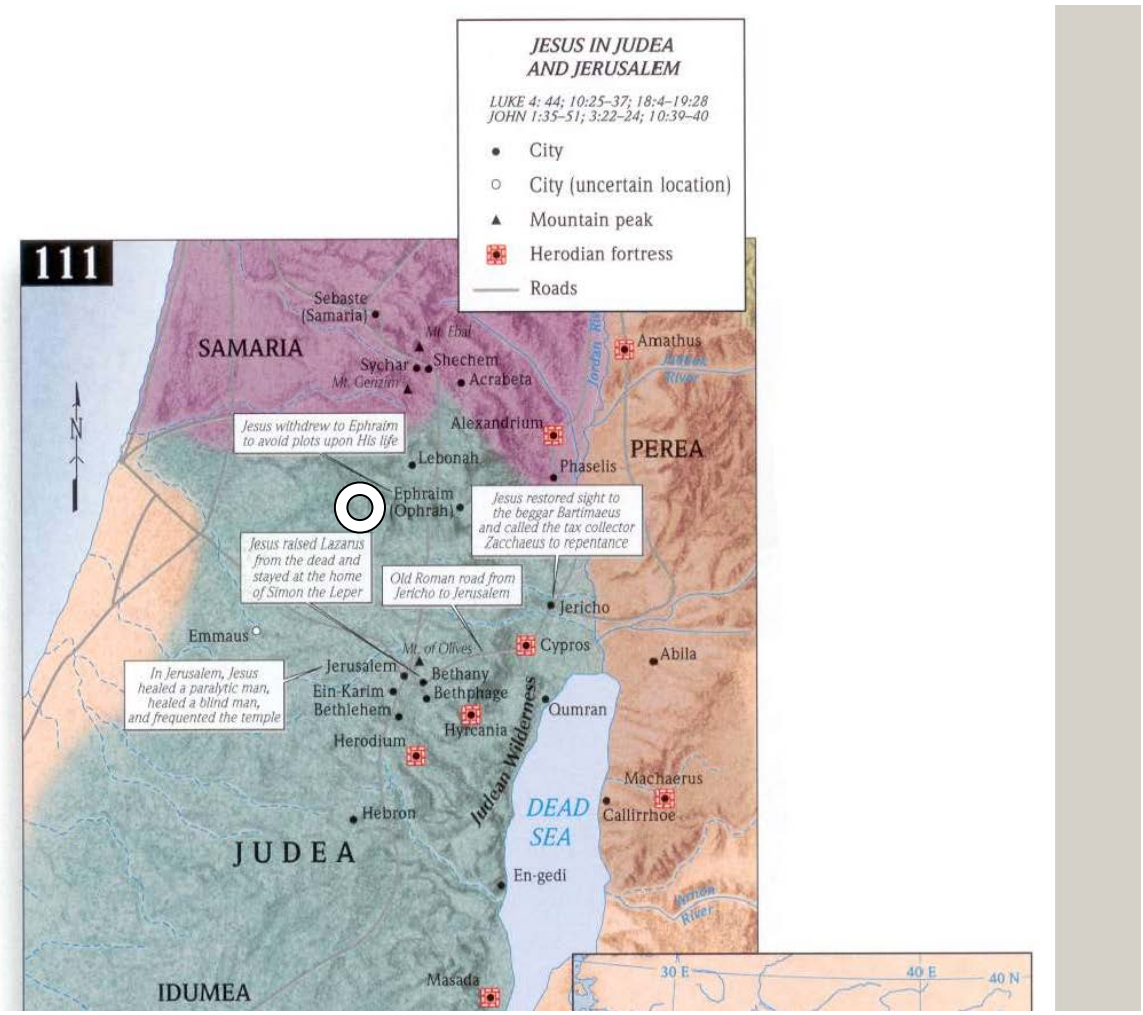
But God allows no evil out of which he cannot make a greater good. One of those politicians is the High Priest for that year. As corrupt as he is, God uses him to make the prophecy that will bring the Cross. For the good of the people this Jesus must die. Indeed, for the good of all people, Jesus died.

The many

May I point out just one thing about “the many” who believed in Jesus? They got no press; they are anonymous. Just like most of those who work in the church today. Just as it should be.

Jesus withdraws

Jesus, at the end of this scene, understands that the Pharisees will cease him if they can. It must not happen before the time prepared for it. So he withdraws to the village of Ephraim:



Why?

- He frequently used the desert wilderness areas as a place for prayer.
- He shows us that under persecution even our Lord withdraws to another place.
- So that he might have time alone with his disciples – to prepare them.

"I am the resurrection and the life" – do you believe this?

Divorce and the Church - Matthew 19:3-12

One of the missing sermon topics of our day is divorce. Long ago the church in America gave up teaching against divorce; indeed, it is rare to hear a sermon opposed to adultery. Fornication is still preached against – by youth ministers – but this is rather a rare phenomenon too. The church has "moved beyond" all this and is now struggling with homosexuality. Most denominations have now embraced this as a form of marriage; the stricter denominations are still a generation away from that. But can there be any doubt where this will end? Even now pedophilia is being declared to be harmless, even good for children.

The Scripture paints a different picture:

Mat 19:3-12 NIV Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" (4) "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'[1] (5) and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'[2]? (6) So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (7) "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" (8) Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. (9) I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." (10) The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." (11) Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. (12) For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage[3] because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Dramatis Personae

We may begin by analyzing the cast of characters provided to us.

The Pharisees

These are the people closest to our view of divorce today. The major difference, of course, is that they are talking solely of a man divorcing his wife – as the wife in these times could not divorce her husband except in the unusual incidence of him becoming a follower of some other god. They see this question as not only a hot topic, but a way to tempt Jesus.

It is a fact: if you run to the doctor constantly, you are sick – one way or another. Bringing this up is a sign that it's on the Pharisees' minds. It takes a lot of study to become a Pharisee, so they would be likely ones to look for a younger, cuter wife.

But there is more to it than that. Caiaphas has just pronounced that "for the good of the people, this Jesus must die."[116] They are thus trying to find occasion to enforce this prophecy.

Christ

Jesus has just finished telling the crowd the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.[117] It's pretty clear that this was a hammer stroke at the Pharisees. It is evident that Jesus desires the repentance of these men – and doesn't think he's going to see it.

It appears that Jesus is caught "on the horns of a syllogism."[118] If he approves of the looser standard of divorce, they can use much the same argument Christ will use against them. If not, they will ask (and do) just why Moses allowed divorce by such a simple procedure, with no apparent standard set. (Note that in the argument there is no mention of the penalty for adultery: stoning to death. The correct Mosaic Law answer is "stone the woman." Thus Moses must be talking about cases where there is some other reason.)

You will kindly note that Christ is therein ***tempted***. It is a temptation of social pressure as well as dilemma; it is not unknown today. He knows how this works.

The Disciples

The disciples correctly conclude that Christ's words make marriage a much riskier business. They cannot share our modern attitude of "we can always get a divorce if it doesn't work out." But they are also still having trouble with the radical nature of the church of God: they do not yet see women as important, let alone equals. They are about to hear Christ on the subject of little children,[119] which is even more shocking. So they are unprepared for Christ's argument, just as the Pharisees are.

Christ's Reasoning

It is fashionable in evangelical churches today to equate the intellectual side of Christianity with legalism. As Christ will here produce a logical argument consistent with intellectual Christianity, we hereby forewarn all who think us legalists to please use your search engine to find some less taxing version of this. We wish you all success.

Christ's argument comes in three steps:

- First, no matter what the Law says, what is the will of God? Surely this is what we should follow if at all possible.
- Next, the relationship of the will of God to the Law of Moses.
- Finally, a conclusive statement of direction.

As we shall see in the next section, this is largely ignored by the modern church.

---

[116] John 11:49-50
[117] Luke 18:9-14
[118] Jerome
[119] Matthew 19:13-15

God's will

Christ brings up three quotations from the Old Testament which describe the nature of marriage – as willed by God.

- From the beginning God created us male and female.[120] It is a "law of creation" – it is intrinsic to the human being that one is either male or female. So this distinction is part of God's will.
- Also from the beginning, we see that the man leaves his father and mother for his wife – thus establishing marriage as the most important of human relationships.
- And to make it clear how well cemented this relationship is supposed to be, Christ reminds us that we are "one flesh." It's a point that is seen physically in the children we produce; Paul indeed says this comes not from ceremony but from simple sexual intercourse.[121] This union is mystic as well as physical, having been established "in the beginning."

So what does God want? His will is simple:

- Marriage is to be life long, broken only by death.
- There is to be no adultery.
- There is to be no divorce.

So why, then, does Moses have this rule about divorce?

Will and the Law

Consider for a moment: what changes would you make in the traffic laws if you could have your way? Reasoning logically, we might go this route:

- The objective of traffic laws is to combine the fastest, most efficient ride with complete safety from accidents.
- Assuming that these objectives can be combined, we would than produce a flood of new laws designed to prevent all accidents.
- Which would require an impossible number of policemen to enforce.

"Will" means that which is your objective. Law is the practical implementation of the people's will. It is limited in its effectiveness.

Indeed, most law is a compromise of one sort or another. Many of these compromises come from the fact that we are all sinners, and therefore we have laws which are not ideal but rather the best thing we can enforce. (Think about the 55 mph speed limit from a few years ago.) Moses had much the same problem; and much the same solution.

But one thing is clear: the will of God is superior to the Law of Moses. It is better to stay married to one wife than it is to divorce her. We might even see some sense in this today.

Conclusion

These being so, we may conclude the following:

- God put the two of you together; do not let mankind tear you apart.

---

[120] What this statement does to the arguments of those Christians advocating homosexual ministers I leave as an exercise for the student.

[121] 1st Corinthians 6:16

- Divorce, with the exception noted, is equivalent to adultery. (And we stone adulterers, remember?)

We might do well to remember, however, that even with adultery there is no requirement for a divorce; only permission. Forgiveness exists, if we choose to use it. The Old Testament model for this is found in Hosea.

Curiously, however, the Old Testament gives us one other connection to examine: the link between adultery and idolatry. God characterizes the unfaithfulness of Israel as being her adultery – for she is His bride. That connection has serious implications for the church today.

The Modern Connection

We may observe the following facts:

- The divorce rate in evangelical churches is *higher* than in the general population – currently greater than 25%.
- The church's actions concerning divorce are largely focused on cleaning up the mess afterward, not prevention.

Why? Because the church now teaches the world's view of marriage – an egalitarian marriage with neither partner in charge. Egalitarian partnerships are notably unstable – when the first serious argument comes along, the 50-50 split. The 51-49 don't.

That's the central fact: we no longer have "headship" in marriage. We therefore cannot recommend obedience of the wife – it is prohibited by definition. This is a great change. But we would do well, perhaps, to examine the older model. We shall see that this decision to promote egalitarian marriage has consequences unforeseen and unintended.

How submission works

Submission is simply the right response to right authority.[122] The model is simple:

- In the kingdom of God, authority comes from responsibility.
- Therefore, if you want to know what legitimate authority someone has, you must ask what responsibility he/she has.
- To misuse authority goes by a simple name: tyranny.
- In the kingdom of God, authority is given to benefit those in submission.

It seems rather simple. But – especially as it applies to marriage – the church no longer teaches this model of submission and authority. We now teach that submission is evil, and to be avoided when possible. This has had some interesting effects on those in authority; consider the antagonism which now greets police officers and even firefighters. Nor has this effect left the church untouched; but its greatest impact has been on marriage.

Effect on the church

The primary effect on the church comes from the metaphor of the church as the Bride of Christ. As long as wives were in submission to their husbands, it was logical to conclude that the Bride of Christ

---

[122] Hebrews 13:17

should be in submission to Him. We no longer teach submission in marriage, and thus we have abandoned (quite logically) our submission to Christ. Jesus is now our friend, not our Lord.

So how do we reconcile this with being a "Bible-believing church?" It's simple, really. We do not teach on divorce nor preach against it; we ignore it. In large measure we have stopped preaching against adultery, and confined preaching against fornication to youth ministers. We have "solved" the problem by ignoring it and hoping it will go away.

We must leave it to the reader: as you sow, so shall you reap. What fruit will come of this?

Who's Who in the Kingdom - Matthew 19:13-20:28 and parallel passages

We are approaching the time of the Triumphal Entry. Before this last week begins, Christ has some examples for his disciples which should ring with us today.

Christ and the Children

Mat 19:13-15

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

Mar 10:13-16

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.
14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.
15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."
16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Luk 18:15-17

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.
16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.
17 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Background

It helps to know a little background here. First, the superstition of the time was that to have your baby (translated "little children" here) touched by a great rabbi was bound to bring blessing to the child. Some of the rabbi's piety would rub off, somehow. It's still carried on to this day, in a sense. Have you ever asked for a celebrity's autograph?

There's somewhat of a "wow" factor in this. Oliver Wendell Holmes, justice of the US Supreme Court many years ago, tells a story about this. Someone asked to shake his hand. "You don't know how it feels," said the young man, "to shake the hand of someone who fought at Gettysburg." Holmes replied to the contrary – for as a young boy he had shaken the hand of a man who had suffered with Washington at Valley Forge.

The Disciples

Jesus' disciples see the matter in a different light. Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem; he therefore should not be delayed by unimportant things. Particularly, there should be no delay because unimportant people (women) were bring other unimportant people (infants) to him – just to be touched.

"Have a little respect here," they might have said. It is a misuse of dignity. As Isaiah had it,

Isa 57:15 NIV For this is what the high and lofty One says--
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
"I live in a high and holy place,
but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Being like children

It is recognized that Christ was not teaching infant baptism here; rather, he is teaching the attitudes needed in the kingdom. Here are a few for your perusal, taken from the children of the time:

- Children know that obedience pleases, as we should be pleasing to God.
- Children are naturally curious, never satisfied with the first explanation. And our attitude towards the Scriptures is?
- Children are open to being taught. A good teacher can do much.
- Children, when raised in love, reply with trust and loyalty.

These are all good things for us to imitate in our walk with the Lord. But may I add one that might have escaped your notice? Children are in over their heads. Daily there are things in their lives they don't understand, which they must take on faith in their parents.

Rich Young Ruler

Mat 19:16-20:16	Mar 10:17-31	Luk 18:18-30
16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" 17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." 18 "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, " 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,'[4] and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'[5]" 20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I	17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'[4]" 20 "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."	18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'[2]" 21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in

still lack?"
21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.
23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"
26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
27 Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"
28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother[6] or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.
23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"
24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is[5] to enter the kingdom of God!
25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"
27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."
28 Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"
29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel
30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to heaven. Then come, follow me."
23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth.
24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!
25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"
27 Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."
28 Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"
29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God
30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

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

come, eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

What is this man's problem?

This man comes very close to the "ideal" religious person. To his credit, he knows that he's missing something in life – and evidently this is a conclusion on his part, not just something from the Mosaic Law.

So, he goes to God and asks what he is missing. An ideal strategy; who would know better? Indeed, he must ask from God because he knows it is not in the Mosaic Law, for if it were he would be doing it.

Here we see the dilemma before Nicodemus: what does the man of ordinary holiness have to do? Nicodemus saw no need for repentance, for he had lived a holy life, sacrifices atoning for his sin. To the sinner Jesus says, "repent." To the man of ordinary holiness he says, "Be born again." Or, as Jesus has it here, go from the life you know so certainly to the life you cannot know – follow Me.

The barrier of wealth

The common view of wealth of the time was that it was a sign of favor from God. It granted the wealthy the privilege of giving generously. That is a warm and wonderful feeling.[123] But as Chrysostom had it, "Great is the barrier of wealth." We are taught the evils of the love of money.[124] But for those whose wealth is only a barrier to Christ, not a competing love, what shall we say?

Jesus' reply

You will note that Jesus, in his reply, does not quote all ten commandments. He omits the ones that deal with God, and cites only those which are interpersonal. Even then he omits one – about covetousness – since this fellow is more likely to be envied than envy. He thus brings out the ordinary holiness of the man – and likewise Jesus' love for him.

Did Jesus command his wealth away in a stern tone? I suspect not; rather He would have combined the seriousness of the occasion with the sadness of one who knows what the answer will be.

Perhaps this will surprise you, but Jesus didn't even make the fullness of his demands known. He has, in fact, asked the man to do only what is easy. For the fullness of the command is much more bitter: deny yourself and take up the Cross. And this is much more difficult than sell all you have.

Disciples

The disciples evidence two concerns here:

---

[123] On one occasion I had (actually, thought I had) such a privilege. A heady experience.
[124] 1st Timothy 6:10

- First, they are accustomed to the idea of wealth as God's favor. This man had great wealth and a pious life; if he couldn't make it into the kingdom of God, who would have a chance? Hence we have that all things are possible with God. We would do well to remember whose kingdom it is.
- But come to think about it, we've given up all we had to follow you. What about us? Christ understands our ways; that's why the Judgment includes reward for those who followed Christ faithfully.

A Mother's Request

Matthew 20:20-28

Mat 20:20-28 NIV Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. (21) "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." (22) "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered. (23) Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." (24) When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. (25) Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. (26) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, (27) and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- (28) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:35-45

Mar 10:35-45 NIV Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." (36) "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. (37) They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." (38) "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (39) "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, (40) but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." (41) When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. (42) Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. (43) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, (44) and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. (45) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Of the Time

We need to know a little about the times to understand this.

- Advancement, in any enterprise, was mostly about who you knew, not what you could do. So what James and John were doing was typical for the time and place. It's just that they didn't yet understand what they were asking for.

- They are, however, getting the picture a little bit – they understand that Christ, unique among leaders, highly values women and children. No doubt it was quite clever to have mom do the asking.

Christ's answer

Having dealt with the mothers and children, having sent the rich young ruler away with his wealth, Christ now reveals some interesting facts to them:

- You don't know what you're asking for. This is much more dangerous and painful than you think.
- Even then, such a position is not mine to grant; rather it belongs to the Father.
- But don't worry; you may not get the positions, but you will get the suffering that comes with such a commitment.

This seems rather a painful reply, but even at that, the rest of the disciples are resentful at the asking.

The disciples – dealing with ambition

Having just heard that suffering and misery go with the job, and that they've asked the wrong person, you'd think the disciples would be smiling at the comeuppance of James and John. But they're not; they're indignant. So Jesus explains to them how the kingdom works: servant leadership.

Servant Leadership

Think about it: what does the average pastor/minister do? His days are filled with other peoples' problems. He visits the sick; those in prison (yes, it does happen that way) and generally performs well as the servant to his congregation. It is the typical servant leadership of our time. Being a pastor is not a time-clock employment.

But it does have a surprising result for those who aren't pastors. Servant leadership is a style. Those who use it get surprising results:

- The people who work for such a leader are extremely loyal to him.
- They are also those who perform beyond expectations. Such a leader will often hear that his people are mediocre (when he takes the job) and later hear complaints that he's hogging all the good people.

What does it come down to? Simply this: the imitation of Christ. If you pattern your ways after him; if you follow him no matter what or where; and if you bless his name that he lets you do so, you will be great in the kingdom – even if the world never notices.

Prayer - A Lesson for Children - Luke 18:1-17

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the Crucifixion. As he goes, he is teaching some final lessons to his disciples on important subjects. Today we will hear his teaching on prayer. It begins with a widow, and ends with children as object lessons in the life of prayer for the disciple.

The Widow

(Luke 18:1-8 NIV) Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. {2} He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. {3} And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' {4} "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, {5} yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" {6} And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. {7} And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? {8} I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Like most of the parables of Jesus, the characters would leap out to the people of that time. They are not that distant from us, either.

The Widow

In the Old Testament it was a common thing to evaluate the conduct of the nation by the way widows, orphans and the poor were treated. The widow represents, figuratively, those who are powerless – the little guy, the Everyman facing the big bureaucratic system of today. In this time the widow theoretically had the rights of her dead husband. As a practical matter of fact she had almost no defense against evil, for in court her word did not count against that of a man. So it was that a widow's property could often be taken from her by some legal slight of hand.

The resource of this widow is persistence, and persistence is a powerful thing.

The Judge

From the title itself we know that this judge was not in the Jewish legal system. Such disputes were resolved by the elders. So this judge was in the Roman system, the Romans having conquered the Jews. Most likely he was a hireling from among the Jews; he would therefore be seen as a Benedict Arnold, a quisling. Such a man could not be devout, so the statement that he feared neither God nor man would have been completely in character. He's bragging, if you will.

Brag as he might, the widow eventually wears him down. The expression "wear me out" in the original Greek carries the meaning of giving him black circles under his eyes. The woman has been nagging him night and day for justice, and he wants to get some sleep!

Jesus then contrasts this situation with God. The point is not that we should nag the Lord God Almighty. That's the contrast. If nagging works with the unjust judge, how much more will persistence in love work with the God who loves you?

The purpose of the parable

Luke is gracious to us in this parable: he tells us the point up front. We are to learn to "always pray" and "not give up."

- "Always pray" can have the sense of "no matter how hopeless." Some of us are great at praying when we can see the way in which God could perform his works. But if our imaginations fail us, we cease. This is not good.
- "Always pray" can also have the sense that we should pray "without ceasing."[1] Some of us refer the matter to God and forget about it, as if he were some machine. He is not. He is a person, and he measures our desire for something by the persistence with which we seek it – including how we seek it in prayer.
- "Always pray" can also mean "in all things." Sometimes we do not pray about something because it seems so trivial to us -- God surely would not be interested in *that!* God is surely interested in us; if it's important to you, share it with him.

We are told not to give up. There is a fascinating example of this in the Old Testament. It comes from David's wicked affair with Bathsheba, and it concerns the baby born from that illicit union:

(2 Sam 12:15-23 NIV) After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. {16} David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. {17} The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. {18} On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate." {19} David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked. "Yes," they replied, "he is dead." {20} Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. {21} His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!" {22} He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' {23} But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

There is an aspect here of Job's attitude towards God when he said, "though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him."[2] We often think that when God is good to us we should pray constantly, thanking Him – and this is true. We forget that God also disciplines us or tests us. In those times things seem so hopeless, so bad, and we feel like we don't deserve the privilege of prayer. It is in those times – no matter the result – that we need to pray, too. Pray without ceasing.

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Jesus now goes on to tell one of the classic stories of the Bible.

(Luke 18:9-14 NIV) To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: {10} "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. {11} The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this

tax collector. {12} I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' {13} "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' {14} "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Again, the characters are quite familiar:

The Pharisee

The word has passed into the English language as a synonym for a self-righteous hypocrite, and this story is the root of the meaning. See in what few words Christ paints the picture!

- The Pharisee begins with *righteousness by comparison*. The root of his statement to God (and everyone who is listening) is that by comparison to the man standing next to him, he's very righteous. This is true. It's also irrelevant. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
- He's not at all crude about it, however. The form of things must be observed even though the content is void. He phrases his comparison in terms of thanksgiving! Surely it is not sinful to give thanks to God? Just because the form of prayer is righteous does not mean the prayer is.
- We do much the same today. Instead of thanksgiving, however, we call it "praying for the sinner." "Oh Lord, please melt the wicked heart of old Snidely Whiplash (and ignore the rotten heart of me)."
- He then goes on to tell of his *righteousness by works.* The root of this is the idea that "I have exceeded the legal requirements." You see the point? It's not just that I've kept the law; I did better than that.
- Part of this is the normal human reaction to meeting God. Remember Bill Cosby's classic comedy routine, *Noah*? When they first meet, Noah asks, "Who is it?" "It's the Lord!" "What do you want? I've been good!"
- Much more of this comes from the common idea of God as cosmic bookkeeper. Sins are debits, good deeds are credits, and if you wind up with a positive balance you go to heaven. Great concept. False, but pretty.
- We forget that we are dealing with prayer here. This is so public that we forget that such prayer was commonplace in their time.
- I can see something of the "sense" in lying to others in public prayer. It's good for business to have the congregation think you are an honest man.
- I can see no sense at all in lying to God. Just what do you think you're doing? Surely you know that he is omniscient? This is not very bright.
- But there is a worse case. You can lie to yourself. You can get so convinced of your own righteousness that you try to convince God of it as well. This is indeed a mortal peril, for if you will not see yourself as sinner, how can you receive salvation?

The Tax Collector

This guy comes across as a likable scumbag. Scoundrels are often like that. I think the reason I like him is that he pretends to nothing else. His salvation, however, is that he makes no such pretense to God, but begs for mercy. The greatest thing he does, however, is what he doesn't: he has no mention of self-justification.

- There is no mention of the *Dingus McGee* principle. Remember Dingus McGee? “I’m a better man than….” (actually, he couldn’t think of anyone he was a better man than, but we’ll leave it with that name.)
- There is no mention of spare change at the bar. Many charities place a container for donations at the cash register of the bar – for a reason. It soothes the conscience.
- There is, however, the truth. In the Greek the words could also be “be merciful to me, *the* sinner.” God sees through pretension, and the tax collector has sense enough to know it – and beg. Blessed are the poor in spirit!

