

## MATTHEW

Before beginning to give you a commentary of the New Testament, let me give you some information written by James Burton Coffman to think about.

### CONCERNING THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament stands in glorious isolation as the unique source of authority in the religion of Christ. Its tiniest declaration is of more consequence than all the councils of Christendom. The New Testament is the religion of Jesus Christ; all else is incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial. Its teachings will judge men and angels at the last day. It is the exclusive and final word of God through Christ, as confirmed to us by them that heard Him. What it binds or looses on earth will be bound or loosed eternally.

The New Testament rises higher and higher as the generations of men rise and fade away. Its complete separation from all human literature and its dramatic elevation above all human wisdom are increasingly more and more evident. All the librarians of a hundred nations for two thousand years cannot produce one new additional sentence spoken by the Son of God, nor add the tiniest little word from Christ, beyond those given in the New Testament.

The New Testament is man's mandate from on high. It is man's credential for citizenship in the heavenly kingdom, his patent right of redemption, and his charter of inheritance among the saints in light.

The New Testament is the rock of everlasting truth. It is the word of God. All else is shifting sand. It will confront men at the final judgment. Why should not men confront it now and accept the saving truth?

### INTRODUCTION

AUTHORSHIP: This gospel was written by Matthew, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. His original name was Levi, son of Alphaeus. (Mark 2:14) He seems to have preferred the surname given him, apparently at the time of his call to the apostleship, the name Matthew, which means "gift of God." He was a tax collector at Capernaum. (Luke 5:27) He made a great feast for his

friends for the purpose of introducing them to Jesus. He wrote the gospel which bears his name and obviously had as his chief purpose the setting forth of the Lord Jesus Christ as the world's only Savior.

### DATE

Certainly, the gospel of Matthew was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, A. D. 70. This is true because Matthew often referred to the temple and its services as still standing.

The Roman Catholic tradition asserts it was written in 42 A. D., making it the oldest gospel. J. W. McGarvey, (Commentary on Matthew and Mark, page introduction), fixed the date during the 16-year interval between 42 and 58 A.D.

### ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Some contend that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and that the Greek is a later translation of that earlier document.

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

In the words of J. R. Dummelow, (One Volume Commentary, p. 620) wrote: "This gospel is one of the most attractive books ever written, and in modern times has exercised a wide influence even beyond the pale of Christianity."

There are certainly few who would dispute the right of this gospel to its place as the first book of the New Testament.

Among the general characteristics of Matthew, the following are noted.

- (1) It is conservative. Matthew quotes 65 passages from the Old Testament, 43 of them being direct quotations.

Its primary emphasis is upon Christ, the Old Testament Messiah, embodiment of Jewish hopes, fulfillment of Jewish prophecies, and heir to the throne of David.

- (2) This is the gospel of the kingdom.
- (3) This gospel is said to be apologetic in nature.

Matthew refutes the charge that Jesus' disciples stole the body (28:15), and the Lord's residence in Nazareth is noted as a fulfillment of prophecy. (2:23)

(4) The perfect honesty of the gospel is another characteristic.

Matthew went beyond ordinary honesty. He included many sayings of Christ which are of an opposite tendency to Matthew's every racial and personal prejudice. He introduced Gentiles as the first worshipers of Christ (2:1), records Jesus striking words that "many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (8:11), thus showing the inclusion of Gentiles on a parity with the patriarchs in God's kingdom. He even made the Great Commission the climax of His gospel, showing that all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike, should be baptized.

(5) His gospel is topical rather than chronological in sequence. This makes some difficult problems for commentators and harmonizers of the gospels. The rich discourses of Jesus are more fully recorded in Matthew than by any author. The Sermon on the Mount is an example.

(6) Matthew has been called anti-Pharisaical, principally because of the "woe" passages in chapter 23. This emphasis might have been due to Matthew's first-hand knowledge of the corruption and hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders.

## DIVISION I

### ANCESTRY AND BIRTH OF CHRIST, SON OF THE LIVING GOD

#### CHAPTER 1

NOTE: This genealogy (1:1-17) is quite unlike that in Luke 8. Labored efforts to reconcile the two generally lead to suppositions concerning Levirate marriages in which the issue had two fathers (the legal and the actual).

Perhaps the best, and certainly the simplest, reconciliation of these two lists is to view Matthew's account as the ancestry of Joseph and Luke's as the record of Mary's ancestry. Two separate genealogies of Jesus Christ are absolutely necessary in the establishment of the Christ, first as the blood descendant of David, and secondly as the legal heir to the royal throne of the

Hebrews. Matthew shows Christ as the legal heir to the throne by tracing His ancestry down through the royal line of the kings of Israel.

Luke's genealogy is utterly different, because it is not concerned with title to a throne but with the blood ancestry of Jesus. The two genealogies of Jesus also clear up another point. The prophecy in Jeremiah 22:30 forbade any descendant of Jechoniah ever to sit upon the throne of David. Therefore, if Jesus had actually been the literal fleshly descendant of "Coniah" as He was called, it would have countermanded His claim upon the throne due to the prophecy.

Joseph, Jesus' foster father, however, could lawfully transfer his right to the throne to his legal son, Jesus Christ! Thus Jesus was the legal son with right to the throne of David through Jechoniah, and He was the legal blood-son of David through Nathan, the ancestor of Mary, Jesus' mother.