Exalting and Humbling

You have a choice. You can lift yourself up, exalt yourself, praise yourself – or you can let God do it. One or the other, not both. Scripture is clear:

- If you exalt yourself, if you lift yourself up before the world as someone wonderful, God will humble you. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow – but someday. Hubris is still with us.
- But if you humble yourself, God will lift you up. If you want to look at it this way, consider: who would you rather have lifting you up?
- There is a reason for this: by exalting yourself you hinder your personal relationship with God. That is the only relationship with eternal consequences, and He wants you to enjoy Him forever. Since your pride stands in the way, it is merciful of Him to humble you – isn’t it?

How do I do this?

Humility is hard in our prayer life, as it is in other forms of life. How, then, do I hang on to this relationship?

(John 15:4-5 NIV) Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. {5} "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

There it is. The essence of the matter is to remain in Him. By obedience, by prayer, by reading the Scripture – all things must come to this, for He is Lord of all.

---

[1] 1 Thessalonians 5:17
[2] Job 13:15

On the Verge - Luke 18:35-19:28, and parallel passages

This is our last stop before the Triumphal Entry and the last week of Christ's ministry. Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem – but even such determination gives way to compassion.

Blind Bartimaeus

Mat 20:29-34

29 As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.
30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"
31 The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"
32 Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.
33 "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."
34 Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

Mar 10:46-52

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging.
47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"
49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you."
50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.
51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.
The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."
52 "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Luk 18:35-43

35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.
36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.
37 They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."
38 He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
39 Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"
40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him,
41 "What do you want me to do for you?"
"Lord, I want to see," he replied.
42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you."
43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

The players in this little drama will provide us with food for thought.

The crowd

The crowd, emblematic of the world at large, shows the reaction of fickle man to the power of grace:

- They are not expecting Jesus to *do* anything – just talk. Talk seems so much less threatening.
- Their first reaction is to put the beggar in his place – and keep him there. The blind are beggars, and thus are as annoying in that day as telemarketers are in ours.
- But when Christ speaks, the crowd receives its direction. They encourage the man to get up and come towards him.

There is a lesson in persistence here. As Chrysostom put it, "Christ suffered them to be forbidden, that their desire might be the more evidenced. Hence we learn that though we be repulsed, yet if we come to God with earnestness, of ourselves, we shall obtain that we ask."

Bartimaeus

(The reader will note the various discrepancies in the three accounts; one of these is the number and name of blind man/men.) The man is rather straightforward; we may learn from this.

- He doesn't ask forgiveness of his sins, whatever those might be. He asks pity; he asks mercy. Jesus does not correct his theology, but obliges.
- Even the crowd encourages him – once the Master calls for him.
- Note, please, that he throws off his cloak – the only thing he has to keep himself warm (Jericho has a climate much like our desert, which gets very cold at night). It's a risky thing to do – but he takes the risk. It's a sign of boldness.

Perseverance towards the Lord yields bountiful results. Bountiful results should produce gratitude. So this man is an example to us.

Jesus

In this short drama Jesus reveals his character to us.

- We are told that Jesus stopped. Why? It is an act of courtesy to a lowly member of society. The area near Jericho is much like the fire trails of Southern California – a blind man who leaves the path even slightly risks falling into a deep crevasse. Jesus stands still so that the man might find him safely.
- Jesus heals him – and then credits his faith. This is as it should be; for God is eternal. It is our faith that changes, and with it our results. Indeed as faith changes, so does our spiritual sight as well.

Luke ends this section sweetly. He tells us that these men

- Received their sight;
- Followed Jesus;
- And did so praising God.

Interestingly, the crowd follows their example by praising God as well.

Zaccheus

Luk 19:1-10 NIV

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. (2) A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. (3) He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. (4) So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. (5) When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." (6) So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. (7) All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' " (8) But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the

Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." (9) Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. (10) For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

We might do well to look at the character of Zaccheus:

- We see him first as the *outcast*. Because of his profession no decent Jew would have anything to do with him. Those who have been the outcast know the resentment and loneliness this brings. We also know how the church doesn't exactly forbid us to join – but there's no invitation either.
- But we see him also as the *seeker*. He has money; he has power but he doesn't have the sweetness of life he wants. Perhaps he has chased being respectable, but never caught it. Perhaps God kept him from that so that he might find the real thing in Christ.
- Finally, he is the *repentant sinner*. At bottom, he is like the rest of us, sinners all. Perhaps being the outcast gave him the courage to act against propriety – in concert with God. This man put his money where his mouth was.

The crowd, however, much resembles the modern church in middle class circles.

- We mistake propriety for righteousness. Propriety tells us to wear a tie to church (or, at Eastside, to wear anything but a tie to church.) Like it or not, those who dress differently are treated differently. We accept those who are like us, and reject those who are not.[125]
- We are swift to pass judgment on those who are outside. We forget that we are not to judge those outside the church.[126]
- Somehow we know that what we are doing is not quite right – so we mutter it under our breath. Perhaps we hope Christ won't hear, and the rest of us will.

Jesus, it seems, has a different set of priorities. He begins by inviting himself to dinner. Remember that in those days it was an honor to have your home chosen as an ad-hoc hotel by visiting dignitaries. More to the point – he tells Zaccheus that he must come down *immediately* – the sign that Christ thinks the matter not only important but urgent. Evidently it was, for Zacchaeus comes to repentance – and restitution. His promise to return exceeds the Old Testament Law. No wonder that Christ announces salvation; a sinner has come home.

I cannot help but make the contrast between Zacchaeus and the rich young ruler. Being a sinner in need of repentance tends to motivate change a lot more quickly than being a righteous man in need of taking up the cross.

Ten Minas

Luk 19:11-27 NIV While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. (12) He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. (13) So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas.[1] 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.' (14) "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' (15) "He was made king,

---

[125] Think not? How would you greet a hard core biker; a prostitute who just finished her night's work; someone in a sari; a Goth (modern version)?

[126] 1st Corinthians 5:12

however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. (16) "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' (17) " 'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' (18) "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.' (19) "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.' (20) "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. (21) I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.' (22) "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? (23) Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?' (24) "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.' (25) " 'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!' (26) "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. (27) But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them--bring them here and kill them in front of me."

We need a bit of background here. All the Jews of this time would recognize the man who went away to be named a king. It's Herod the Great (the Herod at the time of the birth of Christ, who slaughtered the innocents.) The story sounds a little strange until you understand the Roman system. They liked to put some puppet royalty in charge – with the clear understanding that Rome wanted tranquility and tax revenues. Herod was just such a man, who went to Rome to be crowned King of the Jews.

The Jews were not that fond of Herod (or his dynasty). Besides the fact that Herod and his descendants were paranoid rulers, always suspecting someone else of doing just what they would do. Herod was not even a Jew! He was an Idumean, an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. Christ's audience would have known just what this was about.

Servants of the kingdom

It is no secret that the servants of God are not at all equal in their abilities. And, just as you would expect, God does not impose equal responsibility on them, but rather gives out authority (from responsibility) in proportion to their abilities. We see three such here:

- There are the highly capable. Of them, God expects much.
- There are those of us who are modestly capable – God expects us to have the same attitude as the stars of the church, but also to recognize that his burden on us is in proportion to what we can do.
- There are those of us who are of little capability – to whom he entrusts but little. But distinguish little capability from poor attitude, please. Sometimes, our attitude determines our capability.

Rewards

As Christ makes clear, at his return he will reward all in accordance with their works:

- To those who are good and faithful he will give rewards completely out of proportion to our deserving them – but in proportion to what we did.

- To those who aren't, they just manage to make it into the kingdom.[127]
- But for those who oppose the kingdom of God, pain and eternal death.

It's not easy to make it any clearer than this. He understands the way we work; he knows we need to be rewarded. So reward us he will.

Why did Jesus tell this parable, right before the Triumphal Entry? These people thought his kingdom was to come immediately, a kingdom founded on military might that would overthrow Roman rule and reestablish David's throne. Looking back, it now seems foolishness.

But consider: we have any number of Bible interpreters who "know" that Christ must return in or before the year 2018. Perhaps he will; I do not know. But so many are so convinced that we might want to take warning from this passage. He never does tell us when; he just tells us it's worth waiting for.

---

[127] 1st Corinthians 3:11-15

Passion Week – Beginning - Luke 19:28-41; John 12:12-25

The reader will note that this section of Scripture has other lessons on the website; this lesson points out some of the lesser noticed aspects of the Triumphal Entry.

Triumphal Entry

Luk 19:28-40 NIV After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. (29) As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, (30) "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. (31) If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.' " (32) Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. (33) As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" (34) They replied, "The Lord needs it." (35) They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. (36) As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. (37) When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: (38) "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"[2]

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (39) Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" (40) "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

The Lord needs it

It is sometimes presumed that Jesus must have made the arrangements for the foal at some previous time. It seems logical, but it really doesn't follow the sense of the passage. There are any number of ways to arrange it, but it appears that Jesus arranged it by not arranging it.

He sends the disciples for a colt with only the words, "the Lord needs it." Ever the gentleman who woos instead of forces, he petitions some unknown disciple with a call: he needs the colt. Apparently no explanation is given as to why he needs it; he just needs it. It is likely a test of faith; if the Master asks you for something, what do you do?

Note, please, the instant response. No objection. Also, no committee meeting, no request for further information, just an obedient response. Perhaps no more than the nod of the head – and your property disappears into the parade. Will it be returned? Who can say – but the Lord needs it, and that is enough. And our response?

Comes in the name of the Lord

So much of our Lord's life is exemplary – that is, he did what he did, how he did, as an example to us. Even our Lord does not come in his own pride, pomp and power – but he comes in the name of God the Father, to do his will. We, therefore, should proceed in the name of Christ – following his example. It is not our glory, but his.

More than that, our Lord does his works in the name of the Father. Let us consider that phrase, "the name of." One of the great pleasures in life is to be able to tell someone, "Just give them my name

– they'll take good care of you." It's a pleasant thing to be known as a "somebody" – especially a somebody whose name gets things done. How much more, then, is the power in the name of the Lord?

But do we really work in the name of the Lord? We pray "in the name of the Lord" quite a bit, but do we honestly take upon ourselves the burden of his holy name, explaining our cause thereby, and crediting the results to it?

I'm afraid that "the name of the Lord" has become a ritual phrase. The sense that we are commissioned by God, working in His power and bringing glory to him seems, to me, a rare thing these days.

The humility of Christ

Christ here presents his claim to be the true king of Israel. It is a moment which we would adorn with pomp, but he goes in humility. For example:

- This is the only time recorded in Scripture when Christ rides. Other than this, he walks his entire adult life.
- And what does he ride on? A colt. A foal. The lowest form of transportation available. It is servant leadership; no pomp for me, but doing what the leader must do.
- Ominously, his entry into Jerusalem is on the same day that the Jew was told to bring the Passover lamb into his house.[128] The colt brings our sacrifice to the Passover. Like the lamb, the Lamb of God goes meekly.
- But, one might think, consider all the cheers. Is this humility? It is – when the option is to have the very stones in the walls cry out.

Cleansing the Temple

Luk 19:45-46 NIV Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. (46) "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be a house of prayer'[3]; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'[4]"

The Son's first stop

Must be in his Father's house.[129] Is it not simple? The Son and the Father are one; therefore anything offending the Father offends the Son.

But this brings up the main question. Why is Christ's anger directed at those in the Temple? Surely there was plenty of other sin for him to condemn!

- This is a sin against the pure. Consider it this way: if you read of a gang shooting where one drug dealer shoots another, you are not too perturbed. But if the victim were, say, an infant shot during a drive by shooting, you are much more outraged. Those who came great distances to devoutly present their sacrifices were being mugged, financially, by those whom they should be able to trust.
- This is a sin against God. All sins are ultimately so, but the connection is very direct. His Temple, his instructions to his people – and now the thieves.

---

[128] Exodus 12:3

[129] Note that this is the second cleansing of the Temple; the one described in John comes at the beginning of Christ's ministry.

- This sin is being committed by the leadership of the nation. We try to hold our politicians to higher standards, or at least have the hypocrisy to say so.

That last is important, for (as one ancient author put it), "When the priesthood is sound, the church flourishes, but if it is corrupt, faith is impaired."[130]

The Temple as metaphor

Rarely does a physical place have such metaphoric importance as the Temple. Ask yourself this: what does corruption do to the Temple as described in these metaphors:

- The Temple is the body of Christ, as in the sense that Communion is the body of Christ.[131] What does it do to the church when the Lord's Supper is neglected or distorted?
- The Temple is the metaphor for the body of the believer – the temple of the Holy Spirit.[132] If the Spirit is not welcome within you?
- The Temple is the metaphor for the church.[133] If the church is corrupted, then what is the impact on the believer?

(The reader will note that we have excluded other metaphoric uses found in Revelation, as this subject is rather lengthy.)

The example of one man

Perhaps more than anything else, this is the example of what one man with courage and righteousness can accomplish in the face of evil. Permit me a parallel example:

In the 1930s a riot erupted in a west Texas oil town. The riot soon turned into looting, and the sheriff and mayor appealed to the governor for help. The governor wired back that help would arrive by special train the next morning.

The next morning the train arrived. The sheriff was amazed to see that the governor sent only one man: Henry M. T. "Lone Wolf" Gonzualles. The sheriff blurted out, "You mean they only sent one man?"

"There's only one riot, ain't there?"

Over the headquarters of the Texas Rangers to this day is the motto: "One riot, one man." There is a moral authority in this world. We seldom use it; indeed, "when what is vile is honored among men, how the wicked strut!" But here we see such authority displayed.

Greek Inquiry

Joh 12:20-25 NIV Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. (21) They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." (22) Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn

---

[130] Pseudo-Chyrsostom, as quoted in the Catena Aurea.
[131] John 2:19
[132] 1st Corinthians 3:16-17
[133] Ephesians 2:21

told Jesus. (23) Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (24) I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. (25) The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

"Greek"

We need to remember what "Greek" meant to the ancient world. These anonymous Greeks are symbolic of the Greek system of belief, which underlies much of the modern world. I would bring to you three specific points:

- Philosophy. This was the primary way in which ancient man explored the truth – and indeed the church kept Aristotle around for over a thousand years. Think of it as logic and rational thought.
- Science. Aristotle and other Greeks established much of science, though this is not recognized today. The idea that nature could be categorized and described, with cause and effect, is a Greek idea.
- Freedom. Particularly in Athens, we have the roots of what today would be called democracy. Into this fertile ground Christ will plant the idea of the fatherhood of God and the resultant brotherhood of man.

Power of Paradox

So what answer does Christ give to the Greeks (note, without hearing their questions)? He brings to them the challenge of Christian living in a philosophical, scientific world: the power of paradox. He who loses his life, will save it. It is no secret; the Christian often appears the fool to the world.[134] The Apostles themselves were examples of this; they suffered greatly for the privilege of bringing the Gospel to the world. To the worldly, this seems madness – but it's the only thing that works, in ultimate reality. The key to truth is in the form of "who," not "what." Only in this paradox do we see the solution to the deep questions of life.

The Church today

This point has largely been lost by the church today. We are, one author reminded us, in the most anti-intellectual age the church has ever known. It is common to hear a Christian – particularly an evangelical – dismiss an argument with, "Oh, that's only a philosophical argument." Philosophical now means "false." With this we throw away much wisdom – and the background which helps us understand that ultimate reality is in God, not philosophy. The paradox makes no sense to those who do not understand man's view.

We have also gone from freedom to license (think about sex and marriage) today for a much similar reason. We accept that "science proves" can be applied to such things as, "an affair is good for your marriage." We don't ask what the limits of science just might be; we just accept it.

Would you see the paradox clearly? Look at Christ; the greatest man ever to live did so humbly, in a conquered country – and his main purpose was to die. He should, by human standards, be

---

[134] 1st Corinthians 3:18

forgotten. But in his meek lowliness of heart he shows us that losing your life saves it. Perhaps he meant it when he told us to take up the Cross.

The Nature of Authority - Matthew 21:23-32

It is an article of faith among Americans today that authority must be resisted and rebelled against at all times; that it is inherently "not cool." ("Good" and "bad" no longer being in common use.) So it is perplexing at times to see the emphasis placed on authority and its legitimacy in earlier times. Bear with us, then, modern Americans, as we attempt to explain it.

The Challenge

Mat 21:23-27 NIV Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" (24) Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. (25) John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' (26) But if we say, 'From men'--we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." (27) So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

At first glance the priests would seem to be on solid ground. The Old Testament is clear that the priests have complete authority over the Temple; even the king has no part in it.[135] It is interesting, therefore, that they do not present this argument to Christ. We shall see more of this, but for the moment we must consider the phenomenon of projection – where I attribute to you my own motives. To the pure, all things are pure. To the cynical, the other guy must be just as corrupt, right?

This is the weak point in the priests' argument. They can't imagine that Jesus' motives are pure. Therefore they accuse him (for example) of being in league with the devil. Here they challenge his authority. Funny thing, isn't it? The moneychangers and those who sold animals there had very little difficulty in recognizing his authority.

Why didn't Christ answer directly?

It's a straightforward question, why not answer it directly?

- Those who ask for the truth must be fit to receive it. The corrupt mind is not. (Compare the use of parables in this[136]).
- One who has hatred or contempt for the truth is not entitled to ask.[137]
- Christ is Truth – and therefore must give the answer of an honest man to the corrupt mind.
- Christ came to seek and save the lost – even the Pharisees.[138]
- Most of all – Christ's objective is not winning the debate but obliging the choice: for or against him. Those who are for, are saved.

Why John? It is simply this: John testified to who Jesus is. If you accept John's testimony, you accept these things:

---

[135] 2nd Chronicles 26:16-21, the story of Uzziah burning incense in the temple.
[136] Matthew 13:13-15
[137] Psalm 50:16
[138] Luke 19:10

- Christ is the Lamb of God.[139] As such, Christ has the responsibility of the Atonement; therefore he had the authority that being the Atonement brings – "no one comes to the Father except by me."[140]
- Christ is given the responsibility of winnowing out those who claim to be of God.[141] He therefore has the authority to do so.
- There is also John's personal testimony. He is a prophet in the Old Testament fashion – of the Law and the Prophets. If you accept John, you accept that Jesus is much, much greater than John.[142]

But suppose you reject John? It seems that this is the simple solution. John is just some nut case in the desert, right? How is this risky?

- First, "everybody knew" that John was a prophet. Even the most amoral of regimes must have some support from the general population, and this bunch was already on thin ice.
- Tyranny often bases itself on an assumed righteousness – and thus fears being found out.
- Most of all, these are priests who have surrendered to the powers of this world. They fear Caesar more than God; there is no way to fit John into their system.

So they say, "we don't know." Sure they don't.

Nature of authority

We must now consider the nature of authority. There are many schemes for analyzing this; we shall use a relatively simple one.

- Authority has a moral dimension. Power may be rammed down your throat; but authority has to have at least an air of legitimacy about it.
- Authority often depends upon expertise. Doctors write our prescriptions; elders must be knowledgeable in the Scriptures.
- Commonly, authority is positional. You have a certain authority because you are a policeman. It's not something within you. Salute the uniform, not the wearer.

Recognizing authority

How do we know real authority when we see it?

- Sometimes by the power it has. It is often a correct conclusion that an authority is legitimate when we see the power it has.
- Sometimes "by uniform" – the office, if you will. John the Baptist *looked* like a prophet (camel hair coat, eats locusts). He acted like one too. (Prophets always out there condemning sin.) He was also beheaded for it, which seems to be a common fate for prophets – and apostles.
- Mostly, however, we recognize it by delegation – someone we know is an authority tells us that someone else is such, under his authority.

The chain of authority

In the kingdom of God, authority comes from responsibility. An elder has authority because he has God-given responsibility. Note that responsibility is a moral condition. We often describe

---

[139] John 1:29
[140] John 14:6
[141] Matthew 3:12
[142] John 1:27

responsibility with, “he’s supposed to do that.” Legitimate authority’s actions are subject to the test: does this help carry out the responsibilities given?

Such a moral aspect usually requires expert knowledge authority. Can the elder rule over the church if he is ignorant of the Scriptures? Likewise, can a husband rule over a family if he is ignorant of God’s commands on how to do so? We have classes to train husbands and fathers for just this reason.

Tyranny

This enables us to define tyranny: it is the abuse of authority.

- Such abuse may be in the moral realm. A cop who pulls over the cute blonde and offers her a choice of ticket or sex is abusing his authority, no matter how pleasant the results.
- It often comes from exceeding one’s authority for personal pleasure or gain. The fire truck should not go sirens blazing down to pick up the pizza.
- Sometimes it’s just plain stupidity or ignorance. There are men who believe that there wives should be beaten to keep them in line – and that this is the teaching of the Scripture. (It isn’t.)

The Authority of Christ

Mat 21:28-32 NIV "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' (29) " 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. (30) "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. (31) "Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

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

We may begin with a review of the authority of Christ, which stems from this statement:

Mat 28:18 NIV Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Permit me then to point out three areas of that authority in the Christian life:

- It is authority over all things – including governments. If we no longer say, “In God We Trust,” we deny His authority over the government – and make the government’s authority supreme.
- It is authority over the church. There is such a thing as heresy, and it should be fought. His teaching should prevail in his church.
- It is authority over the Christian – you and me.

The parable

There is one basic question: with you, is it “say, say” or “Do, do?” God must be praised – but he also must be obeyed.

This seems so obvious that it should not be necessary even to state it. But it was necessary; indeed, it was necessary to point out further example:

- The Pharisees didn't accept Christ – but the sinners did. The worst of the sinners, those afflicted with sins socially unacceptable. Who's saying and who's doing?
- And if the least and worst of sinners are doing this, why haven't you taken notice?

Rejection of authority

I said this teaching is hard to understand today, and it is. We have been taught that, as Americans who are "self-actualized," we are "the measure of all things" and "if it feels good, do it." Authority is pictured as always corrupt, generally ignorant and tyrannical. We condemn abuse based on the old idea of authority; we excuse our rejection of it based on the new ideas. But as Christ said here, can we take a look at the results and draw the logical conclusions?

- Society as a whole – is Western Civilization rising, or flushing?
- The church – even the evangelical wing – is it weak or strong?
- The believer – are we more or less tangled in the sins of the world, the flesh and the devil?

I submit that our rejection of authority simply substitutes our own feelings and ideas for true authority. Either Christ is Lord as well as Savior, or he is neither. As Joshua put it,

Jos 24:15 NIV But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Christians and Kings - Matthew 22:15-22

It is a familiar passage:

Mat 22:15-22 NIV Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. (16) They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. (17) Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (18) But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? (19) Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, (20) and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" (21) "Caesar's," they replied.

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

About This Incident

It helps first to know who these Herodians are:

- First, they are the strangest of bedfellows for the Pharisees, for these are the political lackeys of King Herod – the Pharisees' rival for power. That these two should make common cause shows the depth of hatred each had for Jesus.
- They are not, primarily, a religious group but a political one. Herod's concern in this matter is rebellion; he's a toady to Rome and he keeps his throne by keeping the peace and collecting the taxes. Jesus seems a likely leader of a rebellion.
- Perhaps more important than this is that they might not be known to Jesus by sight – and therefore are the ideal people to pull off this little trap.

Theories and traps

There were a number of theories about in Judaism of the time on why a devout, pious Jew should not pay taxes to the Roman government:

- One was the "citizen of the world" theory. As the pious Jew was a servant of God, the ruler of heaven and earth, he therefore had no obligations to any government. He should then be exempt from Roman taxes, just as an American working in the United States would be exempt from, say, British taxes.
- The other theory was the "saintly rebel" idea. If a man is saintly enough, that should be sufficient for any government. (A modern parallel might be Gandhi.)

The enticement, then, is that Jesus is so holy that he would declare himself exempt from taxation. It didn't work – largely because of the character of Jesus.

The character of the teacher

The Pharisees and Herodians unwittingly provide us with the answer in their description of the teacher named Jesus. Let us see the standard they draw:

- The teacher must be personally truthful, teaching the way of God, not of man.
- He must show no partiality – as is demonstrated by Christ's answer, equally suitable for Herodian and Pharisee.

- Christ makes his point with their coin (nice of them to bring the visual aid to the lesson) – showing his desire for their own salvation. He does not just dismiss them out of hand.

He lays out for them the basic principle of the relationships between church and state. Find out what is owed to whom, and act accordingly. In more general terms, we must determine our responsibilities with regard to the state and fulfill them. All else belongs to God.

Relations with ANY form of government

Rather than jump right into democracy, and the upcoming elections, we begin by outlining the responsibilities of the Christian to *any* form of legitimate government. Most of what Paul wrote applies directly to the Roman Empire, which was certainly no democracy.

Why?

Why do we have any responsibility to the government at all? Why couldn't we be just a citizen of the world, for instance?

- First, God ordains those governments. He put them in place, and did so largely for our benefit. They benefit us; we should be willing to support them.
- Our prime mission is evangelism and training disciples. This, history has shown, is best accomplished in a time of peace. (Think of the missionary explosion in the last half of the nineteenth century during the Pax Britannica.) The first duty of government is to keep the peace – which is to the benefit of the Kingdom of God.
- We are specifically commanded to be obedient.[143]
- Finally, there is the practical argument Jesus brings forth here. You use their coinage, you recognize their authority. A Confederate dollar bill is of no use at the grocery store; only at the antique shop. You use the roads, water, sewer and other services of government? Then support that government.

The Baseline Principle: Submission

What this amounts to is submission to the government. Submission is simply the right response to righteous authority. That requires a definition of that authority, but once that is done the Christian's submission can then become a witness to the rest of society.[144]

The specifics

So just what is it that we are commanded to do? What are the duties that all Christians owe to their government?

- We are to pray for our governments.[145]
- We are not to curse our leaders, but respect them.[146]
- We are to "fear the king" – and not join in with the rebellious.[147]
- We are to "persuade with patience" – strive to make improvements in government in patience and wisdom.[148]

---

[143] 1st Peter 2:13
[144] 1st Peter 2:13-17
[145] 1st Timothy 2:1-3
[146] Exodus 22:28, Acts 23:5
[147] Proverbs 24:21
[148] Proverbs 25:15

- We are to seek the peace and prosperity of the nation – even if that nation is a conquering one.[149]
- We are to pay our taxes.[150]

To all this we may add the duty of normal obedience. Stop at the stop signs and don't run the red lights.

Relationship to Democracy

All this is well and good, and generally known to Christians. American Christians are prone, however, to add to this the idea that we should espouse democratic capitalism as the one God-approved system on the planet. This can be a discredit to the church if you are visiting another country.

So what does the citizen of a democracy need to do above and beyond what the Christian of any time and place needs to do? We may lay out the basic principles again:

- Submission: find out the rightful authority and submit to it.
- Do so in such a way that others will find the Gospel attractive.

Duties Unique

May I suggest the following things which are unique to democracy but fall within these guideline?

- Participate in the political discourse of your time. Campaign, argue, letters to the ~~idiots~~ editors and so on.
- Hold your leaders to account – morally. Make it clear to your leaders that corruption, abuse of authority and greed are simply not acceptable. The "bully pulpit" is ours.
- Vote.
- Uphold justice. Don't duck jury duty; be outraged when justice is perverted.
- For those who are called and gifted this way, run for office. Move within the political system. It doesn't apply to most of us, but it could apply to any of us.

A straightforward list, but there is one section missing. What do we do when the government is evil and oppressive?

The problem with evil government

We must begin with one fact: if the government holds itself to be supreme over the issues of right and wrong, conflict with the church is *inevitable.* This is particularly true in the "last days," when evil will abound.[151] So how do we conduct ourselves in this situation?

- We must realize that our struggle is not primarily against the government, but the forces of Satan.[152] It often happens that the government recruits the hordes of police needed to threaten the populace. Our charity to others, even others associated with an evil government, must not fail.
- Suffering is inevitable. Therefore, we must suffer in such a way that the Gospel may be heard – which, incidentally, causes God to bless us.[153]

---

[149] Jeremiah 29:27
[150] Matthew 17:24-27
[151] 2nd Timothy 3:1-5
[152] Ephesians 6:12
[153] 2nd Peter 3:14a

- If we need to flee oppression, do so.[154] Some of us have the strength to be martyrs to the cause; most do not. We are permitted to run – and spread the Gospel as we go.
- We must look to our weapons – the weapons of God, not the world. We are to overcome evil with good. As one martyr (Bonhoeffer) put it, "It is immaterial whether the power be good or bad, what matters is that the Christian should overcome evil by good."

It may be in all this that God, in his providence, will rescue us. But that should not matter to us.[155]

Martin Luther, in his commentary on Romans, summed it up this way:

"By faith the Christian makes all things subject to himself; for he is neither ruled by them nor does he put his trust in them. He compels them to serve his glory and salvation. That is what it means to serve God and to rule as kings. That is the spiritual rule, of which we read in Revelation 5:10,

(Rev 5:10 NIV) You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

The world is conquered and subdued in no better way than despising it. The spirit of the believer therefore is subject to no one, nor can it be subject to anyone. It is exalted with Christ, and all things lie subdued at his feet."

No matter how evil the government, it is only temporary. We are eternal. More than that we can say:

Rom 8:35-37 NIV Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (36) As it is written:
"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."[12] (37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Fear God; dread naught.

---

[154] Matthew 10:23
[155] Daniel 3:16-18 is a great example of this.

Testing Jesus - Matthew 22:23-46 and parallel passages

We begin the final public discourses of Jesus of Nazareth. It starts with a relatively unknown group, the Sadducees, testing him with a standard trick question.

Seven Brothers

Mat 22:23-33 NIV That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. (24) "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. (25) Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. (26) The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. (27) Finally, the woman died. (28) Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" (29) Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. (30) At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. (31) But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, (32) 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'[1]? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." (33) When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

Who are these Sadducees, anyway? Well, after what just happened to the Pharisees, we can conclude that they were smugly satisfied with being the "intellectuals" of their day, certain that their approach was right.

The did not believe in angels, spirits, or the immortality of the soul. They accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament, the rest being ignored. It was their claim that they were the intellectual descendants of Zadok, a priest of David's time.[156]

In a very real sense they are parallel to the humanists of today. You die, that's it – you entirely cease to exist. You are nothing but matter and energy – a higher form of a dog, so to speak. Sound familiar?

The argument

It's important to remember that Christ is arguing with the intellectuals of his society. His answer leaves out some steps in his argument, and for modern Christians with no training in formal logic, it seems impossible that anyone would be persuaded by Christ's words. But look at it this way:

- If the Sadducees are right, then Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are gone. They have ceased to exist. They are now "nothing."
- But God told Moses, "I am the God of Abraham…" Certainly the three were long dead by this time. But yet God recognizes them.
- How can God be the God of non-existent things? How could any god be the god of things that don't exist?

The argument is new to them – and all Christ's listeners see how it hits the Sadducees.

---

[156] Zadok's story is part of Absalom's revolt, see http://www.becomingcloser.org/David/2_samuel_14-20.htm.

Why I believe in the resurrection to come

The point is sufficiently important that it needs review, so that we might understand how central this resurrection is to the teaching of Christ. There are three principle reasons that I believe it:

- The first is the character of God. God is just; the resurrection will be the time when He dispenses justice. God is love; he will (as Job said) "long for the work of his hands."
- Next is the witness of the Scriptures. Implicitly and explicitly, in the Old Testament and New Testament, the Scriptures over and over again prophesy the resurrection of the dead.
- Finally, there is within me the Holy Spirit. His results can be seen in my life; He therefore is real within me. He is the deposit, the down payment, the guarantee of the resurrection. His reality guarantees the resurrection.

Greatest Commandments

The testing of Christ continues; there is one rabbi left standing.

Mar 12:28-34 NIV One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (29) "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.[5] (30) Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'[6] (31) The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[7]There is no commandment greater than these." (32) "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. (33) To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (34) When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

(The reader will note that in various parallel accounts in our earlier studies this section usually comprises a complete lesson.)

The Pharisees were shut up; the Sadducees were silenced; now one rabbi comes forward with a question. Is he testing Jesus? Yes, but I think he does so in honesty. I picture him as being from some small town, in Jerusalem for the Passover. He's heard of this Jesus, and wants to find out whether or not he is really so clever. Instead of the trick question, he comes with the honest question – the mark of the honest man.

Christ's reply is still important today.

Love God

(Note: Matthews account omits "all your strength." The passage Christ quotes, from the Septuagint, parallels this account. Matthew gives us the Hebrew version.)

We are given four pillars of this love:

- *With all your heart.* The word in the Greek can be used to refer to the organ, but its metaphoric use is to refer to the will – not the emotions. A Greek speaker would assume that if your will is trained, your emotions have been trained to your will. This is a conscious decision, not the spur of the moment outburst.

- *With all your soul.* With your very essence, as Aquinas might have put it. Whatever it is that makes you, you, God wants as His.
- *With all your mind.* This is assumed to be a typographical error in current evangelical circles.[157] Somehow we have the idea that faith and reason are incompatible (or worse.) But here Christ tells us that your mind, too, must love God.
- *With all your strength.* None of the above are half-way measures. Love God is the command; not "Love God feebly."

Love your neighbor

How am I to love my neighbor? As I love myself. But how do I love myself? Quite easily and liberally, in my case. I'm the life of the party, always interesting in conversation, personally pious to the point of sainthood – and God's reaction to that is to say, apply the same standard to everyone else. If you can be this lenient with yourself, do the same to them.

You see the point. It's a matter of weights and measures, really. It doesn't matter whether you use English or metric units, as long as your yardstick is honest. So when I meet my neighbor I am to apply the same standard to him as I do myself.

But it's not just how I treat others; it's also whether or not I'm willing to sacrifice for others. It's a practical point; do you feed the hungry, visit the sick and so on? A theoretical love of your neighbor is like having a theoretical life boat in a raging sea.

Honest man's reaction

You will find no more staunch advocate of attending the worship service than this author. It is something you should do, and do weekly. But let's not kid ourselves. If this is not accompanied by the imitation of Christ, the worship is for you pointless and worthless. It's not an either/or, it's both.

Such a life of the imitation of Christ brings you closer to God. Indeed, it's hard to see how it could not have that effect. If you complain that God seems dark and distant, perhaps it's something missing in your life of service.

Ultimately, the honest man finds out that this brings you close to God. If you work on it enough, you may develop the only known instrument by which man can actually see God: the pure heart.

Lordship

Mat 22:41-46 NIV While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, (42) "What do you think about the Christ[4]? Whose son is he?"

"The son of David," they replied. (43) He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, (44) " 'The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet." '[5] (45) If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" (46) No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

---

[157] "Check your brain at the door, 'cause God wants your heart."

The Intellectual Problem

It's difficult to see the problem here unless you get a little background:

- David is considered the greatest king Israel and Judah ever had. He is the founder of the dynasty from which the Messiah would come. Moreover, in this culture a father is honored more than a son. So David would be seen as greater than Solomon, who would be greater than… You get the idea.
- By that thought, David should be superior to the Christ. But yet here[158] David calls him "Lord." How can this be?
- There is only one resolution to this. The Christ must be the physical descendant of David, to be sure (and thus wholly human). But he must also be God (wholly divine), as David would call God, "Lord." It is this challenge he presents to the thinkers of his day. Just who is this Jesus of Nazareth?

Summary

We may briefly conclude:

- The disciple of Christ lives in the hope of the resurrection of the dead. By this he conquers those whose hope is in having no hope.
- The disciple is known to the world by the love he shows. So it is that we tie the rather vague idea of the resurrection (we don't have a lot of details, really) with the crisp, positive life of good works. Thus the world may see that they go together.
- Such a life can only be lived within the power of Christ. He is Lord, and therefore all will turn out well – for those who love him.

---

[158] Psalm 110:1

On Hypocrisy - (Matthew 23)

It is a curious but noteworthy fact that Jesus never expressed anger at anyone except the hypocrites. Of all sinners he met, from thieves to prostitutes, the only ones to experience his wrath were the hypocrites. It is instructive therefore to hear what he has to say *to his disciples* about those hypocrites.

On Obedience

(Mat 23:1-3 NIV) Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: *{2}* "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. *{3}* So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

It might seem unusual to you that Christ would tell you to do what the hypocrites instruct you to do. Our natural reaction is to defy such hypocrisy (or so we think) – or worse yet, to cooperate with it. Jesus tells us to obey. There are at least three reasons for this:

- First, because they "sit in the seat of Moses." That is to say, you are obeying not the hypocrite but the real thing. You don't throw away the wallet just because you found a counterfeit bill. A hypocrite must, by definition, be an imitation of the real thing – and it is the real thing you are obeying.
- Second, because such defiance is the use of the weapons of this world. Do not be overcome by such evil, rather, overcome evil with good.[159]
- Third, there is always the possibility that you are wrong in your judgment – and for such things it is best to "judge not." Sometimes what sounds like a hypocrite in public prayer is actually just a poor attempt at it. Only God can truly judge the heart of a man.

The tests of the hypocrite

There is a comedian now making a lot of money off of one joke: "You might be a redneck if…" Christ now gives us three tests of the hypocrite:

(Mat 23:4-12 NIV) They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. *{5}* "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; *{6}* they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; *{7}* they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' *{8}* "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. *{9}* And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. *{10}* Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. *{11}* The greatest among you will be your servant. *{12}* For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

So what, then, are the tests of a hypocrite? It may surprise you to know that they can be applied to some people who would never think of themselves in that light.

- First, to the hypocrite his own burdens are heavy, while those of others are light. So he has no compunction about adding to the burdens of others while complaining of his own load. Do you hear this? "Oh, my life has been such a weary road, I have so many troubles, …" And some do. But for

---

[159] Romans 12:21

most of us, if we were compelled to take an equal share of life's troubles, we'd feel very happy to leave carrying that with which we came. The true Christian knows this, and feels the burdens of others as heavily as his own.

- Second, everything is for show. Phylacteries were the sign of the pious, reminders of the Word of God. The tassels were the outward symbols the Jews were to wear to distinguish themselves from others, a people apart for God. The trap in such things is that the outward show can become the goal. The Christian is admonished to wear good deeds rather than adornment – and even those are to be done so that the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing.
- Finally, there is the love of status. This is a particular temptation to the teacher, I find. It feels so good to be "greeted with respect." It feels even better to be considered someone's "spiritual advisor," which is as close to "rabbi" as one can get in the church. (A teacher's goal should be to bring his students to spiritual maturity!) The corrective is given to the teacher here: remember who the real teacher is. Nothing I say, nothing I teach, should ever come from my mouth unless its source is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the real teacher; I'm just the retailer.

There is a great comparison here. The world works on power and status, and the hypocrite applies the world's methods to the church. The church is in the world but not of the world, and therefore its methods must be different. The servant of all shall be the greatest of all.

The Seven Woes

Christ now pronounces seven woes upon the Pharisees (eight, if you include verse 14, which seems to have been transcribed from Mark's account). These are, if you will, the indictment of the hypocrite – the crimes with which the hypocrite is charged:

#1 Blocking the entrance

(Mat 23:13 NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

How many people are utterly "turned off" by the hypocrite! How often the hypocrite stands at the door of the church and by his poor example convinces the spiritual orphan that there is no home here. Even if the orphan decides to try it, he will have to go through the pride of the hypocrite to get there. Here we see that subtle, yet firm, indication that some people are "just not good enough" to get into this church (perhaps you should try the Salvation Army post down the street?)

#2 Converts worse than the teacher

(Mat 23:15 NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

This one may not seem too obvious at first, but consider this: how do you win praise from your teacher, when your teacher's primary concern is to be praised himself? Only by exceeding him! If you are going to succeed at being a hypocrite, you have committed yourself to a competition. You certainly don't want to hear, "He's a pretty good teacher, but nothing compared to old Joe…."

#3 Blind Guides

(Mat 23:16-22 NIV) "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' *{17}* You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? *{18}* You

also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' *{19}* You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? *{20}* Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. *{21}* And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. *{22}* And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

"Blind guide" is almost an oxymoron. You can easily pick up that they were guides in the spiritual sense – just look at the incredible "theological" detail that was attached to the concept of taking an oath. So these men had indeed accepted the role of guides. But from the incredible stupidity of the result, they were clearly blind.

Sometimes the teacher needs a reality check. It is necessary to remember that all of Scripture is consistent; if your teaching on one part of the Bible negates that of another part, something is wrong. Your opinions should come from what God says; they should not be imposed on what God says. (For example, how often we "know" that the homeless don't "deserve" help. But where does it say they must deserve it for us to give it?)

#4 Tiny legalism

(Mat 23:23-24 NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. *{24}* You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

The herbs mentioned here are rather small – the kind of thing today that would be grown in a kitchen garden. But, according to the law, they were crops, and therefore to be tithed. Christ does not tell them to ignore the law on this point; rather, he tells them not to substitute the tiny points of the law for the major ones. The key is to do both. Don't neglect the small stuff – but don't make it a substitute for the large stuff.

#5 The outside is clean, the inside is filthy

(Mat 23:25-26 NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. *{26}* Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Character still counts. What you do in private does affect what you are in public. In this "woe" Christ places the emphasis on two things: greed and self-indulgence. In this day a person's financial dealings can be kept quite discreet. Indeed, we do not often recognize greed as a sin; it usually masquerades as an "investment strategy." But one must ask: what has been your stewardship of your money? Will the poor rise up at the last judgment and bless your name for your gifts? Or was all your money tied up in mutual funds? Worse yet, did you take the earnings from those funds to spend entirely on your own appetites? And then hide that fact under a cloak of Sunday morning plastic smiles?

#6 The "whited sepulcher"

(Mat 23:27-28 NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. *{28}* In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

The word here translated "wickedness" is perhaps better translated "lawlessness." That's how it is in the New American Standard and Revised Standard; the King James has "iniquity." The meaning

of the word (the Greek is *anomia*) is that of one who has no law. We would see it today as being a law unto oneself. This is someone who is so sure of what he is doing that "those rules don't apply to me."

The illustration is a telling one. One of the ways in which a Jew can become "unclean" is to handle the bones of the dead. The Pharisees extended this to walking over a grave, even if you didn't know the grave was there. So graves were often whitewashed to mark them.

#7 Decorating the graves

(Mat 23:29-32 NIV) "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. *{30}* And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' *{31}* So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. *{32}* Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

There is a curious parallel here in our time. We are debating "affirmative action." In that debate there is a frequent comment like, "If Martin Luther King were alive, he would…." This is amusing in a painful way, for it is a work of the "spin doctor." Here we have an earlier example of it. The prophets are honored, now that they are dead. But surely we would have been good to them, surely. The hypocrite honors the name of the one whose principles he does not follow.

The Fate of the Hypocrite

Jesus now foretells the fate of these hypocrites – and the warning should be a lesson to us today.

(Mat 23:33-39 NIV) "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? *{34}* Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. *{35}* And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. *{36}* I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. *{37}* "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. *{38}* Look, your house is left to you desolate. *{39}* For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

The sentence is this:

- First, there is the clear statement that they are going to hell. Time is short, eternity is long, hell is hot – but Jesus saves.
- Second, there is the statement that they will be given enough rope to hang themselves. It is a fitting fate. The hypocrite above all else wishes to appear righteous; these Pharisees did. How fitting it is that the word "Pharisee" is now a synonym in many languages for "hypocrite." The reason is simple: they crucified the innocent Messiah.
- In the sense that the innocent blood of Christ is a type of the blood of the innocent everywhere, we can say that these men were the representatives of the hypocrites of all time. For this, they were to suffer God's wrath. It is interesting to note that the Babylonian captivity lasted 70 years, a punishment for wickedness and idolatry. The dispersion of the Jews from Jerusalem which began in AD 70 did not end until 1967. The comparison is worthy of note.

- But note the last verse: the account is not yet closed. He is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Will he spare the Pharisees of our time?

The Art of Devotion - (Mark 12:41-44)

Every now and then the Bible gives us the picture of the art of devotion. I define the art of devotion as the art of living extravagantly for God. Today's passage is short, but filled with devotion:

(Mark 12:41-44 NIV) Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. *{42}* But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. *{43}* Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. *{44}* They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."

The temptation in this passage is to launch immediately into the subject of giving. The point is worth considering, of course, but what strikes me about this woman is the nature of devotion. Most commentaries will focus on what a large percentage (namely, all) of her money was given. This ignores the more obvious point: of how little practical value was the gift.

Indeed, the gift is of very little value. The Greek word is *lepton*, which was later picked up by physicists to signify "light" particles such as electrons. The coin in question was so small in value that the Roman Empire had no equivalent. It was a Greek coin, and four of them made up the equivalent of the Roman penny. In today's terms it would be approximately one fortieth of a day's wages, or perhaps a dollar. This in a wealthy nation; in a third world nation the amount would be so small as to be completely insignificant. But the amount was extremely significant to her; it was all she had.

These two things define an act of devotion, therefore. It is the giving of a gift or performing a service which

- Has little or no practical value. From the world's point of view, the widow's two coins were of no significance.
- Has enormous cost to the giver. From her point of view this was all she had, and therefore the price was as much as she could bear.

Now, the curious thing is that Christ commends her. The point is not just mathematical, how much more than a tithe she has given. The point is that she is worthy of praise for such an act *which had no practical value.* Why did Christ commend her?

May I suggest that it is because she has shown a pure imitation of God himself. God is extravagant – in love! Paul puts it this way:

(Rom 5:6-10 NIV) You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. *{7}* Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. *{8}* But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners**,** Christ died for us. *{9}* Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! *{10}* For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

We see here the extravagance of God: for the unworthy sinners (that's me) he sent his Son, in the flesh, to pay the price of our sins. But beyond that we have the hope of heaven, the "well

done" of the Father and so much more. Extravagance? Beyond all measure. The motive could only be love.

Some examples

The woman is not unique; devotion is a characteristic of many of the great names in the Bible. We recall Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac, for example. Here's another one:

(1 Chr 29:3-4 NIV) Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: *{4}* three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings,

This is King David's personal contribution to the building of Solomon's temple. Just how big is this? Well, a talent is about 75 pounds. At about $400 per ounce (I'll save you the math) that's about $1.44 billion dollars worth of gold! But notice something: "over and above everything I have provided…" That means David had already contributed something:

(1 Chr 22:14 NIV) "I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them.

Just the gold alone is $48 billion! That's over a hundred *tons* of gold. And what did they use it for? *To line the walls of the Temple!* We have lost this sense of devotion. No one could build a cathedral like Notre Dame in Paris today; they'd quibble about the cost. But as a side note, the architect who designed that cathedral is unknown to us, for the work was to be to the glory of God, not the architect.

But devotion is not found just in money:

(Luke 7:37-38 NIV) When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, *{38}* and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

The jar of perfume was indeed expensive (some commentators suggest it would have been a year's wages for an ordinary working man), but the hair and the tears are not priced in money. They are priced in the sacrifice of pride. Again, there is no practical benefit – a basin of hot water would have done better for cleanliness. The price to her is incredible; the benefit to the practical world nil – but the extravagance is right from the heart of God.

Mother Teresa no doubt could have built more buildings and bought more medicine had she devoted her time to running telethons. But if she had, she would not have been Mother Teresa. This is extravagance; this is devotion.

Once in a while the Bible gives us the key to devotion along with the act:

(2 Cor 8:1-5 NIV) And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. *{2}* Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. *{3}* For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, *{4}* they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. *{5}* And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Note the last verse: "they gave themselves first to the Lord." It is the root cause of devotion.

The Causes of Devotion

What causes such devotion in a person? We have seen it already in that love is the prime mover, and this moves a person to give himself to the Lord first. How does this happen? There are many ways to approach this. The monks of the Middle Ages would show you devotional exercises, but the 20th Century looks for logical reasons for devotion. Here are three:

The pearl of great price

(Mat 13:45-46 NIV) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. *{46}* When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Most of us want to hedge our bets. We believe that security is found in spreading the risk. The merchant here looked for the main chance, and when he found it, he acted. Do we recognize Christ as the pearl for which all else must be sold? If we do, he will reward such devotion:

(Mark 10:29-30 NIV) "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel *{30}* will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

Faith, not sight

(2 Cor 5:7 NIV) We live by faith, not by sight.

This is a core principle also. How can one be extravagant in devotion without it? We so often miss the fact that the faith must come first, but when it does, the reward is sure:

(Heb 11:6 NIV) And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Joy

May I submit to you that there are three forms of the phrase, "I have to?"

- "I have to do it because someone is holding a gun to my head." If this is your view of God (I better do this or I will go to hell), then there will be neither love nor joy in your relationship.
- "I have to do this because it's my duty. It's in the rules." If this is your view then your duty will be unpleasant. There may be love, but it will be grim.
- "I have to do this because I just can't help myself – I love doing it." In this circumstance you have found joy, and joy gives rise to devotion.

God rewards such joy by bringing you into the most joyful of families, the family of God.

Sidebar: a Monk's Eye View

Just in case you're interested, the monks did have a different perspective. Here, very briefly summarized, is what Thomas à Kempis might have taught you:

- Meditation – the kingdom of God is within you
- Humility – your pride prevents devotion, your humility compels it.
- Purity of mind – a distracted mind cannot love to the fullest
- Unity of purpose – another way of stating the pearl of great price
- Loving Jesus above all things – the starting point of it all.