#### **Verses 1-2**

Jesus was the literal Son of David through Mary a descendant of Nathan, one of David's sons, as in Luke's genealogy. Jesus was the legal Son and heir of David through King Solomon as in Matthew's genealogy.

Many parallels exist between the life of our Lord and that of King David. Both were born in Bethlehem. David's struggle with Goliath answers to Christ's struggle with Satan. In both cases, it was the enemy's own weapon which was used to destroy him. (Hebrews 2:14)

Both David and Christ were sent by their father with a message to the brethren. Both were rejected. David was in a sense a mediator between the lines of Israel and the Philistines; Christ is the one Mediator between God and man. (1Timothy 2:5)

"The son of Abraham . . ." Jesus was the "Son of Abraham" in the following senses:

- (1) He was the "seed" of promise. (Galatians 3:16).
- (2) He was the legal son and heir through Isaac, son of the free woman, as distinguished from Ishmael, son of a slave woman.

- (3) He was literally, descended from Abraham through Mary and her ancestors.
- (4) He was the antitype of Isaac.

As in the case of David, there are also sharp contrasts between the life of Abraham and that of Christ. Abraham gave up his wife to Abimelech in order to procure his own safety, or so he thought; but Jesus gave Himself up to die for His bride, the church. (Genesis 20:2, Ephesians 5:25)

### **Verse 3**

“By Tamar . . .” Tamar’s name in the Old Testament (Genesis 38) is remembered for her having been twice the daughter-in-law of Judah, and later, by means of a deception, his wife also. It was with reference to her that Onan refused to raise up seed to his brother; and the Roman Catholic superstition concerning birth control is founded on this incident in the life of Onan and Tamar.

### **Verse 4**

“To Ram . . .” It should be noted that several names are possibly omitted from this list of generations from Abraham to David. J. W. McGarvey (op. cit., p.16) pointed out: “There are 366 years for the time between this event and the birth of David.”

Only the most noted of intervening ancestors are given in the tables. Even the enemies of Christianity never disputed these genealogies during the times when they were available as public records of the Jews.

### **Verse 5**

“Rahab . . . Ruth. Rahab is identified with the woman of that name who was a harlot on the walls of Jericho. (Joshua 2:1)

Ruth appears in Scripture as one of the sweetest and truest of womankind ever to live upon the earth. She, as was also Rahab, a Gentile. The Book of Ruth recounts her remarkable story.

## **Verse 6**

“Wife of Uriah . . .” It is a marvel, in the providence of God that this guilty and unfortunate wife of Uriah the Hittite should have found a place in the Lord’s ancestry; however, her first child was not permitted to live.

## **Verses 7-16**

Here are skipped some names in the ancestry, as will be seen by a glance at 2 Kings 8:26ff.

## **Verse 17**

“Fourteen generations . . .” This is an artificial grouping of the names to make possible their easier retention by the memory. Jechoniah is counted twice, being the end of the second grouping and also the beginning of the third and final grouping.

## **Verse 18**

“The birth of Jesus Christ . . .” Christ was born of Mary without the aid of the natural processes of generation. To give up the doctrine of the virgin birth is to sacrifice the integrity of the gospel authors, the convictions of the apostolic church, and the entire premise of supernatural religion as revealed in the Holy Bible.

The great miracle of the New Testament is not the virgin birth, or walking on the water, or the resurrection of Christ, but Jesus Christ Himself! The phenomenon of Jesus Christ the Son of God not only admits but demands just such an entry into this world of human life as that revealed in the virgin birth.

In normal procreation the union of a man and a woman always produces a new life. Christ’s life was not new but existed from before the beginning of the creation. It can hardly be imagined just “how” God could enter the world of human life in any other way than that depicted in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

His birth accomplished the following:

- (1) His birth honored and elevated womanhood to a place of dignity, honor, and respect, hitherto unknown on earth.

- (2) It virtually destroyed infanticide by revealing the sanctity of embryonic life.
- (3) It has emphasized absolute chastity as one of the highest virtues in both men and women.
- (4) It has glorified mother-hood as a state of purity and honor every whit as righteous and desirable as virginity.

“Betrothed . . . before they came together . . . “ In those times betrothal was legally equivalent to marriage, and adultery during the period of waiting was punishable by death by stoning. (Deuteronomy 22:23-24)

“By the Holy Spirit . . .” Mary’s conception was the work of the Holy Spirit of God and must therefore be understood as the most holy and sacred occurrence that can possibly be imagined!

#### **Verse 19**

As Joseph thought on these things, his desire was to show mercy to one who appeared in his eyes, to be guilty of sin. The noble character of Joseph who desired to shield Mary under those circumstances is most commendable. He was of a different kind from those in the present day who delight to expose what they fancy to be the sins of others. In Joseph was fulfilled the word of the Lord who declared that “He who is trust worthy conceals a matter.” (Proverbs 11:13)

#### **Verse 20**

“An angel of the Lord . . .” this is perhaps the same angel whose name is given in Luke 1:19, 26; if so, he is Gabriel. The existence of angels affords no difficulty for Christians. The Scriptures abound with the deeds of angels.

Angels announced the birth of Christ, ministered to Jesus in the wilderness of temptations, strengthened Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, and escorted Him to glory.