What can I do?

Very well, then, it's great that David was so rich with gold – but I'm not. Nor am I the prostitute. And I do have a family to feed. What act of devotion could I possibly perform?

I give you one possibility:

(Mat 5:43-48 NIV) "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' *{44}* But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, *{45}* that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. *{46}* If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? *{47}* And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? *{48}* Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Consider that this example meets our criteria of devotion: extravagant living toward God. It is of no practical value, at least from the world's point of view. It is of great cost to the giver, for it gives up the revenge, or even justice, to which the giver feels entitled. But it is the perfect imitation of our God – the extravagant God.

Olivet – The Early View - Matthew 24:1-44

It is almost impossible to give a coherent picture of the many different ways this section of prophecy is interpreted. I leave that as an exercise to the student. We can, however, find the plain sense of the passage in many ways, and will endeavor to do just that.

Mat 24:1-44 NIV Signs of the End of the Age
Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. (2) "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (3) As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (4) Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,'[1] and will deceive many. (6) You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. (7) Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. (8) All these are the beginning of birth pains. (9) "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. (10) At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. (12) Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, (13) but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (14) And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (15) "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,'[2] spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand-- (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. (18) Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. (19) How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! (20) Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. (21) For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. (22) If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. (23) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. (24) For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. (25) See, I have told you ahead of time. (26) "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. (27) For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (28) Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. (29) "Immediately after the distress of those days

" 'the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'[3] (30) "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (31) And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (32) "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. (33) Even so, when you see all

these things, you know that it[4] is near, right at the door. (34) I tell you the truth, this generation[5] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (35) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Day and Hour Unknown

(36) "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,[6] but only the Father. (37) As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (38) For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; (39) and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (40) Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. (41) Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. (42) "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. (43) But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. (44) So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Sack of Jerusalem

It was the universal opinion of the church for its first 1500 years that this section concerns itself first with the sack of Jerusalem in AD 70. The idea that there could be a second such event was beyond the vision of the early church fathers. We shall examine it, therefore, from their point of view. This does not mean that the other point of view is wrong; prophecy is difficult to deal with, especially where it concerns the future. And it's none too easy concerning the past, either.

One, Two, Three

Look at verse three. Tell me: are the disciples asking one question, two questions or three questions? It's clear that the answer to that question determines a great deal about how you interpret this passage.

- The modern (pre-millennialist) view says it's all one question – and therefore the entire passage concerns the future *only.*
- The parallel passages in Mark and Luke quote this as two questions, however. This would imply a short term and long term view.
- Jerome (and others) saw this as three questions.

We'll follow Mark and Luke; we shall treat this as having a long and short term fultillment.

Short view

In the short view the early sections are fulfilled by the sack of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in AD 70. This is confirmed by the parallel passage in Luke, to wit:

Luk 21:24 NIV They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

In certain prophetic schemes the "times of the Gentiles" are very specifically computed (usually to end in 1947, when the Jews returned to the land). This sack of Jerusalem included a form of the "abomination of desolation" as the Romans set up their worship in the Temple before destroying it. It was a time of great distress (tribulation) as well. Church history records that the apostles were warned ahead of time so that they could leave early.

Warnings

The early Christians were given some signs to look for:

- They were warned of false prophets and false Christs.
- They were also told of earthquakes, etc. and war – but that these were simply the beginnings of things. There is no real significance to this or that war.

But there are other signs that apply to the main event.

End of the Age

After the "birth pangs" come the signs of our Lord's return. See if any look familiar:

- Persecution – and severe at that. Some hold this to be the Diocletian persecution (AD 303-313); others think it yet to come.
- Turning away from the faith – including betrayal of other Christians and hatred for them. (Hmm – getting warmer, huh?)
- False prophets. There's been at least one – Mohammed.
- An increase in wickedness - which causes many Christians' love to grow cold. (Does that ever sound familiar!)
- Finally, that the Gospel would be preached to all nations. (That could be interpreted as just the Roman Empire as well as the entire planet.)

Now we have the warm up exercises completed; we can look at the signs specific to Christ's return.

Christ's return

There are several theories of prophecy that hold that two things will happen due to the prophecies in this paragraph:

- One is the Great Tribulation – usually cited as a three and a half year period, the second half of the 7 years of Daniel's last week.
- The other is that the Temple will be rebuilt – according to the instructions given in the book of Ezekiel.

These two may be right; other interpretations hold this not to be the case.

But there are two signs we can look for: false prophets and false miracles. There does not seem to be a shortage of people calling themselves prophets; and one does have one's suspicions about all those miraculous cures on television. But when will Christ really come?

We will be told that Christ has returned here or there – but just the fact that we have to be told means that it's false. He tells us here:

- His return will be highly visible – obvious to all.
- The location of the return is generally held to be the Mount of Olives. Other passages indicate that his return will happen when the valley between Jerusalem and that place will be filled with bodies.
- Mysteriously, we should expect "signs in the sky." For most of Christian history this has been taken figuratively (meaning huge political changes – remember Joseph's dream of the stars?), but it now is more commonly taken to mean physical changes.

This generation

How do we get so many interpretations? One reason is found in verse 34. The word "generation" can be interpreted in several ways, such as these:

- It could mean the generation standing in front of Christ when he said this. If so, fulfillment was made in AD 70.
- It could be the generation which (theoretically) will see the "millennial Temple" described by Ezekiel.
- The word (*genea* in the Greek) can also be translated "race." This would mean that the Jews as a race would still be in existence when He returns. Which, so far, is true.

Seven Last Things

Let's be clear: we have signs of his return, but it is clearly stated that not even Christ himself knows the date and time of his return – only God the Father knows that. It seems highly unlikely that anyone will be able to figure it out, therefore. This has not prevented people from trying; the Seventh Day Adventists, for example, were founded on precisely such an attempt.

We do know one thing about the time: life will be "business as usual" at his return. It's when we're not expecting it.

Luke gives us one other cryptic sign:

Luk 21:29-30 NIV He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. (30) When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.

It's difficult to tell if this is just a general instruction to "watch for the signs" or if it is to be interpreted as the nation of Israel coming into being. The fig tree is often used as a metaphor for Israel. You pick.

But isn't there something that we really do know will happen?

Seven Last Things

Indeed. Over the course of the last two millennia, seven things have emerged as being "last things" – those things associated with the time of the end. Some may have happened; others clearly have not. Here, in some order (but not certain) they are:

- *Tribulation* – held by some to have been fulfilled, or at least in part fulfilled, it means that the church will be persecuted intensely for a limited time.
- *Armageddon* – there will be a final military battle between the forces of evil and the forces of God. It will happen at Har Meggido, and will result in the decisive defeat of Satan.
- *Rapture* – also called the resurrection of the dead. The number of separate resurrections, and which group of people comes in what order, is still debated. (Lindsay, for example, posits six resurrections).
- *Second Coming* – all views agree: the Lord will return in the flesh.
- *Millennium* – which will happen before or after the return of our Lord, or might be happening now. This is a major classification point of prophetic theories.
- *Judgment* – generally held to be after the resurrection, all will be judged. The Christians to be given reward; all others on the deeds in their lives.

- *New Heaven, New Earth* – somehow (don't ask the physicist) the universe changes to one in which death no longer exists, and God lives among men.

These things I believe. So do most Christians of most times.

Our Part

OK – nice problem. But just what should we be doing about it?

- Keep watch. Look for the signs of the times. Trust Jesus in this; these things will happen, so be on the lookout.
  - Be careful. Why? Consider the parallel passage in Luke: Luk 21:34 NIV "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

- Watch and pray – that you may escape!

Luk 21:36 NIV Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

- Be ready!

Five Parables - (Mark 13:37; Matthew 25)

Jesus is on the Mount of Olives with his disciples. He has just told them the signs of his coming again, and now he tells them what to do while awaiting his return. There are five parables – his favorite form of teaching – and each has its own specific meaning and message.

The Doorkeeper

(Mark 13:33-37 NIV) Be on guard! Be alert ! You do not know when that time will come. *{34}* It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. *{35}* "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. *{36}* If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. *{37}* What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

There is an interesting phrase here: "the one at the door." In one of the other uses of this word (it is a single word in the Greek, and the King James translates it "porter,") Jesus tells us that the doorkeeper of the sheep pen will open the door only to the true Shepherd. Most of Jesus' followers, however, would have associated this idea with an older passage, one of two found for Ezekiel:

(Ezek 3:17-21 NIV) "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. *{18}* When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. *{19}* But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. *{20}* "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. *{21}* But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself."

This is the clear function of the porter, the doorkeeper. He is not to correct sin by force or by law; he is to warn. He is to scan the times, alert for the plague of sin, and warn those who might be affected. Note that this is not an administrative position, or one of power. The doorkeeper indeed is a minor servant in a rich household. The only real qualification for the job is that you have to stay awake. Indeed, the word translated "watch" at the end of this passage really means "stay awake." Jesus reproached his disciples with it in Gethsemane, that they could not "watch" one hour with him.

Military veterans, particularly naval ones, know the meaning of the term all too well. It is the custom in the navy that if you are the one in charge, whatever happens during your term in your fault. The phrase is, "It happened on my watch."

Who are these people today? I might be one of them. Some years ago one of my students, who had previously been divorced, came to my home to "talk about it." She was concerned that I would soon be visiting her, telling her not to be married, because she did not have Scriptural grounds for the divorce. (I knew that she did have such grounds, and amply so.) We both came from churches where the Sunday School teacher was expected to make such a call, and she wanted to prevent any misunderstandings. She knew that I was expected to be (and she's right) a watchman.

The man in charge

(Mat 24:45-51 NIV) "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? *{46}* It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. *{47}* I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. *{48}* But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' *{49}* and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. *{50}* The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. *{51}* He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable is addressed to "those in charge." Note that this is not the same as the watchman. The watchman is a solo performer, if you will. His function is to warn; this person is intended to have authority. We might see such a person as being a deacon or elder in our churches today, or anyone given responsibility and authority. This particular one is said to be in charge of feeding the servants – so we might see him as a minister of the Gospel, for example.

Responsibility defines the job and the authority that goes with it, in the church. We might see this person in the literal sense – the one who is responsible for distributing food to the poor (remember the seven deacons who passed out food to the widows?) We might see this spiritually, as in the minister. We might, moreover, see it figuratively. This could apply to anyone whom God has put in a position of authority – in the church or in the world. If you are a Christian manager, I submit this parable applies to you.

Let's look on the positive side first. Suppose you're doing a good job when He returns, what happens? You get more responsibility. This may not sound so good! But consider: if you truly have the gift of administration or management, you are intended to be a manager. God has given you that gift. It is as natural for you to manage as it is for an eagle to fly. God simply promises that when He comes again, you will have more scope for your gift. It would be like telling an eagle that at the renewal of all things he will fly higher and faster.

Punishment is not only in proportion to crime but to responsibility. The greater the authority given, the greater the punishment for its abuse. (Or so it should be.) What is done here is an abuse of authority. This wicked servant is abusing the other ones "under color of authority." But note something else: our Lord gives us a symptom of such abuse. Look at the company the man keeps! If you are given authority, check your friends!

Wise and Foolish Virgins

(Mat 25:1-13 NIV) "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. *{2}* Five of them were foolish and five were wise. *{3}* The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. *{4}* The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. *{5}* The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. *{6}* "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' *{7}* "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. *{8}* The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' *{9}* "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' *{10}* "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was

shut. *{11}* "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' *{12}* "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' *{13}* "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

This parable applies to all of us. Note that we have a lot of people involved here, and there is no particular function. They are wedding guests. This is a story that Jesus' disciples would have found quite familiar. The custom of the time was (and still is, in some places) that the bridegroom would arrive at some unexpected hour to "steal" his bride. It is considered a good sign for the groom if he finds the bridal party asleep. He then carries his bride away to his parents house, and the wedding party begins (these things tend to go on for a week or so.) The lamps and oil are necessary at night (no street lights, you see).

There are some things to note:

- First, all the wedding party were virgins. There is no difference between the groups, except that one group is prepared for the long trip, and the other is not.
- The oil may be seen as symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Some commentators then see this as the difference between those living a spirit filled life, and those just along for the party.
- Note one thing: they *all* slept. God knows that we're human. It's hard to keep awake, constantly vigilant. But the issue here is not vigilance, it's preparation. He will surprise us with the time, but we know he's coming. Are we ready? (Hope your answer isn't "not yet.")

Some commentators take this in the apocalyptic view, and see repentant Israel in this. Who can say?

The parable of the talents

(Mat 25:14-30 NIV) "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. *{15}* To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. *{16}* The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. *{17}* So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. *{18}* But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. *{19}* "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. *{20}* The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' *{21}* "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' *{22}* "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' *{23}* "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' *{24}* "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. *{25}* So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' *{26}* "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? *{27}* Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. *{28}* "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. *{29}* For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have,

even what he has will be taken from him. *{30}* And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This is a rich parable (pardon the pun). It can be taken in so many ways: as dealing with money; or (taking the fortunate English translation) as dealing with talent; or for that matter dealing with anything we have. This story is about using what we have, and we all have something.

Now, there is a curious point to this parable, often missed. What was the motive of the third servant? Fear. He has misunderstood his master's thought. Out of fear he hides the money in the ground.

In the kingdom responsibility and authority come together. When God gives you something to work with, he has handed you the responsibility, whether that be a checkbook or a singing voice. He also hands you the authority to use it, for (as the world would say) it is "your own." All the complaints of the workers of the world (I'm responsible for failure but don't have the authority to do the job, or I have the wherewithal to do the job, but somebody else has the task) are nonexistent here. If you have the responsibility (i.e., you have the money or the talent) you have the authority to use it as you see fit.

Indeed, God is the ideal manager. Not only does he match authority and responsibility, he rewards those who perform. Very richly; the bonus program in the kingdom of heaven is exceedingly generous. But God works on the same principle you do when you pick out a mutual stock fund: he rewards the ones that perform.

One interesting side note: this is an example of why we are to "judge not." We have no idea what God may have given the other servant.

But if God rewards, it is only fair that he withdraw that reward from the servant who does not perform. Indeed, it is a hard part of a manager's job to tell the poor performer of his reward; it is never pleasant. The third servant presents his excuses, and expects to be rewarded for them. It doesn't work that way.

Sheep and Goats

(Mat 25:31-46 NIV) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. *{32}* All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. *{33}* He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. *{34}* "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. *{35}* For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, *{36}* I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' *{37}* "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? *{38}* When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? *{39}* When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' *{40}* "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' *{41}* "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared

for the devil and his angels. *{42}* For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, *{43}* I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' *{44}* "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' *{45}* "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' *{46}* "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

We come to what C. S. Lewis once called "the most terrifying passage in the New Testament." Please note that this passage also applies to each and every one of us. This is not specific to ministers, elders or deacons or teachers. It applies to all.

The scene is simple, and familiar to all who herd animals. The flocks must be separated because they graze differently. The meaning for us is clear: the day will come when Jesus will take his people out, and sort out those he wants with Him for eternity, and those to be condemned. Note one interesting thing: neither of these groups noticed at the time that they were doing something for God. They didn't see it that way. They saw it as doing something for their fellow men. The face of Christ is hidden in the pauper's eyes.

There is a story from the early days of the church. Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier, and like such he normally wore a cloak. As he approached a town he saw a beggar. He had nothing to give him, but seeing the man cold he tore his cloak in half and gave the half to the beggar. That night, in his dreams, he saw the Lord Jesus, wrapped in his half cloak. "Where did you get that, my Lord?" he asked. "My servant Martin gave it to me."

This is the practical side of the faith. It is not the sign on the door, the doctrine taught inside (though this should be as sound as we can make it) nor the type of worship service that Jesus will examine. He will examine the fruits of our lives to see if the Spirit was flowing through them. What will he find when he comes?

Perfume - Matthew 26:1-16 and parallel passages

Note: the section read from Touchstone magazine will be included as soon as we have permission from them to reprint here.

We should note at the beginning that there are significant differences concerning the central episode as recounted by Matthew and Mark, when compared to John's Gospel. This is so much the case that some ancient scholars concluded there must have been two separate, similar incidents. Matthew and Mark have it at the house of Simon the Leper; John at Lazarus' house. The dates seem different. The anointing is either the head or the feet. The woman is anonymous; she's Mary of Martha and Mary. For purposes of our instruction, we shall treat them as one.

Mat 26:1-16 NIV The Plot Against Jesus
When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, (2) "As you know, the Passover is two days away--and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." (3) Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, (4) and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. (5) "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."
Jesus Anointed at Bethany
(6) While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, (7) a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. (8) When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. (9) "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." (10) Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. (11) The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. (12) When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. (13) I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."
Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus
(14) Then one of the Twelve--the one called Judas Iscariot--went to the chief priests (15) and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. (16) From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

The Nature of Christ

It does not readily appear so, but we can glean some information about Christ himself from this short passage.

His foreknowledge

We sometimes forget that Christ knows the future; even during his advent, his mission and suffering were clear to him. He knows what he will suffer (crucifixion); he knows where (Jerusalem); he knows when (at Passover); he knows who will do it and how. But there are two additional bits of foreknowledge you might not have seen:

- He sees clearly that the Cross is not the end, but that the Gospel will be preached around the world. How could this be without the resurrection?

- He tells us that "it was intended"[160] that she use the perfume this way. He sees into her heart and knows what will be done; he knows that she has set this aside for Him.

The implications are important for us. What is there that he does not know about us?

His divinity

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." But evidently the Son of God has no such inhibitions. Matthew and Mark tell us this is the home of Simon the Leper – which automatically makes it off limits to the Jews. I suspect the disciples felt a little uncomfortable about it, too. Though perhaps it kept the Pharisees at a distance; who can say? What threat is leprosy to the Christ who will die shortly on the cross and be raised again on the third day?

Next, notice one of those curious statements which in any other mouth would be wildly egotistical. For the devout Jew, giving to the poor was commanded and expected. Who, then, could dismiss the call to give the money to the poor with the observation that – since he is here – the money is better spent on him? Do you see how arrogant this sounds in any mouth but that of the Son of God?

Look at the disciples' reaction. The rebuke her for doing it; but they don't criticize Jesus for that comment. They know that He is, intrinsically, worthy of such a sacrifice.

His humanity

Fully divine, Christ is also fully human – and quite a human being at that. One of the constants of his life is that the ordinary man listened to him gladly. The ordinary man is his protector in this instance; the Pharisees know that if they arrest him publicly, there will be a riot – and then who knows what happens? He is not aloof and distant; he is personal and "in your face." The ordinary man loved Him, and does still.

There is a curious connection here. Christ is sold for thirty pieces of silver – the price of a slave in the Old Testament.[161] The Son of Man came to serve – and was priced accordingly. One other figure in the Old Testament was sold like that – Joseph. He brought twenty pieces of silver[162] - the servant is not above the Master, it seems.

The Nature of Evil

The modern humanist view is that man is basically good – but his culture has turned him to evil. ("Culture" is sometimes a code word for "Christianity.") The Christian view is entirely different. Man was created good – but is fallen. Each and every one of thus is a sinner by nature. Therefore each of us is capable of immense evil. Permit me two examples.

Adolf Eichmann was instrumental in the Holocaust. A movie was made about this; it starred an actor named Werner Klemperer as Eichmann. I saw the movie several years after it was issued – by

---

[160] John 12:7
[161] Exodus 21:32
[162] Genesis 37:28

which time Klemperer had gone on to play Colonel Klink[163] on the television comedy *Hogan's Heroes.* Despite a fine performance, I could not see Eichmann as villain in the film – only the bumbling fool.

It goes the other way too. A minister of our acquaintance was accused by his daughter-in-law of sexually molesting her children. One of the saddest aspects of this was that many of the man's friends immediately assumed he was guilty (and said so.) Lifelong friendships were ruptured. He eventually spent all he had saved defending himself; it came out that she was using this accusation as a weapon in her divorce case against his son. Many were all too quick to believe; why? Because we know that we have the capability for great evil too.

Motives

What would motivate a Judas to betray the Christ? Some possibilities, all of which are common to us as well:

- *Love of money* – perhaps not the most logical reason, as it is not certain Judas would have gotten his fingers on it. But you can see the pull of the temptation.
- *Fear of discovery* – that is to say, pride – and the terror of being humiliated. What will people do to avoid having their sins found out?
- *Manipulation* – some have suggested that Judas did this to force Jesus to become an earthly king.
- *Bitterness* – Judas was the only Judean of the twelve, Mr. Outside. Perhaps he was fed up with being lowest on the totem pole. Frustrated ambition does that, sometimes.

Satan

Luke, in his Gospel[164], tells us that Satan entered into Judas. If so, then matters were very bad for Judas. Satan is described to us as one of the cherubim – fallen from his original state through his pride:

Isa 14:12-14 NIV How you have fallen from heaven,
O morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations! (13) You said in your heart,
"I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. [3] (14) I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High."

It is well to remember that Satan is the enemy of our souls[165]; Christ the lover. His strategy in our time is fitting the Father of Lies. In the industrial world he tells us that he does not exist – and therefore the Bible is false. In the world of tribes and peoples, he is the "god" who opposes the God brought by the missionary – and opposes him with powerful presence.

---

[163] A fatuous, bumbling prison camp commandant always outwitted by the prisoners under Colonel Hogan.
[164] Luke 22:3-6
[165] Ephesians 6:12

One last things we may say about evil: to the last, Christ offered Judas the chance to repent. Overcome evil with good.

The Servant's Devotion

My daughter – the real writer in the family – tells me that a story will not work without conflict. Think about that; when you hear of conflict, you want to know what happens next. Here is a conflict that's been going on a long time.

Some years ago the cardinal of Los Angeles, Cardinal Mahoney, had a new cathedral built (cardinals need cathedrals). It was indeed a lavish thing; the greatest expanse of translucent alabaster windows in the world. It was also heavily criticized; "Why wasn't that money spent on the poor and homeless?" Do you not see that the same question could be asked of the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris? The answer is the same in both cases: it was done for the glory of God.

At that, however, we must sometimes look again. The million-light bulb palace that is TBN is also done for the glory of God – though we suspect someone's ego just might, possibly, have been involved.

All things may be done to the glory of God[166] - it's just that they're likely to be misinterpreted along the way.

The nature of an Act of Devotion

An act of devotion such as we have here is at root an act of love. It has certain characteristics:

- From the world's point of view, it's a total waste. Forgive him? What for? Roses are one thing; long stem American Beauty roses? What a waste!
- From the giver's point of view, it is expensive to the point of total commitment. The widow, after all, could have put in only one coin.
- It is elegant; first class. Give of your best to the master.
- It is insightful – did she know of his burial to come?
- It is timed for the occasion.

If it meets these characteristics, it is sure to be criticized.

Christ's reaction

"She has done a beautiful thing to me." Christ praises and values good works, even if we think them a little lacking in propriety. But note please: He does not reward her with anything but praise. There is no spiritual gift given; just remembrance. We sacrifice for those we love; they love in return.

---

[166] 1st Corinthians 10:31

Not Like That - Luke 22:24-34; John 13:1-30

It should be noted that there is some question of the order of events given in this section. I have used one particular author's opinion (Robinson), but alternate chronologies are certainly reasonable.

Jealousy

Luk 22:24-30 NIV Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. (25) Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. (26) But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. (27) For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (28) You are those who have stood by me in my trials. (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The World's Way

Recently an Orange County businessman donated thirty million dollars to Cal State Fullerton for a new building for its business school. The building was then named after him, along with a campus street renamed for him. As far as I know, the extent of the return he received from this donation was entirely intangible – and by this act he is known as a benefactor of the school. Apparently, it's an expensive hobby; I doubt I shall take it up any time soon.

But it's not just businessmen who want to be known as benefactors. The greatest desire seems to come from politicians – perhaps because they don't have to use their own money. Throughout history those in authority have cherished the reputation of being a public benefactor. It's easy to see why in a democracy; politicians want to be reelected, and this certainly helps. But even in the days of autocracy the king wanted to be known as a benefactor – it helps prevent revolutions, rebellions and rivals. In either case the society soon descends into bread and circuses – or welfare and television, as may be. Being a benefactor is often expensive; appearing to be one is cheaper. In this age when manipulation replaces truth this leads to bread, circuses and tyranny.

Organizational inversion

Consider for a moment the nature of worldly organizations. Those whose object is profit or power tend to be top-down – defined as authority at the top and responsibility at the bottom. Those who object is service (like the church) tend to be bottom up – if you'll assume the responsibility, you soon get the real authority. Think not? Volunteer to be a little league coach.

If you do, you'll find that the top down approach doesn't work. The players on the field – in theory the "bottom of the food chain" – are in fact at the top, for they are the ones who win or lose. They won't listen to one who claims authority, but they will to one who has the responsibility of coaching. How do they know a real coach from someone who wants to run things? By his service.

Sometimes it appears to Christians that God is blind to service. We see the highly visible servants, but once in a while we notice one who has labored in obscurity for years. We wonder; why doesn't God reward this person?

Perhaps our problem is not that God cannot see the person, but that we cannot see the reward. Ask yourself: what do you consider really rewarding? How do you get it?

Suffer, then reign

Most of us take pleasure – are rewarded – in team victory. The question, then, is – are you on the team? If you are, you are rewarded in the context of the team. Most athletes resent the "hot dog" – the athlete who cares nothing about the team winning, only his own personal accomplishments. There's a truth in this. For the Christian, it is Christ and the church who are the winners – noting well that many individual Christians will suffer for that triumph, as Christ suffered. Ultimately, God will reward his teammates beyond our expectations. In the meanwhile, there is suffering.

But isn't that typical of service organizations? Baseball games are decided on the field, but won or lost in practice. (How often did I repeat, "Play like you practice, practice like you play.") Hard work – suffering, if you will – means victory. For the church as well this is true. Victory starts with the life of devotion, and that is a life of self-sacrifice.

Christ next gives his disciples a supreme, simple example of this.

Washing the Disciples' feet

Joh 13:1-20 NIV

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.[1] (2) The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. (3) Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; (4) so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. (5) After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (6) He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" (7) Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." (8) "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." (9) "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (10) Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." (11) For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. (12) When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. (13) "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. (14) Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. (15) I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (16) I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. (17) Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

(18) "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'[2] (19) "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. (20) I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

A little background: in this time personal hygiene was a bit different. One went to a bath; then walked home. In the process the feet would become dirty – and needed to be washed again.

Leadership by example

Permit me a war story, please; it is especially cherished.

Rich was, to put it simply, arrogant. A manager who did all the thinking personally, as he personally had all the brains, he was difficult to work with – and for. One day he went into the executive coffee room and took the last cup from the pot. A secretary admonished him; the rules were that whoever took the last cup, made the next pot.

Rich turned on her and let her know, in loud language, that he was much too important to be making coffee – that's what we had secretaries for. As he was explaining just how grateful she should be for the chance to make coffee for people at such a high level, Rich's boss walked in. JJ paused for a moment, understood what was going on – and silently proceeded to make the next pot of coffee. Lessons by example tend to be memorable ones, don't they?

Christ sets just such and example here:

- Washing the feet was not just a servant's job – it was the job of the lowest ranking servant in the place.
- It's back bending work – especially if you have more than one person's feet to care for. You either kneel in front of the person – or bend over like a pretzel. Neither position can be called dignified.
- One other example: he washed the feet of all twelve – including Judas. He knew what Judas was going to do – and served him anyway.

Symbolism

The early Christian writers saw this incident in symbolic or metaphoric ways:

- The starting point was that bath which cleaned the whole body. That, of course, symbolized baptism.
- Washing the feet symbolized repentance after baptism – for example, when we examine ourselves at the Lord's Supper.

The point then becomes clear: repentance is effective only when our Lord does the cleansing. By his stripes we are healed.

Lordship

We call Jesus Lord, for such he is. But do you not see that even lordship is not incompatible with service? Indeed, we are taught just the opposite: it is precisely because of the service and sacrifice of Christ that he has been made Lord of all.

See, too, the humility of Christ. The King of Kings understands that true lordship is expressed in service and sacrifice. So his humility in doing this tells us that no task is too low for the leader – for the leader is to be the servant of all.

The great principle of Christian living is the Imitation of Christ. He has set you the example; will you follow it?

Judas and Peter

Joh 13:21-30 NIV After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." (22) His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. (23) One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. (24) Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." (25) Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" (26) Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. (27) As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

"What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, (28) but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. (29) Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. (30) As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Teamwork is not without its problems. It is important to distinguish the types of problems one may have, for the response to each is quite different:

- *Innocent problems* – most commonly, failures to communicate clearly. We didn't want to foul things up, we just didn't know what we were supposed to be doing. Solution: communicate a little better. Example: did the disciples really know what was going to happen in the next few days?
- *Leadership* – often enough, somebody thinks he has a better idea. Perhaps he does. The issue should be confronted, worked out – and the team should proceed with the chosen solution. Example: Peter – who knows how Christ should handle things.
- *Rebellion* – the rejection of the team's leader. In the church, it is the prideful desire to "be like God." It is Satan's own sin.
- So how, then, did Jesus handle this rebellion?
  - As we pointed out earlier, Jesus washed Judas' feet. He reassured him that, despite what he had done (and was planning to do) Jesus still wanted him amongst the disciples.
  - Dipping the bread and handing it to Judas was an act of hospitality – one which would be interpreted as showing Jesus' desire for Judas' friendship.
  - Finally, when it is clear that Judas is going to betray him, Jesus tells Judas to do it quickly. He removes the rot from amongst the disciples; the leader is always concerned for the well being of the team. Our Lord is always concerned with the well being of the church.

(The following questions really don't fit in the flow, but I thought it wise to put them here as the questions, and their answers, are important for a Christian's general understanding).

It may be asked: Did Judas really have a choice? After all, it was prophesied; Christ clearly knew he was going to do it. The answer, I think, is this: yes, he did. God saw him do it from the perspective of the eternal; to see someone do something is not to make them do it.

But if God saw it beforehand (if we can apply that to the eternal, timeless God) does that not mean that God in some sense authored this evil? After all, there was no necessity that Judas be even born – and Christ tells us it would have been better for Judas if he hadn't. I answer that God did not author this, but allowed it. He allows no evil out of which he cannot make a greater good.

Peter

Luk 22:31-34 NIV "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you[1] as wheat. (32) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (33) But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." (34) Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

It is not a comparison made very often, but Jesus had a rebellion problem (Judas) and a leadership problem (Peter). Judas will sell Jesus out; but Peter will deny he even knows the man, after three years of discipleship. On the face, they are similar sins. Why, then, are the two treated so differently? Denial is, after all, a form of betrayal.

Consider this: both of these men, when confronted with their sin, showed remorse. Judas flings back the money; Peter weeps. Both knew their guilt and were sorry for it. But of the two only Peter takes the next step: to let remorse be godly sorrow and thus lead to repentance. Judas is remorseful, but no more. He tries to make atonement for himself; Peter seeks forgiveness from Jesus.

That action, or lack of it, determines the response of God: for Peter there is restoration; for Judas, replacement. Perhaps Judas thought himself indispensable, who knows?

We sometimes are quick to judge our leaders. It is worthwhile, then, to see what the leader of the disciples did. Not all saints are made of plaster:

- Sometimes Peter says what he thinks is appropriate, rather than what he knows is right. Social pressure led to his denial.
- He's been known to try to talk himself into doing the right thing. If you brag enough about your courage, perhaps it will show up at the right time.
- It can even be said that Peter just doesn't really know who he is – until Jesus points it out to him (see the last chapter of John – and the various words used for "love".)

Judas failed; Peter failed. Peter thought himself capable of success in himself; perhaps Judas did too. Peter alone turned back. Christ is never a failure, even though we are.

The Lord's Supper - 1st Corinthians 11:23-32

1Co 11:23-32 NIV For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, (24) and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." (25) In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (26) For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (27) Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. (28) A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. (29) For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (30) That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. (31) But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. (32) When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Symbolic Communication

Nature of symbolic communication

My wife is not a woman given to "water power." She does not go into tears over the minor upsets of life. She is not one of those women who use tears as a weapon to get what she wants. When she cries, she means it. When she cries, I pay attention.

So you can imagine that I was extremely concerned when I came home one day to find her hovering over our kitchen sink, bawling her eyes out. She was clearly crying over something in the sink, and it wasn't onions. It took some time for me to get her sufficiently calmed to find out what happened. She was crying because she had lost the diamond out of her engagement ring. It's interesting to see the difference in our reactions. My first thought was, "You've got to be kidding?" (If you knew how little that diamond cost -- and it was the biggest one I could afford at the time -- you'd understand my first reaction). To me, it was a relatively inexpensive gemstone.

To her, however, it represented her marriage. She had lost the symbol of something which (she tells me) makes her happy. I began to think about it in a different light.

Isn't it interesting that the deepest form of communication in our species is symbolic communication? It is the least precise form of communication, to be sure, because its meaning depends both on the one talking and the one listening. For example, when I see an American flag -- a symbol -- it carries deep meaning to me. For many of you it does also, but the meaning is somewhat different. Yet we refer to these meanings by the same symbol. The communication is not complete in what I say when I show the flag; it needs your experience to be complete communication. To my wife, that ring was symbolic communication from me to her, and it was very precious. That's symbolic communication. It needs a symbol, like the engagement ring. It needs a sender, but it is not complete without the experience of the receiver. The deeper the experience on both sides, the more meaningful the communication.

Communion is symbolic communication as well. For some who do not see the possibility, the elements of communion are "only tokens." But perhaps there is more to it than that.

Wine and bread

If we consider the Lord's Supper to be the food (symbolically) of the church, we find some interesting things:

- Bread is made of many grains of wheat, crushed together – a symbol of the unity of the church.
  - It is unleavened bread. The usual reference is to equate leaven with sin. But may I also point out that it is "hasty bread?" Bread baked in haste has no time for yeast. Thus we should be prepared at any time for our departure ("sandals on your feet.")
  - With bread we feed the hungry; with the Bread of Life we feed those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

    So it is with the wine. Most of us see in it the blood of Christ, but we might also see it this way:

- Wine was used both as anesthetic and antiseptic – symbolizing the relief of our pain and the cleansing of our wounds.
  - Wine, too, comes from many – grapes, in this. But do you not see that if grapes are to be suitable for wine they must be crushed? We become what we eat; the proud heart must be crushed, broken hearted, to be of service to the Savior.
  - In our own time there is another example. Some of you have given blood at a blood drive. You know that such blood saves the lives of those in surgery or injury.
  - Taken together they are also symbolic:
  - They are taken separately – just as Christ's blood was separated from his body at the Cross.
  - In Communion Christ's body is seen in thousands of separate pieces – yet He remains whole and undivided.

The bridge

Perhaps one symbol of Communion as a whole will help us: we can see Communion as a bridge:

- One tower – the bread – is on our side of the "great gulf fixed." We can see "his body" as one thing he certainly shared with us, for he is fully human.
- But he is also fully divine – and thus the tower on God's side of the gulf. The blood is his new covenant, and that is given from God.
- And the main causeway of the bridge? Christ himself – the way, the truth, the life.

Covenant

Much ink has been used to discuss the concept of a covenant; whole schools of Biblical interpretation have been formed to support one method over another. It is not my purpose in this lesson to give a definitive answer as to who (if anyone) has it right. We shall confine ourselves to that which is needful. Here is Luke's brief account of the institution of the Last Supper:

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people. And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. They were glad and agreed to give him money. So he consented, and began seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the crowd. Then came the first day

of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it." They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?" And He said to them, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. "And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' "And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there." And they left and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.
(Luk 22:1-20 NASB)

Providence

It is important to note the introduction of the passage. It is not an accident, nor is it a coincidence. It is the providence of Almighty God.

There is a curious parallel to this section. Saul has an experience as foretold by Samuel.[2] It is God's way of telling Saul that he is indeed king; that Samuel is not just some crazy old man but the man of God. Thus convinced, Saul proceeds to take the kingship in hand.

God works like that. Here, the details of "finding" the upper room are laid out in advance, so that the disciples will know that the small things are in God's control. They will need this; the next few days will be a horror to them.

It is a curious thing: many Christians will acknowledge God's control over the large developments of history, but not the small things. But His eye is still on the sparrow; even in the ordinary things of life we detect his hand. Now sheltering, now disciplining, He is always there. If he controls the great, is he so limited that he cannot control the small?

The Passover as image

One way in which we see the providence of God is in this: he provides for us pictures – images – of that which is to come. The Passover itself is such an image. We see the sacrificial lamb – which was to be without defect. This is the image of the coming Christ, the sinless sacrifice. Those who accept that sacrifice – by painting blood on the lintels – are passed over by the angel of death. It foreshadows how the blood of Christ is our security against the angel of death; we are to live eternally.
Consider well the prophecy in the Bible. Is it not the case that, having seen the fulfillment in part at the first coming of Christ, that the rest will be fulfilled at his return?

Concept of Covenant

Christ here institutes a new covenant. The word is a "church word" for the most part; at one time it had a legal meaning as well. That usage has died out (it was used to restrict the future sale of homes by race), so we are left with the Biblical meaning.

First, rid your mind of the notion that a covenant is the same thing as a contract. It is not, though the word is often used for agreements between men. A contract is between equals (in theory). A contract requires the exchange of valuables; what valuable do you have that would place the Almighty in obligation to you?

Rather, it is a "take it or leave it" offer from Almighty God to us. There are four common elements which we will take as instructional:

- Covenants carry with them some form of sign. For example, the state offers you license plates for you car – on the state's terms, take it or leave it. When you take up their offer, you put the sign of that on your car in the form of the plates. What would otherwise remain unseen is now proclaimed.
- God's covenants (we shall look at historical examples) deal with the problem of sin and guilt. That's because He loves us – but sin stands between us and our heavenly Father.
- His covenants carry with them a present blessing. God knows we would "leave it" if there were only blessings in heaven. Therefore he provides us with blessings in this life.
- His covenants also deal with the future. They look forward to a time when they will end, and a greater covenant will be made.

Examples

Noah

- Sign: One of the most common of images in Christian children's literature is a picture of Noah's Ark. You usually see it on the waves or the mountain top, and often you see with it a rainbow. That's the sign God gave to Noah in his covenant: the rainbow.
- Sin: As Bill Cosby might have put it, He "drowned it right out." It is a simple method; get rid of the sin by getting rid of the sinners.
- Present blessing: Noah and his family were saved by being in the Ark.
- Future blessing: no more floods like that one.

Abraham

- Sign: God changed Abram's name to Abraham, Sarai's name to Sarah. Beyond that, God ordered that circumcision be implemented. (The implications of that are rather lengthy; we will slide over them.)
- Sin: God tells Abraham to make a sacrifice – of his own son. It shows that Abraham truly keeps God first. It also sets the groundwork for Moses and the Levitical system of sacrifices.
- Present blessing: At an age of 99, Abraham gets to worry about whether or not Medicare covers pregnancy – for Sarah gives birth to a son, Isaac.
- Future blessing: God tells Abraham that his descendants will be incredibly numerous and that one of them (the Messiah) will bless all the nations of the earth.

Moses

- Sign: The various feasts of the Levitical law, especially the feast of the Passover.

- Sin: the system of sacrifices for sin and atonement.
- Present blessing: God will call them his own people, take them out of slavery and by his mighty hand give them the inheritance of the land promised to Abraham.
- Future blessing: the covenant would be kept forever – IF the Jews would be obedient.

The New Covenant

We may now understand a little more clearly what Christ did at the Last Supper. He proclaimed the covenant under which we live – the covenant of the church age

Sign

The sign of this covenant is given here: the Lord's Supper. Like the others, it is a simple thing. It has two elements:

- Bread – usually unleavened – symbolizes the body of Christ. In the early days of the church it was a common loaf; anyone could see that it fed the body of Christ on earth – His church.
- Wine – in those days, white wine was rather difficult to produce. Most wine was red – the color of blood, which it symbolizes.

You confirm your acceptance of the covenant when you take communion; you also proclaim to all who might be watching that you are a Christian. It is a sign for you; it is a sign for the world.

Sin

Of all things most powerful, the sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary is the greatest. You can see its image in the Passover: the spotless, unblemished lamb slaughtered, portraying the Lamb of God to come.

It is the atonement, though, that makes this covenant unique. The covenant with Noah destroyed sin by water; Abraham appeased God with animal sacrifices; Moses brought forth God's law in detail for those sacrifices – but this sacrifice actually atones for sin, cleansing us from it.

What makes this all the more powerful is this: Christ died for us willingly. His life was not taken; he gave it up.

Present blessings

Christians are often accused of thinking of "pie in the sky" as our blessings in return for a dull life here. It is not so.

- We have within our souls the Holy Spirit. As the work of our days becomes more complex, the Holy Spirit guides us in the simple truth.
- We have the power of prayer. No longer do we need a priest to mediate between us and the Father; the door is open. The light is on.
- Indeed, on this earth we have the church, designed by Christ and bought with his blood, which is both comfort and guide.

Future blessing

- Compare these blessings to those of the older covenants:

- At the return of our Lord we will see the resurrection of the dead. Those in the ground will return and walk again.
- When he returns, he will bring justice with him. Rewards for the faithful; final justice for the wicked.
- Perhaps greatest of all is this: no more death. No more sin, no more death.
- We are indeed the recipients of the greatest of covenants.

Preparing ourselves

So then, what shall we do if we are to prepare ourselves for such a great thing as the Lord's Supper?

Self-examination

Self-examination is the main reason we like music during communion – it keeps our mind on the hymn and not our sins.

- We should be aware that our suffering is meant to prompt self-examination. So don't come to communion to complain – but to seek repentance.
- Also, our self-examination should be real – not just hedging our bets. Anyone can confess generic sins.
- Note, fishermen, that there is no lower size limit on sins. Christ wants to catch them all.

Reconciliation

Permit me the story of the death of Richard the Lionheart:

In 1199, in a dispute over treasure, he laid siege to a castle in Chaluz, France. He was wounded in the shoulder by an arrow. Gangrene set in, and he knew that death was at hand. He arranged matters in accordance with the principles by which he had lived, dividing his belongings among friends and charity. The archer who shot him was now a prisoner, and Richard pardoned him, and gave him a gift of money.

The thing that interests me most is this: for seven years prior to his death, Richard had not been to confession (he was a Catholic, as were all Christians in Western Europe at that time) nor taken communion for that seven years. Why? Because he knew that at confession he would be obliged to admit his hatred for Philip, the King of France -- and would then be compelled by his faith to be reconciled to his mortal enemy.

Christ reconciled us to God by the Atonement; we too must be reconciled as brothers.

Proclamation

The Scripture is clear:

1Co 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

You proclaim his death (and thus the Resurrection). But as those who share this meal, do we not also proclaim brotherhood? Permit me another story:

The year was 1866; the place was Richmond, Virginia. The citizens of the capitol of the defeated Confederacy were still trying to recover from the devastation of war. Among many other problems, they were struggling with the question of the role and relationship of the newly freed slaves -- a struggle which is not yet done.

In a fashionable church in Richmond the minister was offering Communion. In this particular house of worship Communion was offered somewhat differently than we serve it. When the time came, the minister would stand at the front of the church, behind an altar rail. Those wishing Communion would rise from their seats, a few at a time, come forward and kneel at the altar. The minister would hand them Communion. Usually those in the front came forward first, but it was not uncommon for some to remain longer than others, deep in meditation. One rule was observed: Communion could not be given to a solitary person -- at least two must be at the rail. This was to preserve the spirit of Matthew 18:20.

In the middle of this procession, from the back of the sanctuary, a former slave stood up and strode forward. The minister was taken aback. This was a "white" church; racial separation was the firm belief of virtually all the members. This was also the Lord's Supper. The minister hesitated. The man was at the rail alone; he was not obliged to serve Communion to a solitary worshiper. What was he to do? All eyes in the congregation were on him.

At this moment another worshiper rose from his seat. He was an elderly man, with gray hair, but tall and erect in his bearing -- military, we would say. He walked down the aisle and without a word knelt by the "man of color" (as the phrase is today) to take Communion. His example decided the minister's action; Communion was served to both men together.

The man? Robert E. Lee. Sometimes doing what's right takes courage – and sometimes it takes even quiet, private courage to bring yourself to the Lord's Supper, and there repent.

(The reader will note the extensive quotation from other lessons – just too much good material to miss.)

The Oneness of God - John 14

The reader will note a different treatment in our series on the Gospel of John, and the previous series on the life of Christ. This is a very rich passage.

Joh 14:1-31 NASB "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. (2) "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. (3) "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. (4) "And you know the way where I am going." (5) Thomas *said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" (6) Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (7) "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." (8) Philip *said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." (9) Jesus *said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? (10) "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. (11) "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. (12) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father. (13) "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it.* (15) "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (16) "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; (17) *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (18) "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (19) "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. (20) "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. (21) "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." (22) Judas (not Iscariot) *said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" (23) Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. (24) "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (25) "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. (26) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (27) "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. (28) "You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. (29) "Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. (30) "I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; (31) but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.

In My Father's House

Problems

It is fashionable today to deny the truth that only those who are real Christians will make it to heaven. God, we are assured, could not possibly be so much a stickler – after all, we're not, right? And He is made in our image, right? Well, wrong! But let us take the issue as it is presented. There are three common forms of the argument:

- What about the pygmy in Africa? The person who has never even heard of Christ should be given a shot at heaven, right? That's only fair; they've earned it as much as we have. Which is true; they have earned it as much as we have – which is to say not at all. It's grace, not brownie points.
- What about the sincere religious person of another faith, the devout Jew or the devout Moslem? For that matter, the devout Hindu or Buddhist? Surely it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere? After all, the Scripture tells us that "all Israel shall be saved."[167]
- Of course, as long as we're being sincere, what about my kind, generous, right living (and politically right-wing) agnostic neighbor? Surely if I'm going to heaven, he is too. (But which of you deserve it?)

Logic is logic

The argument can be made more formally than that. Permit me to introduce to you the concept of the logical contrapositive: If we know that "if A, then B" is true, it is tempting to conclude that "if not A, then not B." It often happens that way – *but it is not logically required.* It is also the case that we cannot say the logical contrapositive is false, either – we simply don't know from the information presented.

An example might help. "If you speed past the traffic cop, you will get a ticket." Let's accept that as true. We might say, "If you don't speed past the traffic cop, you won't get a ticket." That's the logical contrapositive. But it's false, as stated. You might get a ticket for any number of other things (like weaving in lanes, or running a stop sign.) But we might put it that way to discourage our kids from speeding. So it's common use – but not strictly correct.

So, to the point: if you know Jesus Christ, you are saved. From that statement we therefore *cannot* conclude that if you don't know Jesus Christ, you are not saved – and are therefore going to hell. The conclusion is not warranted. In fact, we are really looking for a statement of the logical type denoted as an IFF – if and only if. So then, does Christ make such a statement here?

The way, the truth, the life

I submit that He does. He does not say, "I am *a* way" but "I am *the* way." Let's see what He means:

- The way: Christ is the way to God by virtue of his sacrifice on the Cross. Only if you claim the effectiveness of that vicarious offering for your sins can you satisfy the righteousness of the God of

---

[167] Romans 11:26. But see also Romans 9:27.

heaven. The pygmy in Africa, the devout Jew, my righteous neighbor – and I – do not deserve to go to heaven by our actions. There is only one way – the way.

- The truth: our liberal society proclaims that truth is both multiple and relative; there is no sense of this in Scripture. There is only one truth – and Christ is that truth. Any other route means that you can get to heaven by believing a lie.
- The life: Christ showed this at the Resurrection. He, and he alone, holds the keys of death and hell. The only other destination is heaven, and he and the Father are one. He therefore alone determines who has eternal life – and he has made it clear how to obtain that. There is only one method – the life.

Truth is one, for it is an attribute of God – who is One. It is God's oneness that means there is only one way to Him.

Oneness of the Trinity

Preconceptions

Before we can understand the disciples' objections, we must understand the preconceived ideas they had which stood in the way of their understanding. Teachers know that they must often dispose of a false idea to teach the truth.

- Their first, and persistent, notion is that the Messiah was to be a conquering king. This is true – at the second coming of the Messiah. They saw only one coming, and were looking for the military triumph.
- Their second notion – and much more subtle – was that religion was created by those who know God, in some sense. . In their mind, these would be the prophets. It is described and taught much more than experienced If someone said he was a god, it would seem to them to be a pagan thing; if someone said he is God, it appears as blasphemy. It is – except in the mouth of the Son of God.
- Most prominently, God is One – and therefore can't be three. Nothing can be both one and some other number; it's mathematically impossible. But what is impossible with man is possible with God.[168]

Unity of Christ and the Father

Christ does not argue with them; he presents them with the facts and helps them draw the logical conclusions.

- If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. Christ is the image of God.[169] It's not so much like a photograph as someone might say, "You're just like your father." Christ is God in the flesh.
- He then tells them that the Father is in him – and he is in the Father. Both halves are necessary; we have the Holy Spirit within us, for example. But we are not yet "in" the Holy Spirit, in the same sense. Christ is both. For evidence, Christ gives his actions (the Father "lives in me") and his words ("my words are the Father's").
- Finally, for those who just don't get it, there are the miracles. Would God the Father allow someone who claimed to be God in the flesh work miracles – unless he really was God in the flesh?