Robert Milligan, (Commentary on Hebrews, p. 73-74) gave the functions of angels as follows:

- (1) To frustrate the wiles of Satan (Jude 6);

- (2) To punish wicked men Genesis 19:1-26; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 12:23);
- (3) To preside over the councils of princes and governments  
(Daniel 10:20-21; 11:1: 12:1);
- (4) To aid providentially in bringing men to repentance Acts 10:1-8);
- (5) to take care of living saints (Hebrews 14; 2 Kings 6:15-23; Psalms 34:7; 91:11; Daniel 3:25-28; 6:22; Matthew 18:10; Acts 5:19; 12:7);
- (6) to comfort dying saints and to bar their souls home to glory. (Luke 16:22)
- (5) To take care of living saints. (Hebrews 14: ; 2 Kings 6:15-23; Psalms 34:7; 91:11; Daniel 3:25-28; 6:22; Matthew 18:10; Acts 5:19; 12:7)
- (6) To comfort dying saints and to carry their souls home to glory.  
(Luke 16:22)

### **Verse 21**

This was not an unusual name among the Jews, the name appearing both as Jesus and Joshua. The word Christ means Messiah; hence, in the confession of faith, the believer affirms that he believes that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God,” as did Peter in Matthew 16:16.

### **Verses 22-23**

God’s great prophets did not always know the true meaning of the words God gave them.

Matthew uses for the first time an expression found ten times in his gospel and nowhere else in the New Testament, “that it might be fulfilled, etc.” That the virgin birth is clearly included in Isaiah’s prophecy is certain.

This beautiful prophecy not only reveals the virgin birth but also sets forth the dual nature of Christ. His name means “God with us!” but His diet is that of a man, “butter and honey.” Here is the GOD-MAN in prophecy!



## Verses 24-25

This verse has a bearing on the so-called doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. Mary's virginity before the birth of Christ is a valid Christian doctrine, bearing the seal of the Holy Spirit.

Her so-called virginity after the birth of Christ is a monstrous superstition, without scriptural sanction. It is here stated that Joseph knew her not "till" she had brought forth a Son. This implies that the relationship of Joseph to his wife Mary, after the birth of Christ, was altogether that of any normal husband and wife. Matthew 13:55 gives the names of four of Jesus' brothers and even mentions His sisters.

As reflecting further light on the question of Mary's virginity, Luke 2:7 is pertinent. "She brought forth her firstborn son, etc." This terminology also suggests that Mary bore other sons, else Christ should have been called her "only" Son. The sacred scriptures make the truth quite plain.

Christ is called the "only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18) and the "firstborn Son" of Mary! (Luke 2:7) It takes a very unskilled and naive student of the Bible to suppose that the Holy Spirit actually meant that Christ was the "Only begotten Son of Mary." To suppose Mary's virginity throughout her life would be to suppose that she defrauded Joseph her husband, contrary to the conjugal duty owed to him.

This we cannot believe that Mary did. As Paul expressed it, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled." (Hebrews 13:4) Then why pretend that the marriage bed is defiled and strive to "protect" the virgin Mary from such man-imputed defilement?

## Chapter 2

### Verse 1

“Bethlehem of Judaea . . . distinguishes between the two Bethlehems in Israel. One of them was Zebulun (Joshua 19:15-16) and the other was in Judaea.

The word Bethlehem means “place of bread;” and it seems quite appropriate that “The Bread of Life” should have been born in a place with such a name.

“In the days of Herod the king . . .” is as near as Matthew comes to giving the date of Jesus’ birth, a point on which there is much difference of opinion among scholars and commentators. H. Leo Boles makes the date 4 B.C. Dummelow makes it not later than 6 B.C.

No one can say certainly exactly when the birth of Christ occurred. *Fortunately, this is not an important difficulty.*

“Herod the king . . . “was Herod I, called the Great, no less than nine members of whose family are mentioned in the sacred Scriptures. He was, in short, a monster. Josephus details his pride, cruelty, and blood-lust, as they supported his merciless and implacable ambition. It was indeed, “night” when our Lord was born with such a man upon the throne.

“Magi from the East . . .” Magi are astrologers. H. Leo Boles (Commentary on Matthew, p. 37) pointed out that Daniel: “Was made president of this order in Babylon (Daniel 2:48), and that Jeremiah spoke of this class among Babylonians.”

Translations using “wise men” is a fortunate rendition of the Greek term “magi” since the truly wise of all ages are indeed those who bow down and worship the Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of those “magi” or “wise men” to Christ has been compared to the experience of certain ones who come to Christ now.

1. They followed a little light, the star.
2. They arrived at the wrong place.

3. They asked for more light.
4. They did not receive it from men but from God's word, the Bible.
5. They followed the additional light they obtained from Micah 5:2.
6. They found the Lord in Bethlehem.
7. Lo, the star came; and it appeared that they had not lost any light but kept all they previously had.
8. They worshiped Him.
9. They returned another way!

Many, in groping their way out of denominational strife and error, have retraced the steps of those original wise men.

### **Verse 2**

The Old Testament opens with a question, God seeking man, and asking, "Adam, where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) The New Testament opens with a question, man seeking God and asking, "Where is He, etc.?"

"Born King of the Jews . . ." That the Messianic hope of the Hebrews was well known throughout the ancient world is evident from the following considerations: The Old Testament had been translated into the Greek language in the Septuagint translation "about 280 B.C." The Old Testament was thus given a world-wide circulation at least a quarter of a millennium before Christ was born. J. R. Dummelow (op. cit., p. 626) noted: "Synagogues existed through the east; . . . at Damascus, nearly all the women were proselytes."