---

[168] This point lends itself to a demonstration of cutting a Moëbius loop in half lengthways. It doesn't produce the expected two loops, but one longer, thinner loop.

[169] Colossians 1:15

Unity with the Spirit

The Holy Spirit often seems rather mysterious to Christians. But we can see the signs of unity in the trinity with regard to the Spirit in what Christ tells us here:

- The Father gives the Spirit. Would the Father gives us one who claimed to be God in us unless it were really so?
- We often see him as counselor – but we miss the word "forever." (See verse 16). That means the Spirit is eternal – and only God is eternal (though we shall be).
- The Spirit is told to us to be the Spirit of Truth – but God is truth, and God is spirit – so therefore the Spirit is God.

(The reader still puzzled by the Trinity will find himself in good company. May I suggest the explanation by Dorothy Sayers given elsewhere on this website?)

Oneness of Christ and the Church

Christ is preparing to return to heaven by way of the Cross, the tomb and the ascension. As will be seen in John 17, he is greatly concerned for the church he leaves behind. The church is described as "the bride of Christ" – and we know that in marriage man and woman become one flesh. That's one reason the church is the body of Christ – we are one flesh with Christ.

Christ's farewell gifts

To make this unity a reality, Christ leaves behind three important gifts:

- He leaves us the ability to do "greater things." If we are one with him we should do his work – and he gives us the ability to do it.
- He gives us the Counselor, so that we should be guided, as He was, by God's own wisdom.
- He gives us peace. As he saw all things and was at peace with the results, so should we be.

Oneness with the disciples

Christ is very free with the preposition "in." It is the word he uses to express oneness.

- (Verse 20). He says the Father is "in" him, he is "in" the Father, and the disciples "in" him. It works spiritually, not geometrically.
- Likewise, there is a similar use of the word love (see verse 21).
- He tells the disciples that we (the Trinity) will "make our home" in the disciple. The word "home" is the same translated as "rooms" in verse 2).

Finally, he tells us, "I will come to you" (verse 18). It is comfort itself.

The secret of oneness: obedience

So how then do I develop this oneness with Christ? The answer is simply, obedience.

- In verse 31 we have the example of Christ – obedient to the Father. And why? Because he loves the Father.
- He then conveys that example (see verses 23-24) to us. Indeed, it is the IFF statement we have been looking for – IFF you love Christ, you will obey his commands. So love is required for obedience, and obedience for love.
- But – as Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed out – "only those who obey, believe." We all know that only those who believe, obey. But disobedience is a barrier to faith as well as to love.

Do you love me? Keep my commandments.

Church and World - John 15-16:4

John's Gospel often contains sayings by Christ that take some time to absorb. John, writing in his later days, is very familiar with Greek philosophy (see John 1 for a good example of this), so his writing often selects the philosophical side of the teachings of Christ.

The Vine

John 15:1-8 NIV

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. (2) He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[1] so that it will be even more fruitful. (3) You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (4) Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (5) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (7) If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (8) This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Pruning

It is a fact of life for Bible teachers, college and otherwise: the students move on. Whether or not you are a teacher, those in your life who are growing in Christ because of you are eventually removed from you and given to someone else. It's the same thing in evangelism. As a teacher, I have asked, "why?" Here are some reasons:

- First, so that the teacher's pride be kept in check. Just when you get very pleased with a student's faithfulness, God prunes them away to remind you that you are not the only teacher with His words on your tongue.
- It's also so that the "pruned" may grow. No teacher ever has all the answers, nor can his points of emphasis be all-inclusive. People have differing needs at differing times; God meets these needs by moving people to new teachers.
- Finally, there is this: a teacher can only work with so many people at a time. God prunes some so that others might arrive.

Signs of a good relationship

The same principle applies in our personal lives. We can use this to ask ourselves some questions which will give us a good idea of how our life in Christ is growing. For example:

- Can we see ourselves bearing fruit in the lives of others?
- Does God prune people away from you?
- Do Christ's words remain in you? Does Scripture come readily to mind?
- Are your prayers answered?
- Does your life bring glory to God? Especially at the price of persecution?

True vine

Note that Christ says He is the "true" vine – which implies that there are others, who are false. Indeed, "the true" vine implies that *all* others are false. This picture carries some interesting implications:

- He is the only mediator between us and God the Father. If you want to be saved, He is the only way.
- He is the only source of true life. All the other vines are plastic.
- Only through him are we connected to God; but also only through him are we connected to each other. If you are not in the church, you are not on the vine, buddy.

Love One Another

John 15:9-17 NIV "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. (10) If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. (11) I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (12) My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. (13) Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (14) You are my friends if you do what I command. (15) I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (16) You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. (17) This is my command: Love each other.

Relationship of love and obedience

For some, the idea that obedience to God implies love of God, and vice versa, is intuitively obvious. For the rest of us, we offer the following instructional aids:

- First, there is the example of Christ. His obedience to the Father is perfect, and he tells us here that this is because his love of the Father is also perfect. As Christians, we are the imitators of Christ – and the Father treats us similarly. He will reward obedience with love, which encourages even more obedience.
- For those in need of a picture, here's one. Consider the commonly portrayed DNA double helix. Imagine that the genes on one side all say "love" while those on the other say "obedience." We keep adding love, one little element at a time – which requires us to add a similar element of obedience. Otherwise, the spiral helix is out of balance. Note that perfect obedience from the very start is not required; just that love and obedience match, and the spiral continues to grow.

It grows into perfection. When does it reach that point? When your joy is complete. That's the objective of love and obedience pairs – joy in Christ!

Progression: servant, friend, brother

We see here the first two steps in the progression which takes us from being strangers to Christ into being his brothers and sisters. This too is growth:

- We begin as servants – those who are not at all certain where our service will lead, nor what its results might be. We know but two things: to serve is to follow, and that service to God brings honor from God.[170]
- We soon become the friends of Christ (verse 15). Friends know the plan! As we mature we read the Scriptures more and more; in our prayers we see more and more, and soon come to see just what God has planned for the world – and to some extent for us personally.
- Finally, we are made brothers and sisters to Christ, co-heirs of the kingdom of God.[171] (When we come to him, we already are such; it just takes a while to comprehend it.)

---

[170] John 12:26

That's often where the pruning takes place – at maturity.

Whatever you ask

There is a problem here: here again is one of those passages that suggests that our prayers are like magic wands. All we have to do is ask, and God will perform it – including all the prayers that are contradictory. Remembering that God is not the author of confusion[172], we can discard the contradictory. But there still remains the fact: we don't get everything we ask for. Why not?

- One reason is that we ignore the condition given here: the purpose of this power – so that we will bear much fruit.
- We also forget that it is conditioned in love and obedience.

As James puts it:

James 4:2-3 NIV You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. (3) When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Motive, it seems, counts.

The Church and the World

John 15:18-16:4 NIV "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. (19) If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (20) Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.'[2] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (21) They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. (22) If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. (23) He who hates me hates my Father as well. (24) If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. (25) But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'[3] (26) "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. (27) And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. (16:1) "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. (2) They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. (3) They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. (4) I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

The world hates

It is a fact: the Christian loves; the world hates – indeed, hates without cause. It sometimes puzzles the Christian to discover that Mr. Nice Guy is hated and despised, and can't figure out why. Here are some thoughts:

---

[171] Romans 8:13-17. Our brotherhood is first proclaimed in John 20:17, *after* the resurrection
[172] 1st Corinthians 14:33, phrasing from the King James.

- *Methods.* The world's methods start and end with power. The Christian method is love and sacrifice. This arouses suspicion in the worldly; obviously these Christians must be up to something sinister – because their method makes no obvious sense. It's a conspiracy! It's also a nettlesome example.
- *Goals.* The world seeks after the material. Since they know there is no God, there is no heaven or hell, no judgment to come (or now, either). Therefore, grab all you can while you can. The ends justify the means – and the ends are all about self.
- *Worship.* Man, it seems, is capable of worshiping only one God at a time. The modern choice is God Almighty or Self Almighty, and most of the world has chosen self. It's a very old story. The worship of self yields envy, lust, anger, sloth, gluttony, greed and most of all pride.

So why are we hated?

OK, I can see why man hates God – but why us?

- First, because we are in Him and He is in us. Satan sees this clearly, and he is the prince of this world. There are no accidents!
- Second, because we are salt and light. When the light goes on, the cockroaches scatter – but they don't like it. They will create darkness whenever and wherever they can.

What shall we do about it?

There's not much we can do about Satan in general; just what are we to do with this?

- Expect it! To the world the end justifies the means, so they will use social pressure, deception[173], legal process and eventually deadly force to push away the brothers of Christ.
- Have a ready defense for what you believe! As Peter put it,

1 Peter 3:14-15 NIV But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear[2]; do not be frightened."[3] (15) But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

- Finally, count it all joy when you suffer for the faith. It is an honor to you; Satan has recognized a worthy foe. It shows your Christ likeness. It means that God will bless you for it.

---

[173] For example, the Kinsey report's justification of adultery.

On the Holy Spirit - John 16:5-15

The Trinity is indeed a great mystery. But no part of the Trinity is more a mystery than the Holy Spirit. We see in outline form here the various roles and functions of the Holy Spirit:

John 16:5-15 NASB "But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' (6) "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. (7) "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. (8) "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; (9) concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; (10) and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; (11) and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (12) "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. (13) "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (14) "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. (15) "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

The Holy Spirit As…

It is easiest, perhaps, to teach the roles of the Holy Spirit as given here. There are three which may be concluded from the various translations of the word here translated as "Helper."

Advocate

Also known as intercessor, there are two prominent forms of this:

- Have you ever known *what* you wanted to pray for – but not how? Wish you could have a translator? Often enough we understand our own motives well enough to know that we can't be pure enough to "put it right." How can I say "thy will be done" at the same time as "Lord, I need?" I don't know how, but the Spirit does.[174]
- Sometimes it's not what I want but how I feel. To be specific, lonely, left out, misunderstood and wondering why I'm the only one to feel like that. The Spirit then connects us to our Father in heaven[175], who wants us to be in fellowship with him.

Counselor

Things go both ways. We need to speak to God, but we also need to listen. The Spirit does this for us as well. For example:

- The Spirit is a frequent guide to "what to do next." The Apostle Paul was guided this way geographically[176]; others have a similar story to tell.[177]
- The Spirit is also the counselor to the church, being concerned with the unity of the church.[178] It is good for us to dwell together in unity.

---

[174] Romans 8:26-27
[175] Galatians 4:6
[176] Acts 16:6-7
[177] Including your author
[178] Ephesians 4:1-6

- The most frequent source of counsel for the Christian is the Bible, the Word of God. It is no accident that this is described as the "sword of the Spirit."[179] Is it any wonder, therefore, that we hear Christians say that the Word was speaking to them?

Comforter

Sometimes you just need an arm around your shoulders. It is a great comfort to know that God will not forsake you; indeed, more than that the Spirit resides in you.[180] If there is one time at which a Christian needs such comfort, it is at the death of a loved one. Is not the Spirit the pledge of life to come?[181]

Convicting the World

(The astute reader will note that the Scripture is taken from the NASB, not the NIV. The reason is found in verse 8. The NIV, almost alone, adds the phrase "of guilt" to the text. This is a reflection of the modern view that guilt is a feeling, not a fact. A similar reasoning will tell you why the NIV often refers to sinners as "sinners." Sin and guilt are just emotions in this view, and with proper counseling will go away. The view is entirely modern; there is no evidence that Christ, the Apostles or anyone else before the 20th century ever believed this nonsense.)

Sin

What about this concept, sin? Christ tells us that it is the work of the Spirit to convict the world of sin – because they did not believe Christ. The argument is simple: Christ on this earth gave convincing proof that he was supreme over sin – and the religious leaders of his time simply refused to believe. While He was in the world there was time for repentance; now all time is urgent.

How so? Sin is a fact, not a feeling. So even if I don't "feel" sinful, I am a sinner. This is the first step on the road to salvation, realizing that I'm not perfect, and I need to do something about it. So for the world, this is the "first contact" point.

For those who are already Christians, conviction of sin is just as important – for it leads to repentance. Indeed, we are told to "walk in the Spirit."[182]

Righteousness

Christ then tells us the world is to be convicted of righteousness "because I go to the Father." Huh? The explanation is simple: He lived a blameless life. He is sinless. Therefore, righteousness does exist – we have the example in front of our faces. So it's not hopeless!

This carries some important implications:

- All this presumes the existence of right and wrong. If right and wrong both exist, then righteousness exists.

---

[179] Ephesians 6:17
[180] 1st Corinthians 3:16
[181] 2nd Corinthians 5:5
[182] Romans 8:1-14

- And with whom does it exist, if not with God? God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are righteous. And I'm not. There's step 2.
- Because of this, I am separated from God until I accept his pardon.

Judgment

Christ then brings up judgment – "because the prince of this world is judged." How is this? Because the prince of this world, Satan, has condemned an innocent man. All others who died were sinners, and Satan can plead that they deserved it – in a sense, they are his lawful prey. But not Christ. Satan is shown for what he is.

Do you not see that God, who is righteousness, MUST judge the world – and its prince? This case is so clear as to leave no doubt; God must judge. And if he judges its prince, He must judge the world with him. This is step 3.

BUT – by His great love he has offered us mercy, for Christ is our atonement sacrifice. His justice is satisfied by this, and he offers us this as his grace. This, if you will, is step 4 – accepting his grace.

Now you understand the unforgivable sin: If you will not follow all the steps, you will not be saved. If you deny your sinfulness, you will not get to step 2. If you deny God's righteousness, you will not get to step 3. If you ignore his warning of judgment, you will not get to step 4. And if you will not accept his grace (step 4) then you *will not be saved.* That's why the sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable.

The Spirit of Truth

We may see the connection of the Holy Spirit to Truth in several ways.

Guide to all truth

How does the Spirit guide us into all truth?

- One way is in public speaking – we are told not to worry about what we will say, the Spirit will guide us.[183]
- Sometimes there are changes necessary in the church – for example, when Peter had to be convinced that Gentiles had a place in the church as well as Jews.[184]
- Most of all, the Spirit sees the deep things of God – and brings them to us.[185]

Not his own

We should not need to point this out, but in this day and age it seems prudent to do so. There is only one Truth. Period. Therefore the Spirit doesn't proclaim the "Spirit's truth" (as opposed to Christ's, or the Father's.) Instead we find that the Spirit (verse 14) glorifies Christ, not Himself. He does this by taking what is Christ's (which is also what is God the Father's) and conveying it on Christ's behalf (verse 15).

---

[183] Mark 13:11, but see also 1st Peter 3:15
[184] Acts 10:44-47
[185] 1st Corinthians 2:10-14

This is sometimes confusing. May I give you a simple mnemonic for how this works? The ancient church held that all good things came "from the Father, by the Son, through the Spirit." It helps to know your prepositions.

What is to come

An often neglected aspect of the Spirit's ministry is that of prophecy – the foretelling of things to come.

- It may surprise you to learn this, but *all* prophecy comes through the Spirit.[186]
- One good example of this is given by Paul[187], where he teaches us that in the last days some will fall away. Hmmmmmm.
- But there is a most solemn example of this. Seven times in the Book of Revelation[188] we are warned "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The Spirit is comfort and guide; the Spirit convicts the world of sin and judgment – and brings the church into all truth, no matter how disturbing that might be.

---

[186] 2nd Peter 1:21
[187] 1st Timothy 4:1
[188] Starting with Revelation 2:7, for each of the seven churches.

High Prayer - John 17

(The reader will note that two rather different treatments of this chapter are also available on our web site. It is a very rich passage.)

Jesus Prays for Himself

John 17:1-5 NASB Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, (2) even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. (3) "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (4) "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. (5) "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Glory

The glory of God is a subject passing the perception of man. We can simply note a few items:

- This glory of Christ is pre-incarnate. Christ is eternal, and before time was created (if I might say, "before") the glory of God was the glory of Christ.
- Stunningly, we are told[189] that we too shall receive this glory with Christ. You have never met a mere mortal!
- This glory proceeds from the Father – for Christ asks to God to glorify him "with Yourself." The glory of God is part of the very nature of God. As Aquinas might put it, it is one of God's attributes, and therefore it is one of Christ's attributes.

Authority

The Greek word here is not simply "authority" in English; it also carries with it the meaning of "power." What is stunning in this passage is the purpose given for this authority. It is not so that Christ may lord it over humanity; rather, its purpose is so that *we may have eternal life.*

Think of that! So great is Christ's authority that it extends to giving eternal life to those whom He loves. More than that, the reason such awesome authority is given comes out to be the love Christ has for us – that we might be saved.

Eternal life

There are two ways in which we may take the verb, "to know." We use it to mean that we are acquainted with someone or something; we also use it to mean a deep understanding – as in, "he really knows his stuff." The word used here could be translated, "really know."

To really know what? Not what, who. First, to know God is eternal life. If you know God, you will know Christ (and vice versa). The "personal relationship" so beloved of Southern Baptists carries this truth: if you memorize the Scripture, but do not know the very heart of God, it is vanity, as Solomon would say.

---

[189] Romans 8:17

On the Father

John 17:6-8 NASB "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (7) "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; (8) for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.

The Father, the source

There is an old expression of the church that good things come "from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit." Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father.[190] What gift, then, has the Son brought us from the Father?

- First, there is the Name of God. When you know someone by name, it's personal! We do not worship an abstract "force" but one who has taken the astonishing step of introducing Himself personally.
- We also have, obviously, the words of God – as revealed by Christ. Indeed, Christ is *the* Word of God.
- Even the disciples themselves are gifts of God the Father, given to the Son. (Did you ever think of yourself as God's gift to Jesus? Think about that one for a while.)

Through Christ

The Father is spirit; how can He give us things in a material world? Through His Son, who was sent into that material world for us. And what does this result in? Our belief, our faith. God did this for us, out of His great love.

Intercession for Disciples

John 17:9-13 NASB "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; (10) and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. (11) "I am no longer in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We *are.* (12) "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. (13) "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

Glory to Christ, from the disciples

Look at verse 10. Did you ever think of yourself as bringing glory to Christ? Well, you do – or at least you should. Christ speaks this aloud so that his disciples will know this fact, from which we may conclude that it is not entirely obvious. If we bring glory to Christ, do we not thus automatically bring glory to God? Makes you want to think about your conduct, doesn't it?

---

[190] James 1:17; the phrasing is from the King James.

Protected by the Name

There's an obvious problem here. Christ is leaving – but the disciples are not. They are still in the world. They are citizens of the kingdom, and therefore the world hates them. Christ has overcome the world[191], but they haven't. Yet. So Christ provides them with the protection they will need – not just to resist, but to triumph. A protection so strong that even death cannot threaten it – the Name of God. In this Name, triumph.

So why is Christ telling them this? Is it so that they won't be so afraid? No; he is telling this to them so that they might have joy! In this we imitate our Lord, who despised the Cross for the joy set before Him.[192]

Disciples in the World

John 17:14-19 NASB "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (15) "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one.* (16) "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (17) "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (18) "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. (19) "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

We have a problem: if we love Christ as we should, the world hates us.

In the world, not of the world

To every problem, there is a solution: neat, plausible, and wrong. Such a solution would be to simply take the disciples out of this world. Start again on another planet, say. God has chosen instead to protect us while we're here.

But protect us from what? Persecution, beatings, death by the cruelest of means – millions of Christians have been quite literally crucified – don't seem to be included. Nor are they. We are protected from the real dangers. Do not fear the one who can kill the body, but the soul.[193] We are citizens of the Kingdom of God; therefore we are aliens here. And you know how aliens are treated in this country.

Sanctified by Truth

Let us be clear about something. Christians *are* different. They're sanctified, or holy. The word means to be set apart for a particular use. In our case, the use is spreading the kingdom of God. Why do we need to be set apart like that? Because of the Truth.

Truth has no fellowship with lies; truth that is mixed with lies is, by definition, no longer the truth. Each of us has a decision to make: go with the truth, or go with the convenient. If you choose the truth, that sets you apart.

God expresses this in prophetic language:

---

[191] John 16:33
[192] Hebrews 12:2
[193] Matthew 10:28

Zechariah 8:3 NASB "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain.'

It appears that Truth is so much the nature of God, and is so inseparable from holiness, that even at His return we find this division.

Sent into the world

We may not be "of the world" but we are certainly sent into it. It is not an accident. The great commission is clear. But we may ask why God would do such a thing; why didn't he send a string of angels (for example) to do the job?

Simply put, we are ambassadors of reconciliation.[194] As such, only humans will do – for an ambassador must be able to deal with the citizens of the land to which he has sent. We're the ones who know, personally, what it is to be sinners – and what it is to be saved.

Prayer for the Church

John 17:20-26 NASB "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; (21) that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (22) "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; (23) I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (24) "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (25) "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; (26) and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

It is an astonishing fact: Christ, on the last night of his life, prays for us – the church.

Unity

He prays on our behalf for our unity. Why?

- So that we may be like God – who is One, yet three persons.
- For the sake of the lost – that they might see one church, just as there is one way to God.
- For our own sakes – division in the church is painful!

Knowing God

All thought to the contrary withstanding, we're the ones who know God – not the folks of the world. Oprah will create her God in her own image, and call it good. But the truth is not something we create; the Truth Is. We know that. We must proclaim what we know.

---

[194] 2nd Corinthians 5:19

What the world should see in the church

We know one answer already: unity. But there is another here: unity – so that the world may know that the Father has sent Christ to us. Everything revolves around that mission: bringing others to know Who He Is. There is only one question that counts: "who do you say He is?"

How are they going to see that? What will convince them? The mechanism might be preaching, but the underlying power is this: the love of God. If we have the love of God within us, given by the Spirit, then we become a picture of Christ to the world. God is love, and love walked among us. Now we should walk in the world in that same love.

Garden Prayer - Matthew 26:31-46

The emotional scenes in the Garden of Gethsemane have a powerful influence on Christians of all ages. There are many things we can learn here.

Peter's Protest

Matthew 26:31-35 NIV Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

" 'I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'[3] (32) But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." (33) Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." (34) "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." (35) But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Motives

"It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere." Oh yes it does. Let's look at the motives here:

- Christ, of his foreknowledge, is warning Peter and the other disciples of what is to come. Have you ever been warned, ignored the warning and come to regret it?
- Peter's motive is, in some ways, higher. He reacts out of his great love for Christ. He genuinely loves; he genuinely believes that therefore he will be faithful.

There is a lesson here: the more we are sure of our faith, the more we should beware of the weakness of the flesh.

Peter's faults

So, since we should take warning, can we identify what Peter did wrong?

- First, he contradicted the Lord's words. If the heavens were to open and God Almighty gave you his instructions, would you tell him that he's wrong? Why then would you think the Scripture doesn't apply to you?
- Next, he set himself above the others (big mouth.) When Christ is explaining your failings it is not wise to act like you're the cream of the crop.
- Worst, he presumed he had the power to persevere, as well as the will. James tells us that we should preface our plans with, "If the Lord wills…"[195] After the Resurrection, his attitude was changed.

Results

It is a truth: God allows no evil out of which he cannot make a greater good. Peter's fall here is an excellent example:

- It certainly had the effect of healing his pride. (Did you ever think that pride needs to be healed?)
- It convinced him of his human frailty.
- Most of all, it convinced him of his own unworthiness.

---

[195] James 4:15

That last might be most important. This is a man who was crucified upside down, saying that he was not worthy to die the same death as his Lord. Remember "silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you?"[196]

Going to Prayer

Matthew 26:36-38 NIV Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." (37) He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. (38) Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Overwhelmed

This can be a troubling passage. How is it that the Son of God can be sorrowful and troubled? Is it possible he is afraid?

Indeed, yes. We must always remember that Christ is completely human, like us. He was hungry; he wept. So what was the cause of this agony?

- Pain and death were coming, and he knew it.
- Worse, there would be separation from the Father.
- This would happen after Judas betrayed him and all his disciples – his friends – left him.

Humanity of Christ

We can see the humanity of Christ in a homely way here.

- He takes his three closest friends with him. In times of trial we do not want to be alone; nor did our Lord.
- But, also, he wants to pray alone. He wants his personal agony to remain just that: personal. Have you ever had a trouble so deep that you could share it only with God?
- He asks his friends to "keep watch." The word implies staying awake. Maybe he just wanted someone to watch his back while he prayed.

Disciples

We can see the great love that the disciples had for Jesus, for they had to be told to "stay here." They were inseparable from Christ, though now they were to be separated. Indeed, all the disciples went with him to the Garden; three came further on in. Could the others have been left behind somehow? Such a request would have caused division among those for whom Christ had just prayed for unity.

We can glean some examples from this with regard to our prayer life:

- We are taught to pray alone – as Christ does here.[197]
- Christ prayed three times – did you think the Father didn't hear him the first two? Surely this is our example in persistence in prayer.

---

[196] Acts 3:5
[197] Matthew 6:6

- Christ fell on the ground to pray, in humility.[198] If the Son of God approached the Father in such humility, how then should we pray?

Christ at Prayer

Matthew 26:39-46 NIV Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (40) Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. (41) "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (42) He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." (43) When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. (44) So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. (45) Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. (46) Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

What does he ask of his friends?

It often amazes Christians that Christ does not often make great demands upon his followers – rather he asks faithfulness in the ordinary. Here is the great example of this:

- He asks them to "keep watch" – simply put, stay awake and alert. Spiritually, this is sound advice. Don't let the world lull you into security, but watch!
- He asks them to pray – to avoid temptation. The frailty of the flesh is such that we should pray, "lead us not into temptation" long before we plead for strength in temptation.
- He tells us to remember that the flesh is weak. We are inclined to examine ourselves based on what we believe rather than what we really can do. Just because I believe I could be a weightlifter…

Tension

There is a simple lesson here in opposing tensions. The human nature of Christ asks that the cup pass from him – that his frail flesh should not be subjected to the Passion to come. The divine nature asks, as always, "your will be done." The lesson for us? We should never seek out pain and suffering, nor temptation, always seeking to be sheltered under the wings of God – but if it comes, we should submit to it as being God's will. (There are many things I don't understand; "why" precedes most of them.)

If possible

One last problem remains. Christ prayed, "if it be possible." Apparently it was not possible – but we are told that all things are possible with God. How can this be?

We must, with Aristotle, distinguish the "possible impossible" from the "impossible impossible." God can do the first, and will not do the second. How so?

- Putting the words "God can" in front of nonsense does not make nonsense possible. "God can … make yellow either square or round." It's nonsense; God does not do nonsense.[199]

---

[198] Mark 14:35

- God is not the author of confusion.[200] He will not intentionally befuddle us; we have sufficient capability for that ourselves.
- God's actions will not contradict his character. He will not lie; he will love at all times.
- Christ's prayers reflect this. He begins with "if it is possible." He goes on to "if it is not possible." But in every prayer, "Your will be done."

All of his humanity is in submission to the Father. It is a great example for us.

---

[199] Which also answers whether or not God can make a rock so big he can't lift it. Great mysteries of kindergarten, now solved.

[200] Eloquently expressed in the King James, 1st Corinthians 14:33

Trials – Legal and Otherwise - Various Scriptures

"Nothing is ever a total loss – it can always be used as a bad example." We shall find both good and bad examples here. The good example is Christ, and his conduct in the face of persecution. The bad examples will show us the perversion of justice for the expediency of the state.

The Arrest

John 18:2-12 NASB Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. (3) Judas then, having received the *Roman* cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, *came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. (4) So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and *said to them, "Whom do you seek?" (5) They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He *said to them, "I am *He.*" And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. (6) So when He said to them, "I am *He,*" they drew back and fell to the ground. (7) Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." (8) Jesus answered, "I told you that I am *He;* so if you seek Me, let these go their way," (9) to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." (10) Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. (11) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (12) So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him,

All four Gospels record this incident, which signifies its importance. We may see here the tragedy begin:

- First, Jesus is betrayed by Judas, one of the twelve who have been with him since the beginning of his ministry.
- Peter – who will later deny him – reacts in a very wrong way. He defends the Prince of Peace with the sword. (Luke assures us that the servant was healed by Jesus.) Jesus rebukes him for this; those who live by the world's ways do not live by God's way.
- All the disciples leave him – in accord with prophecy. Jesus, alone, will pay the price of reconciliation. It is as planned; it is as Jesus wanted it; but it still leaves him alone.

We may point out one more thing: the awe in which the mob held him. No number of chickens ever added up to one lion. Jesus has great courage; he will need it.

Trial before Annas

John 18:12-14 NASB So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, (13) and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. (14) Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

John 18:19-24 NASB The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. (20) Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. (21) "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." (22) When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" (23) Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" (24) So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

(It must be remembered that inner Jerusalem of that time was about two miles along the diagonal – so all these trials in so short a time are indeed feasible.)

Annas brings two charges which are favorites of those who pervert justice:

- First, there is his teaching. Remember that most societies permit only the veneer of free speech – controlling what is said in public, by fear, uncertainty and doubt, is a common form of government power.
- The next is more familiar to modern students: conspiracy. Have you ever heard of a conspiracy theory without some evil intent to it? Those who do good need not conspire in secret to do it, the argument goes.

  In short, there is plotting in the dark here. We want the names of all the conspirators.

Christ's defense is rather straightforward. It consists of the truth, put directly. If the doctrine is pernicious, produce witnesses to testify to it! If there is something wrong, be specific.

That last is most important. It used to be a hallmark of English and American justice that a defendant could only be tried for a crime known to the law. You had to be able to point to law and section for the accusation; only those accusations could be tried in court. Now, very generic crimes are allowed.

Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin

Mark 14:53-65 NASB They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes *gathered together. (54) Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. (55) Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. (56) For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. (57) Some stood up and *began* to give false testimony against Him, saying, (58) "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" (59) Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. (60) The high priest stood up *and came* forward and questioned Jesus, saying, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" (61) But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed *One?*" (62) And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." (63) Tearing his clothes, the high priest *said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? (64) "You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. (65) Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophesy!" And the officers received Him with slaps *in the face.*

We see here another common perversion of justice. In our own times we have seen too many men acquitted after years in prison by having the crime scene DNA analyzed – and discovering that the "guilty" man had nothing to do with it. One way we do it is with jailhouse informants – men who receive a reduced sentence in return for cooperation. Something of the same sort happened here. As is often the case, when in a hurry, the witnesses didn't have time to get their stories together.

But Caiaphas knows the simple road. There is one thing that this man will not deny: he has openly claimed to be the Christ. Since they "know" that he can't be the Christ, he must be guilty of blasphemy. The logical fallacy is easy to spot, but here there is no other conclusion in anyone's mind.

The question, however, has not lost its importance: Just who do you say this Jesus of Nazareth is? Is he the liar, the lunatic or the Lord?

Pilate – Round One

John 18:28-40 NASB Then they *led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. (29) Therefore Pilate went out to them and *said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" (30) They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." (31) So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," (32) to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die. (33) Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" (34) Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" (35) Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" (36) Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (37) Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (38) Pilate *said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and *said to them, "I find no guilt in Him. (39) "But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" (40) So they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

Television viewers will no doubt recognize the phrase, "perp walk." The accused is paraded before TV cameras, in handcuffs, in what has become almost a ceremonial fashion. The idea is to set in the public's mind a clear conviction of the person's guilt. The technique has its ancestor here: we wouldn't have arrested him if he hadn't done something.

Pilate is an experienced bureaucrat of the Roman Empire, and he knows what to do with this. It was a point of pride of the Romans that they brought justice with their conquests. You must remember that justice at this time, outside Roman justice, was largely a function of the justice of the individual ruler. You pleaded your case before the local prince, and he gave you whatever justice you were going to get. The Roman system was a great improvement on this, and Pilate is concerned to preserve the appearance of justice.

So he attempts to pass the buck back to the Jews. The man seems to have violated some Jewish law, but nothing a Roman magistrate would consider a crime. Fine. Try him yourself. Then comes the problem: the Romans did not permit the Jews capital punishment. We want him dead; you'll have to do it.

At this point Pilate – other accounts tell us – found Jesus' silence very frustrating. In Roman law the accused was required to defend himself; otherwise, it might not be a valid trial. Only when Pilate asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews does he get a response. Even then, Pilate isn't sure what to do with it.

Frankly, my dear, Pilate doesn't give a &*((). But there is one revealing moment here: "What is truth?" Pilate the cynic would be at home in modern intellectual circles.

Herod

Luke 23:6-12 NASB When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. (7) And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. (8) Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. (9) And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. (10) And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. (11) And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. (12) Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.

Pilate is nothing if not an experienced politician. The man is a Galilean. Herod is in town. What simpler solution could you want – hand him over to the tame king set up under Roman rule. The technique is classic: passing the buck.

Herod, like so many others of us, has a method for determining if Jesus is really who he says he is. He'll just tell him to perform a miracle for him. I hope you see that this is indeed a contradiction of God's character. The Lord of the universe does not perform miracles on command, like some petty fraud. Just to make such a demand is reason enough to deny it.

Pilate, Round 2

Matthew 27:15-26 NASB Now at *the* feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people *any* one prisoner whom they wanted. (16) At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. (17) So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" (18) For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over. (19) While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him *a message,* saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." (20) But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. (21) But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." (22) Pilate *said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all *said, "Crucify Him!" (23) And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!" (24) When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see *to that* yourselves." (25) And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" (26) Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

We may note four things to our understanding:

- First, Pilate acknowledges that he finds no guilt in the man. He flatly tells the mob the man is innocent. But their leadership wants blood.
- Pilate personally has been warned by his wife to get out of this mess and hand it back to the Jews. Dreams were taken seriously in those days, and the standard bearer for Roman justice could not help but feel the guilt. Pilate was a just and merciful man – until it got risky.
- He adopts, therefore, what might be called the "poison pill" defense. OK, I'll crucify the man for you – but you get Barabbas instead.
- All practical help at an end, Pilate resorts to the symbolic. He washes his hands in front of the crowd. It is a pivotal moment, for it causes the Jews to acknowledge that they killed the Christ. The results have haunted them since.[201]

Pilate feels rewarded. He has disavowed responsibility and – a great triumph – he has the notoriously rebellious Jewish leadership chanting, "We have no king but Caesar." It should be a triumphant moment for Pilate. Instead, it seals his fate for history.

One last thing we may note: Except to confirm the truth of his being the Messiah, Jesus does not bother to defend himself. When faced with unjust persecution, the Christian will do well to imitate this. This is the way our world treated the Son of God, the Messiah. Do you think his followers deserve better?

[201] It should not be necessary to add that this does not justify the Christian slaughtering the Jew – but sometimes the random reader misses these things.

Small Things - Matthew 27:26-66 and parallel passages

The parallel passages are Mark 15:16-47; Luke 23:26-56 and John 19:17-42; it would be wise to have readers with their Bibles open to each of the four. Space and time constrain us to omit the actual Scriptures from these texts (there are copyright issues involved).

We consider the small things about the Crucifixion – small objects, small people and small examples.

Small Objects

One may look through the catalog of various Catholic relics which are alleged to date from this time. It seems that nothing was let go; everything was preserved. Much of it lately has been carbon dated to anywhere from AD 300 or so (when Helen, Constantine's mother, was collecting same) on up through the AD 1400 time frame (Shroud of Turin). This should not deflect us from learning from these small objects. In these objects we see the symbols of much larger things.

The robe

The robe is scarlet, according to Matthew, which by its blood color represents the life of Jesus to be poured out for the sins of the world. Mark denotes it as purple, the color of royalty. (Much argument between commentators).

Crown of thorns

Most of us quickly see the royalty of Christ in this, but I would remind you that this is a crown of *thorns*. It symbolizes the lifting of the ancient curse on the ground because of Adam.[202]

The reed

The reed symbolizes a great deal. Christian writers over the ages have seen several symbolic representations here:

- First, it appears as a scepter, signifying that Christ is indeed the King of the Jews.
- It is also (remember Ezekiel?) a measuring device – by which the temple and the city of Jerusalem are measured. Christ thus measures the world; he will be our judge.
- It is also a sign of weakness[203] - the weakness shown in Christ's first advent, by comparison with his second coming.
- In that second coming, the reed will be seen as the staff of Moses – which, when cast down before Pharaoh, became a snake which ate those of the magicians. The parallel to the destruction of Satan is clear.[204]

The veil of the Temple

One may simply note here that the veil is torn "top to bottom" – God opening the way into the Holy of Holies, where the High Priest brings atonement. As the priest went in only once a year, so our High Priest brings atonement once alone – sufficient for all mankind for all time.

---

[202] Genesis 3:17-18
[203] Isaiah 36:6
[204] Exodus 7:9-13

Golgotha

The "place of the skull," it was a site of execution commonly used. One symbol I would point out: it is outside the city walls – therefore Christ's sacrifice was not just for the Jews but for the entire world.

The placard

The placard proclaims the king of the Jews in three languages – a symbol of the universal nature of the Gospel. It also might symbolize three aspects of our lives – personal (Hebrew, the language of the people), business (Greek, the language of trade) and official (Latin, the language of the Roman Empire.)

What's interesting here is that the "official" version (Roman) says "King of the Jews." The Pharisees protest, but Pilate says simply, "What I have written, I have written." All through this passage we see things with double meanings, not clear to the participants, and this is one.

Small people

May we begin with the almost unnoticed women in Luke's account? They weep for Christ; beyond that we know nothing of them. Christ's reply in Luke 22:26-33 makes it clear that he, amidst all his suffering, is more concerned for them than for himself. Do we care for Christ so much as this?

The soldiers

A soldier's life is never an easy one. It is a life of harsh, brutal discipline - a life of fear. Hard soil, indeed. Their sense of humor is cruel; their respect for life is such that they gamble for his clothes while he dies. We need to remember that such people exist – and are not beyond the reach of Christ.

The thieves

The dichotomy of perspective here still echoes in our world today. Both thieves know Jesus as a man of spiritual power. But see the difference in attitude:

- One thief is of the opinion that he is entitled to a miraculous rescue. In short, God is just not performing up to my expectations. It's all about me, isn't it?
- The other thief knows quite well why he's on his cross – and asks for mercy.

Mercy asked for is granted. But as long as we believe that God "owes us one," we are appealing to a God who does not exist. It is well to remember that the concept of "mercy deserved" is an oxymoron.

The Centurion

A centurion is nothing if not disciplined. Those who have been in the service know that such men learn far more by example than they do by instruction. He cannot change the fate of this man, but he can learn by example. Who but God could forgive the men who crucified him?

Joseph of Arimathea

A diamond of a man! When all is lost, he goes to Pilate to beg the body. The Jew of this time would have seen this as a great act of charity, for by all known possibilities Jesus could never repay Joseph. Such charity would have been seen as a high degree of piety. A parallel today is when you help

someone out knowing that they can't repay – so you tell them to pass it on. It is a favor not only to them, but to their heavenly Father – and he will repay.

Simon of Cyrene

This poor guy, whose only fault was being in the wrong place at the wrong time, was compelled to carry the cross. Many writers see in this the idea that carrying the cross of Christ would fall not to the Jewish Christians alone, but to all of us. How fortunate it is for us that his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

A man with a sponge

We don't even know this man's name. But we do know this: he ran to get the sponge. How many of us are so instantly concerned?

The wine itself was laced with myrrh – remember those three kings? Myrrh is very bitter. Despite its anesthetic properties, Christ refuses it. It's an example to those whose solution to every problem is drugs and alcohol.[205]

Small Examples

There are two small examples I would point out to you. The first is the care of Mary, which Jesus commended to the Apostle John. It is an example for us to contemplate our deaths, and in so doing provide for the living.

The other is sublime: The Jews seal the tomb of Jesus. They know perfectly well that Jesus prophesied his own resurrection – and they are determined to prevent any such thing being plausible. It puts the lie to the tale that the disciples took the body. There is nothing quite to touch having your enemies provide the evidence.

It's an example of a grand principle. God allows no evil out of which he cannot bring a greater good. It's true in the smallest things, such as the seal, and the largest things – such as the Crucifixion itself.

---

[205] If you'd like a catalog of the wrong ways of solving life's problem, find the lyrics to "Malcolm Solves His Problems With A Chain Saw."

The Cross - Various Scriptures

If there is any one thing which strikes the reader of modern Christian literature when comparing it with older literature, it is this: the position held by the Cross. It is a central feature of older thinking; it is almost unmentioned today. If asked, today's writers would tell you the Cross is important – it's just that they don't write about it. Publishers don't want to upset their readers – and upset they will be if they hear too much of the Cross. This does not now seem like a clear and present danger.

What Christ did on the Cross

Why is the Cross so important? Consider what Christ did on the Cross.

He humbled himself

Philippians 2:8 NASB Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
Hebrews 12:2 NASB fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Would you like to get the hang of this? It's the greatest metamorphosis in history:

- Christ is equal to God the Father from eternity – there is no higher station.
- He becomes a man – like us – even to the point of death.
- What a death! It's a disgraceful, shameful death – and very painful too.

He bore our sins

1 Peter 2:24 NASB and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.
Colossians 2:14 NASB having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

It is well to remember just what we are: sinners. It is part of the fallen nature of mankind to be a sinner. For this sin, the Old Testament Law had very specific provisions. Special sacrifices were to be made – at a precise date and time, in a specific place. Those sacrifices were to be made from only the finest.

It is staggering to find this, but it is true: Jesus the Christ is our sacrifice for sin, our atonement. He died at precisely the right time, in the right place, in accordance with the Law.

Is this important? Remember that the test to be given to spirits to distinguish them from demons was this: they must confess that Jesus had come in the flesh.

- Reconciled to God

Ephesians 2:14-16 NASB For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, (15) by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, (16) and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.
Colossians 1:15-20 NASB (15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and

invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. (17) He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (18) He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (19) For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, (20) and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say,* whether things on earth or things in heaven.

It is a fact: reconciliation costs the reconciler, and benefits the reconciled. It is one person being willing to bear the consequences of another's sin. That is precisely what Christ did for us.

Remember that without Christ we are without hope. No one promises us anything like eternal life; in fact, the promise is for eternal damnation. Even in this life there would be no walk with God. But the Cross changed that:

- The Cross reconciled us to God, and in so doing
- The Cross created the church, so that now we have both Christ and each other.

What does God ask us for in return? That we would be his ambassadors of reconciliation, and spread the Good News over the earth.

We see what it means to us; Let us next see how the Apostles interpreted it.

What the Apostles did with the Cross

It has been well said that it took only twelve men to turn the world upside down. Twelve men – and one Cross. How did they see the Cross?

Stumbling block

Galatians 5:11 NASB But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.

How is the Cross a stumbling block?

- For those who seek a religion of miracles and wonders, the Cross makes no sense. Why wouldn't God just come down and liberally pass out miracles to everyone, and thus convince the world? Why is there a Cross in this? (The foolishness of God!)
- For those who seek a "scientific" religion, the Cross is equally a mystery. After all, all God has to do is put it logically – so it will fit into our finite minds. But what if it won't fit?
- For those who seek a comfortable religion, the Crucifixion seems extremely gory. Why not just a simple ascension into heaven? But what if that gore is simply the price to be paid – and religion isn't intended to be so comfortable after all?

Boasting in the Cross – alone

Galatians 6:14 NASB But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Boasting? Most of us don't think of ourselves as boasters, especially when it comes to our faith. But think about these:

- Is it boasting to cluck over the sinful nature of others, thus drawing attention to our own righteousness? We are not to judge those outside the church; nor should we judge those inside.
- Is it boasting to lay out our trials and tribulations – especially if we do this every chance we get?

No, says Paul, in the Cross of Christ I glory. It's well to remember that we're just sinners, saved by grace. The Cross is the source of our humility.

Preach Christ Crucified

1 Corinthians 1:17-25 NASB (17) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (18) For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." (20) Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (21) For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (22) For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; (23) but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, (24) but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (25) Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Recently, I read a review of a book which asked more than a dozen learned church scholars to render their opinion of Billy Graham. One complained that he was insensitive to modern scholarship on the Bible; another that he didn't do enough for civil rights; a third complained about his relationship with Richard Nixon, and on it went. Uniformly, however, all of the authors were mystified how Billy Graham was held in such high esteem and considered successful, considering how badly he had failed in each such area. The reviewer modestly suggested that his success came from his purpose – evangelism.

The Apostles would have understood, I suspect. But today how often do we hear that we don't need "old fashioned Bible thumping." What is it that we are supposed to need? Practical psychology, helpful hints on marriage – any number of things. Anything but the old, old story. Can it still be said that we preach Christ crucified?

Take Up The Cross

Of all uses of the word, the most powerful is the phrase, "take up the Cross." It is a rare subject these days for preachers. Interestingly, the concept comes solely from the teaching of Christ – it is his own phrase.

Deny himself

Matthew 16:24-27 NASB Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (25) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (26) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (27) "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

Please note the logic:

- IF you want to be a follower of Christ,
- THEN you must take up the Cross, and
- FOLLOW him.

So what's that supposed to mean? Let me give you an example.

I recently met with some college friends for dinner. The main topic of conversation was a set of lively descriptions of the cruises they had taken, or were about to take. It was not that

cruising was very pleasant; it was that it is very important! These people consider themselves Christians.

Is not the real Christian one who is crucified to the world? Cruises may be pleasant, but where do they fit in the eternal view? The answer seems to be that we now consider it a point of faith that we should live as if our lives could end any day now, and we should seize the day. Seize a pinch of Christ, and the rest of the world is yours. Have you heard the word "sacrifice" lately?

Reward

Christ does not pretend that we should go unrewarded – if we are willing to take up the Cross:

Matthew 10:38-42 NASB "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (40) "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. (41) "He who receives a prophet in *the* name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. (42) "And 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, he shall not lose his reward."

It is perhaps too high to say that if you have nothing worth dying for, you have nothing worth living for. Most of us will never be privileged to be martyrs. But if we do not place Christ first, then how can we keep the eternal view? If not Christ, what is number one?

But for those who do put Christ first, he is clear that he will reward – beyond all sense of balance. Most of us are willing to read those words – but how many will take him seriously? Do you have faith that he will provide?

Enemies of the cross

I wish I did not have to bring this passage forward to you:

Philippians 3:18-19 NASB (18) For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, (19) whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

We are faced here with what I call "consumer Christianity." Christianity is just one more good thing in this world, and we can purchase (or invest, if you like) as little or much as we choose. This is a very popular practice these days – it brings in large crowds who like the idea that they get good things from it without much personal investment. No one seems to think this a problem.

But here Paul puts it in short words: their minds are on earthly things – and they are the enemies of the Cross.

The choice is before anyone who proclaims himself to be a Christian. You can content yourself with things below, and be an enemy of the Cross – or take the higher call.

One last thought, from Thomas à Kempis:

JESUS has always many who love His heavenly kingdom, but few who bear His cross. He has many who desire consolation, but few who care for trial. He finds many to share His table, but few to take part in His fasting. All desire to be happy with Him; few wish to suffer anything for Him. Many follow Him to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the chalice of His passion. Many revere His miracles; few

approach the shame of the Cross. Many love Him as long as they encounter no hardship; many praise and bless Him as long as they receive some comfort from Him. But if Jesus hides Himself and leaves them for a while, they fall either into complaints or into deep dejection. Those, on the contrary, who love Him for His own sake and not for any comfort of their own, bless Him in all trial and anguish of heart as well as in the bliss of consolation. Even if He should never give them consolation, yet they would continue to praise Him and wish always to give Him thanks. What power there is in pure love for Jesus -- love that is free from all self-interest and self-love!