"We saw His star in the east . . . . Many conjectures with reference to this star still leave the question unanswered with regard to what it actually was. Kepler stated that there was a conjunction of the planets Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars within the constellation Pisces (the fish), beginning in 7 B.C. and culminating in 6 B.C. This particular constellation, Pisces, was held by ancient astrologers to represent Israel; therefore, this remarkable conjunction is at least worthy of notice. It is not hard to see in this a possible fulfillment of Numbers 24:17 concerning the star that should rise out of Jacob.

### **Verse 3**

Herod's trouble was jealousy and rage, a rage that would finally vent itself in the slaughter of the innocents. The city of Jerusalem had been troubled with such a man upon the throne. Josephus' (Antiquities, Book 17, Chapter 6) related the circumstances attending the death of Herod who, when he saw death was near, caused a large number of prominent persons to be put in prison with instructions that they should be put to death just as soon as Herod expired in order, Herod said, that "there should be real mourning" at his death!

### **Verse 4**

Herod convened the most learned people of his day and demanded to know where Christ would be born, the bravest among them must have trembled. Under the circumstances, they wisely took refuge in the Word of God. In effect, they said, "O King, we don't really know anything about it, but there is, it so happens, a verse in one of the prophecies that speaks of the birth of the Messiah, and that says it is to take place in Bethlehem."

The ignorance of Herod concerning the Messianic hope of the Jews is in keeping with secular monarchial character in all ages. How few men in public life have any real knowledge of spiritual things!

### **Verses 5-6**

Under the awesome inquiry of merciless and ambitious Herod, they let the Word of God stand alone and unadorned.

### **Verses 7-8**

Herod's duplicity was in keeping with his evil character. He did not wish to worship the Christ but to destroy Him! He knew the birthplace; he thought he knew the child's age; and it remained only to find the exact location of the Christ child in order to slay Him. That there was real danger in this plot appears from the fact that God Himself intervened both in the behavior of the wise men and in the departure of Joseph to Egypt.

### **Verses 9-10**

Following additional light which they received from the Bible, the wise men soon found that in following that additional light they did not forfeit light previously enjoyed. The star came and stood over the place.

It was not Herod's way, however, that they went; they "went their way." Though we may not know the exact nature of the Christ is something which every man may experience for himself when he turns to the Lord and knows the Redeemer in the forgiveness of his sins!

### **Verse 11**

"Came into the house . . ." indicates the passage of some little time after the birth of Christ which took place in a stable. (Luke 2:7) Jesus was about six weeks old at that time. "They fell down and worshiped Him . . ." indicates that Christ alone was the object of their adoration.

"Gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh" . . . certainly suggest three phases of our Lord's life, His kingship, His divinity, and His sufferings are in the most solemn manner suggested by these wonderful gifts; and, although we must agree with the commentators who reject any special symbolism in these gifts on the basis that nothing in the text supports such symbolism, nevertheless, it must be admitted, they do suggest those things with reverence to Christ.

A practical need for the gifts existed in the forthcoming journey to Egypt. Another outstanding teaching connected with this incident is the fact that giving is a vital and necessary part of worship. Those who worship Christ, give. Those who do not or will not give do not worship either! True worship simply does not exist apart from sacrifice.

No ancient monarch was ever approached without a gift. (Genesis 43:11; I Samuel 10:27; I Kings 10:2)

### **Verse 12**

"Warned by God in a dream . . ." the wise men refused to cooperate with Herod. He that "slumbers not nor sleeps" was watching over the Savior's cradle.

Departed . . . by another way . . . “ The old ways are forsaken forever by those who truly worship Christ. The return of the wise men by another way suggests the new and better passage that God gives His worshipers in delivering them from sin and leading them into eternal life.

### **Verses 13-15**

“Out of Egypt did I call My Son . . .” This prophecy Hosea 11:1 is referred by Matthew to the flight of Joseph and the holy family into Egypt from which, of course, they later came back.

Israel was first called “out of Egypt” when God delivered the chosen race under the leadership of Moses; but it was fulfilled even more gloriously when the Christ returned from His journey in Egypt.

“By the Lord through the prophet . . . “ It was actually GOD who spoke through the prophets. The prophets were only instruments to convey God’s message. The word belonged to God and came forth from Him!

### **Verses 16-18**

“Became very enraged . . .” indicates the utmost fury of that inhuman king.

Bethlehem was a small place and that the list of the slain was possibly not very large, especially when compared with the long list of the slain so characteristic of Herod’s reign. The slaughter of a few babes in Bethlehem would create little stir in a society like that.

A fourth century historian, Macrobius, referred to the slaughter of those children and affirmed that Herod’s own son was among the slain, hence a proverb that arose, “It is better to be Herod’s hog than his son.” (Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, Matthew 2:16)

As a Jewish proselyte, Herod refrained from killing swine or having anything to do with them or their flesh.

Two years old and under . . . “ This period is hard to place. Do they refer to children two years older or younger than Christ; or do they apply to those

both younger and older, embracing a period of one year before to one year after our Lord's birth?

“Rachel weeping for her children . . . The tomb of Rachel was located at Ramah, and many of the captives led away to Babylon passed her tomb on the way to captivity. Jeremiah represented Rachel as weeping for the children of the captivity. (Jeremiah 31:15) Here Matthew applies the words as a prophecy of the grief and tears arising upon the slaughter of the innocents at the birth of Christ.

### **Verse 19**

“When Herod was dead . . .” That is God's answer to men who oppose His will. Throughout the universe, one mighty purpose runs; and no man or combination of men or nations can thwart that will. “But . . .” God's “will,” will be done.

### **Verse 20**

The instruction was to return to Israel, not to Bethlehem or to Jerusalem. “Those who sought the child's life are dead . . .” Most of the powerful members of Herod's establishment perished with him.

Satan had doubtless raised many enemies of Christ even in His infancy. How strange and significant that Herod caused such a large number of prominent persons to be murdered on the occasion of his own death.

Josephs tells how they were shut up in the Hippodrome at Jericho and destroyed with darts when Herod knew his end was near. Unique is the procedure by which Herod took so many of his vicious nobles to the grave with him. It was God's answer to Satan's hatred of the Christ.

### **Verses 21-22**

“Archelaus . . .” was a son of Herod by one of his ten wives, Malthake. Like most of that family his life was also vicious.

“For the region of Galilee . . .” This area was also ruled by a Herod, a son of Cleopatra of Jerusalem and Phillip II. He was distinguished as one of the mildest and least vicious of the many rulers that stemmed from the evil dynasty of Herod the Great.

### **Verse 23**

The Nazarites were, in a manner, typical of Christ. The town of Nazareth was named after this order of persons which counted among their number such illustrious Jewish names as those of Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist.

Nazarites of Days, meaning Nazarites for a short period, and Nazarites for life, of who were the three mentioned above. The Nazarite did not allow a razor to come upon him and drank no wine or strong drink.

The town of Nazareth was named after the Nazarites; and thus, Jesus' residence there resulted in His being called a "Nazarene." The marvel of the fulfillment is seen in that Christ was "called" a Nazarene, although He did not manifest the type of life ascribed to Nazarites such as John the Baptist. It appears that this wretched and despised village was made by the Lord to appear as a type of all humanity. Certainly His residence there suggested His rejection.

## **DIVISION II**

### **PREPARATION FOR HIS MESSIANIC WORK**

#### **THE HERALD, BAPTISM, TEMPTATION, AND HIS PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION BY JOHN THE BAPTIST**

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **Verses 1-2**

"In those days . . ." that is, some thirty years after the events recorded in the previous chapter. Jesus was about 30 years of age when He was baptized. (Luke 3:23) The date of John's ministry is also given by Luke as occurring in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. (Luke 3:1) "John the Baptist . . ." John is called "the Baptist" because He baptized people.

J. W. McGarvey, (The New testament Commentary, p. 33) identified John as the originator, under God, of the ordinance of baptism.



J. R. Dummelow, (One Volume Commentary, p. 629) commented on the immense popularity of John the Baptist wrote: “The public appearance of the Baptist marked a new era. He came forward in the two-fold capacity of a prophet and forerunner of the Messiah. As prophecy had been silent for 400 years, and all patriotic Jews were longing for the coming of the Messiah to deliver them from the Roman yoke, it is not surprising that he was welcomed with enthusiasm.”

The Jewish priests said he was possessed by a demon, but this poor opinion of John was a reflection upon themselves and sprang out of the evil in which they were engrossed.

“The wilderness of Judaea . . .” was a strip of wasteland also called a desert (Luke 1:80), lying west of the Dead Sea near the mouth of the Jordan. The wilderness platform of John’s preaching served to identify him as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” J. W. McGarvey, (op. cit., p. 34) said that John the Baptist was most certainly the person spoken of by the prophet, Isaiah: “is evident from the fact that he alone, of all the great preachers known to history, chose a wilderness as his place of preaching.”

“Repent . . .” John’s message was one of repentance. God appointed three changes in conversion and three actions designed to effect those three changes. These are *FAITH* to change the heart (mind); *REPENTANCE* to change the will, and *BAPTISM* to change the status.

Repentance involving a change of will is far more than mere sorrow for sin. (2 Corinthians 7:10) Repentance is an instantaneous change of the will, induced by godly sorrow, and issuing forth in a reformation of life, and marked by restitution wherever possible.

“The kingdom of heaven . . .” This is the kingdom of Daniel 2:44. John was the herald of this approaching king, Christ, in His kingdom. This wonderful new kingdom was not to be a kingdom of this world in the ordinary and secular sense was a fact unknown to the Jews and only dimly appreciated by the Twelve themselves, especially at first. The kingdom of God and the church are one and the same institution. (Matthew 16:13-19)

“Is at hand . . .” With the ministry of John the Baptist, the kingdom was near but not yet established. In Mark 9:1, Christ emphatically declared that the kingdom of God would be established with power within the lifetime of the apostles, saying, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

Both Christ and Judas Iscariot were to taste of death before the kingdom began; and, therefore, the words “some of them” are most precisely accurate.

### **Verse 3**

It is from Christ Himself that one learns this passage’s application to John. Jesus had identified Himself as the Messiah to His disciples, but the disciples had been troubled by the objection of the scribes that “Elijah must first come.” (17:9-13)

Christ then identified John as the “Elijah: foretold by Malachi. The Pharisees should have known that truth already, because it was to one of the priestly group, Zacharias, that the angel announced the birth of John, using almost the identical words of Malachi’s great prophecy. (Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 1:15-17)

Only willful blindness on the part of the Jewish leaders can account for their failure to recognize John as the “Elijah” who was to precede the Messiah.