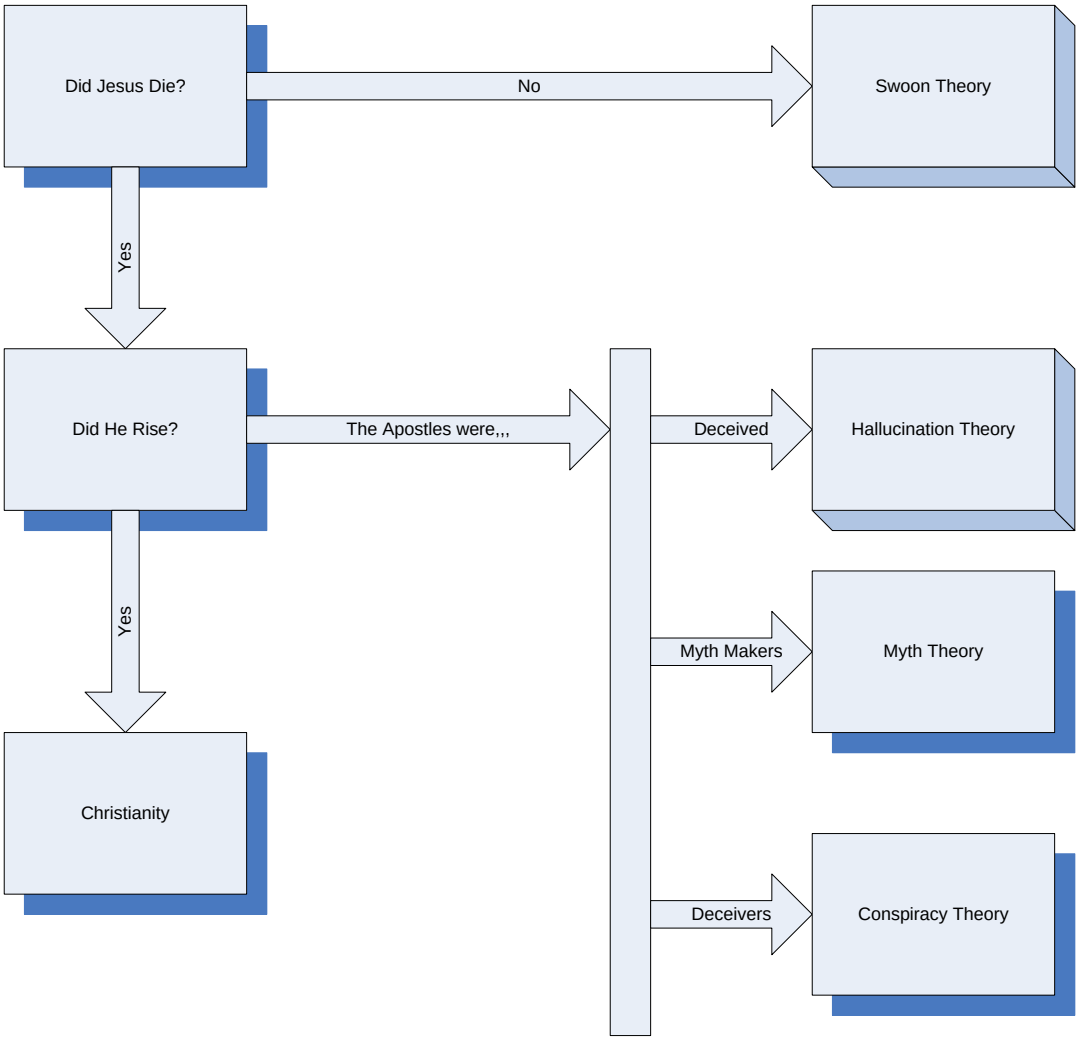
Do not those who always seek consolation deserve to be called mercenaries? Do not those who always think of their own profit and gain prove that they love themselves rather than Christ? Where can a man be found who desires to serve God for nothing? Rarely indeed is a man so spiritual as to strip himself of all things. And who shall find a man so truly poor in spirit as to be free from every creature? His value is like that of things brought from the most distant lands.

If a man give all his wealth, it is nothing; if he do great penance, it is little; if he gain all knowledge, he is still far afield; if he have great virtue and much ardent devotion, he still lacks a great deal, and especially, the one thing that is most necessary to him. What is this one thing? That leaving all, he forsake himself, completely renounce himself, and give up all private affections. Then, when he has done all that he knows ought to be done, let him consider it as nothing, let him make little of what may be considered great; let him in all honesty call himself an unprofitable servant. For truth itself has said: "When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: 'we are unprofitable servants.'"

Then he will be truly poor and stripped in spirit, and with the prophet may say: "I am alone and poor." No one, however, is more wealthy than such a man; no one is more powerful, no one freer than he who knows how to leave all things and think of himself as the least of all.

Defending the Resurrection - Various Scriptures

The Incarnation is the supreme miracle of Christianity; without it, no such religion can exist. But the miracle that is most commonly challenged as a threat to rational thought is the Resurrection. We may summarize the objections thusly:



We shall take each theory in turn, and see its logical results.

Swoon Theory

The swoon theory holds that Jesus, innocently, did not die on the cross but awakened some time later, left the tomb – and that the disciples mistook this for a true resurrection. This theory has its objections:

At the crucifixion

First, consider the history of the crucifixion itself:

- Christ foretold his resurrection – as the Pharisees clearly understood. How did he know he was going to survive the Crucifixion? More realistically, perhaps: why did he ever volunteer to do it?

- The spear in his side produced blood and water[206] – a sure sign of death by asphyxiation, caused by pneumonia. (This was the most common cause of death in crucifixion.) This was the major reason that the Journal of the American Medical Association rejected this theory.[207]
- The Romans didn't break his legs – something done to hasten death. These people knew what they were doing. The only reason for this is that he was already dead.
- The Roman soldier clearly understood that if the crucified didn't die from it, he would soon take his place. This is motivation to do the job right the first time.

Getting out of the tomb

There are some difficulties, too, in getting out of the tomb.

- First, how did the weakened, tortured Jesus roll the stone away – a stone which took several men to put in place? Which covered the entrance – no edge to grab?
- More to the point, how did such a beaten, weakened man even get out of the winding sheet wrapped around him like a cocoon? That's not easy for a fully healthy man, let alone one in this condition.
- Having performed these feats, how did he get past the guards? They didn't notice the stone moving?

After the event

Now that (somehow) he's out of the tomb, past the guards and on his way to his disciples, answer these questions:

- Why did no one notice that he was in such a weakened condition? There is no thought of bandaging up his wounds, or treating him.
- Where, for heaven's sake, did he go? By this theory he is mortal like us, and stays for forty days – and then disappears. Where did he go? Why do we hear no more of him?

The usual result of asking these questions is that "there must have been a conspiracy." We will deal with that in due course.

The Hallucination theory

This story holds that the disciples, distraught by events, hallucinated the resurrection. This has its difficulties too.

Problems with hallucinations themselves

Hallucinations have been studied medically, and such observations pose a serious problem for this theory:

- They usually last, at most, a few minutes. This one went on for forty days.
- They usually happen only once, unless you are indeed afflicted with a particular type of mental illness. This one happened over and over to a lot of people.
- Hallucinations usually are the result of our own inner processes. One thing is clear: the disciples thought the resurrection unimaginable. How, then, did they hallucinate it?

---

[206] John 19:34

[207] Edwards, William D.; Wesley J. Gabel; and Floyd E. Hosmer. "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ." Journal of the American Medical Association, 255 (1986):1455-63.

- Hallucinations don't eat real fish. Jesus did.[208]
- Hallucinations don't provide rational teaching like Jesus did.

Witnesses

- There were many witnesses with the same hallucination. How?
- These people were not New Age thinkers with something to smoke, but ordinary peasants of the time.
- Five hundred identical hallucinations at once?
- Perhaps most telling, the witnesses at each incident started by showing that they did not believe in the resurrection, but had to be convinced. That's a hallucination within a hallucination.

The corpse

By this theory the corpse is still in the tomb – which yields some potent objections:

- The stone and seal would still be there. Who would believe these people?
- The disciples would certainly have known that something funny happened, and would have verified what they thought they saw. Where? At the tomb – still sealed with the stone. In fact, this is just what the Apostles did.
- As the story spread, the Jews had every reason to stop it. They could have done so simply by producing the body. They didn't.

The Myth theory

This one is relatively recent. It runs something like this: We know that the Gospels weren't written until very late – 200 AD at the earliest, more likely 300-350 AD. The Apostles, in this version, were myth makers. The embellished the story of the real Christ until it became that of the Christ of classic Christianity. The church later added to this mythology. Thus, we can never really know the "historical Jesus." This is also called the "two layer theory" – the first layer being the historical (and unknowable) Jesus, the second the mythical one of Christianity. This is a favorite of liberals who believe in having faith in faith (often called "Easter faith.") It certainly allows you to make any number of speculations which your fellow liberals will call "brilliant." But the theory has its problems:

Evidence of the Scripture

- First, we know how myths were written in those days – even Christian myths. Such myths are easily identified by style, and were consistently rejected by the early church.
- Next, there is the date of Paul's writing. You can jabber all you want about the date of the Gospels (there is good evidence for first century dates), but virtually no scholar denies that Paul's letters were written before AD 65 – the year he was fed to the lions. Paul's letters as a whole completely reject any form of myth, and solidly affirm the resurrection.
- This may seem a curious argument today, but bear with me. The first witnesses to the resurrection are women. If you're going to create a myth, start with people who are more credible. The ancient world would not have accepted such a myth based on a woman's account.
- Peter specifically denies that the Apostles are myth makers.[209]

---

[208] John 21:12-13
[209] 2nd Peter 1:16

Other documentary evidence

We may bring forward two more items of evidence:

- There is absolutely no documentary evidence from the first through third centuries of any such myth making going on successfully. The manuscripts have very little variation in them. On the contrary, attempted myth making was consistently rejected.
- Mythology of all types was consistently rejected by the early church. For example, Chrysostom, who commented on most of the books of the New Testament, shows that his understanding in the late 4th century is virtually identical to the manuscripts from the early 2nd century. His quotations from Scripture are such that individual word discrepancies can be identified, and these are few. There are no 3rd or 4th century myths in his writing.

The Conspiracy theory

All the theories above assume that the Apostles acted in innocence. They were deceived by Jesus' recovery in the tomb; they were hallucinating; they were making myths just to make things better. But there is a more sinister version. The Apostles, in this theory, conspired to invent Christianity knowing full well that it was false. This is a very popular theory today, but it too has its problems.

The Apostles

The first set of objections has to do with the Apostles themselves.

- Despite severe torture and death, not one of the early disciples or Apostles ever confessed to conspiracy. The authorities of that time did not hesitate to use torture to get results. Despite that, there are no confessions of conspiracy – only faith. Do people act like that for something they know is a lie?
- These guys? A bunch of hick fishermen from Galilee? A conspiracy? These guys couldn't conspire their way out of a paper bag. How did they ever keep their stories straight?
- What possible motive could they have had? Sentiment for a dead Jesus? That won't last long. Money? Sure – if you can explain how they intended to profit from it. Pure masochism comes to mind – if you can explain how masochism benefits from conspiracy.
- Finally, what an imagination these fishermen had! This is a story that exceeds Tolkien or Shakespeare at their finest. How did they even dream this one up?

Conspiracy problems

Conspiracies, by their very nature, have intrinsic limits and problems. Here are some questions concerning those:

- Five hundred plus conspirators? How many people did it take to leak Watergate to the press? Can so large a conspiracy go undetected for so many years? It is absurd.
- If you're going to lie about something, wouldn't you make it an attractive lie? This is a lie that produces persecution for its adherents. Surely they could have been smarter than that.
- The Jews and the Romans had every facility for breaking such a conspiracy – and plenty of motive to do so. They tried. They failed. Conspiracies usually break down under such pressure.

Other holes in the theory

There are two other gaping holes in this theory.

- First, how did they get the body out of the tomb? Guards, huge stone, seal – all these had to be passed *and then made to look as if the resurrection had occurred.* How did they do that? Especially, how did they get the guards to cooperate – when cooperating would get the guards crucified?
- Second, if they didn't do that, why didn't the Jews simply produce the corpse?

Christianity

The last option, of course, is Christianity. If this is not the right one, then what we know as the church today sprang from fraud, hallucination, mythology or worse. How is it that such good things as Christians do come from such an evil source?

The truth is simple: the opponents of Christ do what they accuse Christians of doing: ignoring the evidence, starting with the conclusion and working backwards to a theory. Try it the other way around, folks, and see where it leads.

Epilog

(John 21)

An epilog is a literary device in which an author makes final comments. Today we will see Christ's epilog to the leaders of the church, his last lesson, in word and deed. Here it is:

(John 21 NIV) Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: {2} Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. {3} "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. {4} Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. {5} He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. {6} He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. {7} Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. {8} The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. {9} When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. {10} Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." {11} Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. {12} Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. {13} Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. {14} This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. {15} When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." {16} Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." {17} The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. {18} I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." {19} Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" {20} Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") {21} When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" {22} Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." {23} Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" {24} This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. {25} Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

This is the epilog; the exit (the Ascension) is the last act. Matthew portrays the grandeur of the exit; John, the intimate friend of Jesus, portrays this last, ordinary encounter. There is an

ordinariness about it which is quite remarkable. The disciples went fishing; it's their occupation, their trade.

Indeed, some scholars hold there is nothing miraculous in the catch. It may be that Jesus just had a better angle to see where the fish were. Whatever the case, there is one thing which is clear: Jesus invites them to breakfast. This is no ghost, no spiritual cloud, but solid flesh. It is as ordinary as a campfire breakfast.

Triplets

One of the aspects of Scripture which is often neglected is the artistic. God is creator, the author of the creative arts. In its supreme moments we see this in the Psalms, but here it is shown in the exquisite detail of forgiveness and restoration. First note the name Jesus uses for Peter: "Simon, son of John." Have you ever yelled at your kids, using their full names? I sense something of that here. It is obviously a formal occasion, for on only one other instance does Jesus use this phrasing.[210]

To understand both the art and the forgiveness, we must recall the offense. Peter has denied his Lord three times.

- "I am not" (one of his disciples)[211]
- "I am not"[212]
- But the third time[213] Mark records that he did it with curses, telling them he didn't even know what they were talking about.

This triple denial brings out a triplet restoration. It has fascinated scholars of the Greek for two millennia. Consider:

- Three times Jesus asks him if he loves him. The first time Jesus asks, he uses the Greek word *agape*, an intense love. Peter replies using *phileo*, which is used of friendship. This is repeated the second time, but the third time Jesus descends to Peter's ability and questions him with *phileo*. In the first two he sets the standard; in the third, paralleling Peter's third denial, he brings it down to what Peter can do.
- Peter replies with "you know." The first two times the Greek word is *eido*, which can roughly be translated, "know for certain, know for a fact." The third time he says, "you know (*eido*) all things," and then "you know (*ginosko*) that I love you." *Ginosko* relates more to knowing in the sense of feeling or perceiving, as in "I know that she loves me."
- Surprisingly, there is an alternation in the word translated as "feed." You'll note that in the second phrasing, the NIV translates "take care of." That's because the first and third times Jesus uses the word *bosko*, which means "feed or pasture." The second time it's *poimaino*, which means "tend, or supervise." Combine this with the progression of lambs, sheep and sheep and you can see again a progression from high to low. First is the delicate task of feeding the newborn lambs, then supervising the grown sheep, and finally down to feeding the grown lambs. From the most important down to the least important tasks of shepherding, Jesus leads Peter from self-importance to servanthood.

---

[210] John 1:42, where Jesus tells him that he will be called Cephas (Peter)
[211] John 18:16
[212] John 18:25
[213] Mark 14:70-72

The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. In this simple, beautiful example we can see some of the key points of this:

- Jesus does not ignore Peter's denials. He redeems them. So too we are not privileged to ignore sin, but rather to redeem and restore the sinner through the grace of Jesus Christ. We too must seek and save.
- Note that he restores Peter to his position as leader of the disciples. Indeed, he is instantly seen as their leader in Acts. All of us are sinners, and it is not sufficient to forgive if we will not allow the forgiven sinner to participate in the life of the forgiven church.
- No one, not even a close follower who denies you, is so far gone in sin that they cannot be redeemed. They may think that what they have done is unforgivable – but God is in the business of taking sinful failure and turning it into glorious success.
- The material with which God works often determines the results. Great sinners, it is said, make great saints.

Discipleship

This scene provides us some insight into the life of a disciple. Like other such scenes, we must infer from what we see.

The heart of a disciple

Note Peter's first reaction: John says "It is the Lord," and Peter immediately grabs his clothing and jumps in to swim to shore. Do recall that this is in the light of his three denials! Most of us (to use a C. S. Lewis phrase) would "rather let sleeping worms lie." When we sin, we don't want to see the Lord; we don't want to pray, because that would just make things worse. As with a toothache, we want something to make the pain go away – something other than a dentist. But Peter is a true disciple, despite his failures. When the chance comes, he swims toward the Lord. The repentant sinner runs toward the light, for there he finds the cleanness he desires. The unrepentant sinner runs from the light, so as to hide the filth he has.

The servant nature of discipleship

Most of us would love to be missionaries – on Waikiki Beach (I know a man who is one). But

- The servant of God is not allowed to choose his living and dying. Jesus already knows how Peter will die; now Peter knows too. Jesus knows how we will die; it's just that he hasn't shared it with us yet.
- Nor is the servant of God allowed to choose his place of service. Paul, before the Macedonian vision[214], was prohibited from going what he thought was the right direction. God had other plans.
- Nor are we allowed to make comparisons (why did he get Waikiki and I get Fullerton?) "What is that to you?" A servant stands or falls before his own master.[215]

---

[214] See Acts 16:6-7
[215] Romans 14:4

The nature of the servant's love.

There are two things that Jesus makes clear to Peter about a servant's love for his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

- Such love is expressed in obedience to his commands. The restoration does not ignore the sin, but puts Peter back on the track of obedience.[216]
- Such love from a leader of the church – and so many are leaders, whether we wish to be or not – is expressed in the phrase, "feed my sheep." It's almost like, "love me, love my kids." If you are the true servant of Jesus Christ, you will want to feed his sheep.

Last Instructions to the Leaders

Just as the night in the room of the Last Supper was a set of last minute instructions, so too is this episode. What singles it out is that it seems particularly meant for leaders of the church, and as such it bears some closer examination.

Feed My sheep

- First, there is the word "feed." Teach them the word; as it also says "take care of," it includes rebuke and restoration. But first and foremost, teach them the word of God. Have sound doctrine, and convey it regularly to the flock.
- Then, remember whose sheep they are! They are not yours; they are His. It is not given to you to claim them; you are a servant. If your ministry is built on personality or charisma you are hiding the Christ from the eyes of your followers.
- Finally, recall that they are sheep. They will follow. So lead them carefully; keep yourself pure so that your example will not lead them astray.

Bear with suffering

- Why should I bear with suffering? Note the phrasing about Peter's death: by what kind of death he should *glorify God.* You suffer because you are his servants (it is inevitable); but suffer so that it brings glory to him. The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.
- Whatever that suffering is, follow Him. Nothing else matters.

Restore the sinners

- It is first necessary to forgive, as Jesus so frequently taught. It is necessary, but it is not sufficient.
- You must also restore. We are given the ministry of reconciliation. It is not sufficient to say, "I forgive," and then do nothing. We have a minister in our church, brother W., who has gone through this experience. I am happy to say that he has been restored to ministry upon repentance. Not immediately, but as he has shown himself capable.

Do not envy

"What is that to you?" In this Jesus shows us that we are not to envy one another. For some time I myself had this problem. I was always worried about the attendance numbers, and dreaming of the time I would have the largest class in the church. But God showed me his way in this story:

---

[216] See John 14:15

The story is told about F.E.B. Meyer, who was a minister in the 19th century. He had a congregation in the middle of London. A friend stopped by to ask how things were going. He heard a sad tale; within two miles of his church were three of the greatest preachers on earth (I recall one being C. H. Spurgeon). The church was half empty and Meyer was depressed.

Two years later the friend returned to find the church filled. He asked Meyer what caused the turnaround. Meyer confessed that God had convicted him of the sin of envy. So he got down on his knees and began to pray for the other churches. "I asked God to fill their churches to overflowing – and out of the overflow He has filled mine."

We are not here for our glory, leaders, we are here for the glory of God.

Farewell - Various Scriptures

We come to the final lesson in this series on the life of Christ. The sections of Scripture which tell us of events after the resurrection often seem fragmented and of little importance. But we shall see there are some grand themes here.

Great Commission

Matthew 28:16-20 NIV Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. (17) When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. (18) Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[1] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

All authority

It is well for us to review the basics of authority. We know from this passage that all authority belongs to Christ. It is therefore well to remember that in the kingdom of God authority comes with responsibility (to him who created the universe is given the task of sustaining it and providing for it) – and with matching power. This authority is rightly his for two reasons:

- First, by right of creation. It's his universe; he made it. He therefore is responsible for maintaining it – and from responsibility flows authority.
- Second, by right of conquest. The terror of this universe is death, and he has conquered that usurping ruler. Satan is defeated.

Make disciples

There is some confusion that arises here. Disciples of whom? Disciples of my particular church, or of Christ? The answer seems simple until you remember that the disciple in question is getting his answers from you. There is only one way in which this will work – they must be disciples of Christ *shown in you.* Follow me, as I follow Christ.[217]

We are told to baptize[218] them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It seems like a formula, something to pronounce during the ceremony, but it is actually very important. To do this is to acknowledge the unity of the Trinity. There are not three gods, but God – three in one. This is fundamental to the faith, and we should get it right from the start.

Teach them

Regrettably, the church today largely neglects this aspect. In older times the restorationist churches were accused of "dunk 'em and drop 'em." Today, it seems that we cannot risk suggesting to the new convert that there is anything he or she really needs to learn. It's not that we don't want to teach them, but we have good reasons for not teaching them, to wit:

---

[217] See 2nd Timothy 1:13

[218] I skip the usual argument for immersion here, reminding the advocates of sprinkling and pouring that virtually every church accepts immersion. It's the one way we all know is correct.

- Teaching implies the discipline of learning. Consumer Christianity asks what the people want, and gives it to them. That usually doesn't include the hard work of study. So it is that I have heard (for over fifteen years so far) that "Sunday School classes are obsolete and will wither away within five years."[219]
- Teaching implies the existence of a progression of learning. New Christians have different needs that older ones. That implies careful planning on the part of the staff of a church – and it also implies that learning will take years. Our time horizons don't stretch that long; hence it can't be done, right?
- Teaching implies the existence of teachers (note the plural). In the new theory of mega-churches, teachers are replaced with people who can operate a DVD player, so that all instruction will be lockstep the same. This is very convenient for the new format, which allows only one "star" in the local church. The consequences of this development are, I submit, much more perilous than realized.

That last is particularly important. "Teaching" by its very nature involves setting an example. People are used to seeing "examples" like rock stars only from a distance – which might explain why those growing up under the new system seem to have such a mild affection for Christ.

Note, too, that we are to teach the disciples to "observe all things" which Christ commanded. It is not given to us to pick and choose. It is no great trick to prepare a list of neglected things.[220] If followed, this alone would keep us in the world, not of the world.

Waiting

Acts 1:4-8 NIV On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. (5) For John baptized with[1] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (6) So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. (8) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The reader must understand that the author has a good deal of experience in the art of waiting, if not waiting patiently. My wife was an hour late for our wedding, and her promptitude has not really improved over the last forty years. My tolerance, however, seems to have mellowed a bit with age.

We are told, as the disciples were here, to wait. How does one go about "waiting on the Lord?"

While waiting

Waiting is not simply filing yourself away in the file cabinet until someone chooses to open the drawer. Indeed, we are commanded to do some things while we wait:

- We are commanded to be strong and take heart while waiting.[221]

---

[219] One might examine the classes to see how many people under 30 are in them. Is this self-fulfilling prophecy?

[220] When was the last time you heard a sermon on the evils of divorce? Did you know it is considered a sin in most circumstances?

[221] Psalm 27:14

- Also, we are commanded to put our trust in his word.[222] Waiting for the Lord involves reading the Scriptures, so that we will know in whom we trust.
- And, of course, we are to trust in Him.[223]

What He does while we wait

So many Christians feel that waiting on the Lord means watching nothing happen, with no sign from God. It is not so.

- He tells us, explicitly, that he will deliver us from that which threatens. This is particularly true in the context of personal revenge – the temptation to say that God isn't doing anything about that jerk, so I will.[224]
- He will uphold and comfort us; we shall "renew our strength."[225]

Rewards of waiting

He tells us also that at the end of the wait good things will happen.

- When our wait for his return is over, he will have mercy upon us.[226] We need not fear the judgment; he is merciful.
- To the ancient Jew he promised the inheritance of the land; but also he promised that we would see the wicked cut off. Where are the Nazis now? How about the Soviets? And where will American humanism be?

  Of course, the ultimate reward is his return.[227]

Ascension

Acts 1:9-12 NIV After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (10) They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. (11) "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."
(12) Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk[2] from the city.

Why the Ascension?

In one sense, the reason for the ascension of Christ is simple: He is possessed of the new body – and he must go *somewhere*. But there are less obvious reasons as well:

- It is fitting to his honor, power and authority that he arise to the supreme place. This is, after all, the one who created the world.
- He tells us, explicitly, that it was necessary that he go in order that the Holy Spirit would come.[228]
- This one may surprise you: his ascension was necessary so that spiritual gifts would come. [229]

---

[222] Psalm 130:5
[223] Isaiah 8:17
[224] Proverbs 20:22
[225] Isaiah 40:31 – see especially in the King James Version
[226] Psalm 123:2, KJV
[227] 1st Thessalonians 1:10
[228] John 16:7

Benefits to us

It's well that we review just what benefits come from the ascension – benefits to us.

- One fairly obvious one is to prepare a place for us.[230]
- Another is a bit more subtle – to be our High Priest.[231] To us this seems somewhat less than important. But in the time in which it happened, only the High Priest had access to God. In short, at the Ascension our High Priest opened up direct access to God.
- As such, he serves as our intercessor with God.[232] Sometimes direct access to God is not what we want – we need someone to speak up for the sinner.

His return

He ascended – and the angels assure us that he shall return in the same way. In his first advent he came in weakness; he must leave to return again in power. On that day shall come the judgment of mankind. When is that day? Only the Father knows. But we shall find out soon enough. In the meanwhile, wait upon the Lord.

---

[229] Ephesians 4:7-12
[230] John 14:2
[231] Hebrews 6:20
[232] Romans 8:34