### **Verse 4**

John had evidently been schooled in the knowledge that he was to be another Elijah, and he promptly adopted the type of dress that would identify him as “Elijah.” In 2 Kings 1:8, Elijah’s dress is mentioned, especially the leather girdle.

This type of clothing was worn by the prophet for another reason, and that was as a protest against luxury of the ruling classes in Jerusalem.

“Locusts and wild honey . . .” comprised the diet of John the Baptist. The locusts were probably somewhat similar to large grasshoppers in the United States. Locusts are still considered edible in many parts of the world.

## Verses 5-6

“All Judaea . . .” is hyperbole in which there is an intentional exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. There are many figures of speech in the Holy Scriptures, and a proper understanding of them is necessary to a true understanding of God’s Word.

Verse 5 merely means that the great majority of the people of that time and place accepted the baptism of John the Baptist.

“In the Jordan River . . .” John selected this river as the scene of his many baptisms for a reason, and the reason is given in John 3:23, “Because there was much water there.”

This makes it imperative that immersion be understood as the “form” of baptism practiced by John, since “much water” could not possibly have been required for any other “type” of baptism.

## Verse 7

“Pharisees . . .” They were a very wealthy, zealous, and powerful sect among the Jews. They were proud, conceited, worldly, and vigilant enemies of our Lord; and yet they were the leaders among the ancient Jews and doubtless had many fine and commendable qualities which tend to be obscured by the fact that they opposed the work of Christ.

W. F. Ledlow (Jesus and His Method, p. 200-202) lists seven distinct classes of Pharisees:

- (1) The Shoulder Pharisee who wore all his good deeds on his shoulder and did his alms to be seen of men. (Mathew 6:5)
- (2) The Wait-a-Little Pharisee who always suggested something else to do first. Of this type was the man who when asked to follow Christ said, “Permit me first to go and bury my father.” (Luke 9:59-60)
- (3) The Bruised Pharisee who was too pious to look upon a woman and shut his eyes when one approached, which caused him to stumble into a wall and be bruised or cut.

- (4) The Pestle and Mortar Pharisee who walked with his head down in mock humility, also called the Hump-Backed Pharisee.
- (5) The Ever-Reckoning Pharisee who kept a ledger of good deeds and bad deeds in an effort to balance accounts with himself.
- (6) The God-loving Pharisee the noblest of the group.
- (7) The Timid Pharisee who was the schizophrenic of his day.

It was probably to this latter class that Jesus addressed His warning that no man can serve two masters. (6:24)

“Sadducees. . .” constituted another powerful sec, though not as large as the Pharisees. They were the crass materialists of their day, denying the existence of angels or spirits and refusing to believe in the resurrection.

They made fun of the idea of heaven as seen from the question propounded in Matthew 22:23ff. Although they were mortal enemies of the Pharisees, they made common cause with them against Christ. Their difference with the Pharisees, however, was always close to the surface. (Acts 23:8)

“You brood of vipers . . .” The total corruption of the Jewish leaders of that day is seen in this passage. John’s vehement denunciation of these wicked men is exceeded only by the far greater condemnation heaped upon them by Christ. Their corruption was an open shame, known to all, denied by none, and justly deserving the words of condemnation uttered against them both by John and by the Christ.

“The wrath to come . . .” could mean either of two things, or perhaps both. It might refer to the overwhelming of God’s wrath against the Jewish nations because of their rejection of Christ and culminating in the overthrow of their temple and religious system in the year 70 A.D. by the conquering armies of Vespasian and Titus. It might also refer to the final overthrow of the wicked in hell. In this context, there is no reason why the passage should not refer to both, since both were “to come”!

## Verses 8-9

“Bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance . . .” suggests the true relationship between repentance and reformation of life.

Reformation of life is not repentance but issues forth from repentance and is a direct result or “fruit” of repentance. That repentance cannot be reformation of life is seen in the words of Christ who allowed that it is possible to repent many times in one day (Luke 17:4)—a thing that cannot be understood of reformation.

“Do not suppose that you can say . . . “ Here Christ answered an alibi and destroyed a refuge of these ancient sinners. They supposed themselves safe because they were the seed of Abraham to whom the promises of old had been truly certified.

However, in this place John blasts their complacency and opens the door for the “spiritual sons” of Abraham. (Galatians 3:26-29) Here in the preaching of John the Baptist was the beginning of that truth so fully expounded by Paul in which it appears that “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, etc.” (Romans 2:28-29)

## Verse 10

“Axe . . . laid at the roots . . . .” This is a bold metaphor, here directed against the Jewish nation, but applicable with equal force against all sinful and rebellious people who reject God’s will. The “axe” is the army of destruction God would send against Jerusalem. “The root of the trees,” refers to those great national institutions, the root and springs of Jewish culture, which would be destroyed when Titus razed the temple, prohibited the daily sacrifice, and destroyed the national polity of the Jewish people.

“The “fire”... refers to the sorrows and tribulations through which the people would have to pass. The words “even now” suggest the near approach of the doom of Jerusalem, a theme which Christ Himself more fully expounded later in His ministry.

## Verse 11

Seven baptisms are mentioned in the New Testament, two of which are mentioned in this verse. They are:

- (1) The baptism unto Moses. (1 Corinthians 10:2)
- (2) The baptism of sufferings. (Mark 10:38-39)
- (3) The baptism for the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:29)
- (4) The baptism of the Holy Spirit. (Verse 11, above)
- (5) The baptism of fire. (Verse 11 above)
- (6) The baptism of John the Baptist. (Acts 19:3)
- (7) The baptism of the Great Commission.  
(Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-20)

To determine which baptism is in force, or which one is *IT*, one only needs to observe these facts:

- (1) Above, applied only to Jews.
- (2) Is altogether figurative, being in no sense a ceremony.
- (3) Was a practice of non-Christians as witnessed by the third person pronouns and was never connected in any way with the Christian religion.
- (4-5) These are both promises of what God will do and cannot be obeyed in any sense.
- (6) John's baptism was clearly and categorically set aside by the baptism of Him that is greater than John, even Christ. (See Acts 19:3) Thus, the ONE baptism of Ephesians can be none other than the baptism of the Great Commission.

“With the Holy Spirit and fire . . .” is seen as a reference to two baptisms, rather than merely one, because John emphatically divided His hearers into two classes reinforcing the point with a double metaphor, first of the unfruitful tree, and again of the threshing floor.

Both at Pentecost and at the household of Cornelius was the baptism of the Spirit received. (Acts 1:5; 2:4; 11:15-16) It is significant that both Jews and Gentiles are represented in these two groups and that there are no other examples of this baptism in the New Testament.

It is also possible to construe “baptism in the Spirit” as a reference to the overwhelming guidance and direction of God’s people through the office of the Holy Comforter. In this sense, it applies to all believers.

“In fire . . . “ likely refers to the overwhelming of the wicked at last in hell.

J. W. McGarvey, (op. cit., p. 39) said: “It is clearly the wicked who are to be baptized in fire, and the fulfillment of the prediction will be realized when they are cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 21:8)

### **Verse 12**

“His winnowing fork is in His hand . . .” The winnowing fork is the judgment; the wheat refers to the just; the chaff stands for the wicked; the fire is the Gehenna in which the wicked shall perish; the threshing floor is Palestine or the world; the one with the winnowing fork in His hand is the Lord, Judge of all the earth. God classifies people in only two categories, good and bad, wheat and chaff, sheep and goats.

### **Verse 13**

Matthew Henry, (Commentary, on Matthew 3:17) saw in the baptism of our Lord a mark of His wonderful humility, saying: “As soon as ever Christ began to preach, He preached humility, preached it by His example; designated for the highest honors; yet, in His first step, He thus abases Himself.”

With reference to why Christ was baptized, it should be noted that He was not baptized for the remission of sins, (Hebrews 4:15), nor to set men an example how they should “follow Christ in baptism” (Jesus was about 30 years of age). The reason assigned by the Lord was that it became Him “to fulfill all righteousness.”

Righteousness, in the scriptural view, refers to keeping God’s commandments, or ordinances. (Psalm 119:172 and Luke 1:8)

Although Christ was sinless and needed not to be baptized for the usual reasons, yet He submitted to John's baptism because God had commanded it. How worthy of emulation is that sublime attitude of Jesus; and how unlike that attitude is that of men who set aside even the baptism that is greater than John's, making it a non-essential, an elective privilege, rather than receiving it for what it is, namely, a divinely imposed condition of eternal salvation, which if spurned cannot fail to bring everlasting remorse.

After Jesus was baptized, He began to pray publicly (Luke 3:21); the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as He came forth up from the water (3:16); and immediately, upon His baptism, God the Father publicly proclaimed Jesus as His Son. These facts certainly suggest that the Christian's baptism marks the beginning of a significant new prayer life, the reception of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:6), and immediate enrollment in the Lamb's Book of Life!

#### **Verse 14**

This testimony of John the Baptist to the sinless nature of Christ is doubly effective because he was a cousin of our Lord.

John preached the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins": and since Christ had no sins of which to repent, and as John did not know of our Lord's other reason for being baptized, he would have prevented it.

#### **Verse 15**

This was equivalent to saying, "Yes, I know I have no sins to be repented of and that I might claim an exemption from this duty proclaimed by the authority of God and binding upon all men; but, since this is God's ordinance, I wish to honor it anyway and am delighted to do so by obeying the commandment now."

#### **Verse 16**

"Jesus went up immediately from the water . . ." strongly suggests immersion as the action that constitutes scriptural baptism. Immersion is the only "kind" of baptism in which the person being baptized goes to the water before the act and leaves the water behind after the act! Who had the authority to change the action called baptism? It cannot be allowed that any man ever



had such authority. The Holy Scriptures affirm that men be “buried” by baptism. (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-5)

“He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove.” This referred to the sign by which John was inspired to recognize the Messiah. (John 1:32-34) Thus, it is clear the Holy Spirit adopted the shape of a dove on that occasion, otherwise John could not have seen and borne witness. As in all scriptural symbolism, the dove was a creature most admirably suited to serve in that situation as a vehicle for suggesting the Holy Spirit.

Note:

- (1) The dove was a “clean” creature under the ceremonial laws of the Jews;
- (2) It was used in their religious sacrifices, two, in fact, being offered upon the presentation of our Lord in the temple (Luke 2:24);
- (3) It is a monogamous creature!
- (4) It is a symbol of peace;
- (5) It is a marvel of gentleness, love, and affection;
- (6) It is a messenger (the homing pigeon is a dove); and
- (7) The dove has no gall, suggesting that there is no bitterness in the service of God.

Verse 17

Three times, the Holy Scriptures represent God as speaking out of heaven in testimony for Jesus Christ: in this place, on the occasion of The transfiguration (17:5), and in John 12:28-30.

“A voice out of the heavens . . .” This passage is a stronghold of the Doctrine of the Trinity. Discernible by man’s senses, all three persons of the Godhead appear in this passage.

The Son is coming up from the waters of baptism, the Spirit of God in the form of a dove has alighted and remains upon Christ, and the Father Himself speaks out of heaven!

It should not be considered strange that God is a Trinity, because man himself, in a certain sense, is a Trinity also. For example, there are three institutions that minister to man's needs:

- (1) The asylum for the deranged,
- (2) The prison for the criminal, and
- (3) The hospital for the physically injured.

Man, created in God's image and manifesting at least some characteristics of a trinity in his own nature, should not stumble at accepting the higher truth that God Himself is a Trinity of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the sharpest focus in the word of God on this subject is Matthew 28:18-20, in which passage baptism is commanded in the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased . . ." This declaration out of heaven in broad daylight in the presence of a multitude was actually God's designation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The Sonship of Christ is unique. He was the "only begotten" of the Father. (John 3:18; 1 John 4:9) Many men claim to be sons of God, and properly so; but only One could have been "the only begotten" Son of God. Surely, this was a true "sign from heaven," given long before the Pharisees asked for such a sign.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Verse 1**

Jesus was led up by the Spirit . . . " does not mean that the Spirit provided the temptation, because God does not tempt any man. (James 1:13) The Holy Spirit did desire that Jesus' temptation should take place at this particular time. Jesus' two great temptations were this one in the wilderness and that in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42; Mathew 26:39); but He was tempted at other times (Luke 4:13), and perhaps at all times. (Hebrews 2:18)

“Into the wilderness . . .” J. R. Dummelow (One Volume Commentary, p. 632) saw in this wilderness temptation a contrast of the temptation of the first Adam: “The temptation of the first Adam took place in a garden . . . the temptation of the second Adam took place in a wilderness.” The fruits and flowers of Eden contrast with the wild beasts and the disorder of the howling wilderness. Thus, the victory of Christ was made more wonderful.

“To be tempted by the devil . . .” H. Leo Boles (Commentary on Matthew, p.96) says: “The identity and person of Satan have long afforded fruitful fields for conjecture; although, in the present generation, there is a widespread tendency to reduce Satan to the status of a mere influence, or personification of evil.”

It is plainly declared in the Holy Scriptures that Satan is actually a person, a being higher in the order of creation than man, but fallen from his first estate. (Jude 6)

Satan is held in awe even by angels and appears to have been cast out of his domain because of conceit and ambition. (1 Timothy 3:6) Satan is the enemy who sows tares (13:28); snatches the word out of men’s hearts (13:19); and by means of countless snares and devices, takes men captive to do the devil’s will. (2) Timothy 2:25)

Satan is restricted and limited. He does not share control of the universe with God. Satan may not even tempt one little child of God more than the child is able to bear. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Temptation is in itself no sin. This is implicit in the fact that Christ was tempted. It is not temptation to do wrong that constitutes sin, but yielding to that temptation.

## **Verse 2**

“Fasted forty days and forty nights . . .” Two Old Testament types of Christ carried out forty-day fasts, namely, Moses and Elijah. (Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8)

“He then became hungry . . .” Out of that hunger rose the first of Jesus’ great temptations. Christ was in the wilderness, sufficiently removed from society as to jeopardize His earthly life. He must eat, but how? Satan was ready with an illegal plan to meet the situation.

### Verse 3

That “if” is characteristic of Satan. He always cast a doubt if possible. Satan himself had no doubt that Christ was indeed the Messiah; but the devil tried to raise a doubt in the heart of Christ Himself!

Three names characterize Satan in the book of Revelation. He is called the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. (Revelation 20:10) He appears in three guises: as a serpent (Revelation 20:2), as a lion (1 Peter 5:8), and as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

This same triple pattern is seen in the temptation of Adam and Eve, through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. (1 John 2:16) It is noteworthy that the temptation of Christ followed this same three-phase pattern.

“Command that these stones become bread . . .” This was the first temptation, and it struck through the basic hunger of the body. Hunger is the first and the last appetite of the body. By pressing the attack in this quarter, Satan tempted to steal into our Lord’s heart as a serpent.

Like all temptations, this one had reference to filling a genuine need, legitimate enough in itself. Christ surely required food that He could be strengthened and returned to the thousands who would attend His ministry.

Satan’s proposal was sinful because it would have involved Jesus in the use of supernatural powers for the ease and comfort of His own body. It would have shown a lack of trust on Jesus’ part if He should have taken things into His own hands and performed a miracle in order to eat.

### **Verse 4**

“It is written . . .” Fortunate are the Lord’s followers, when they are able to meet every crucial test of life, with a like response. This places the highest

stamp of approval upon the Bible. It is simply unthinkable that the Christ of God would have relied upon a merely human and fallible book in His encounter with the Prince of Evil.

“Man shall not live on bread alone . . . “ This has a wealth of significance. Mere physical existence apart from the true life of the spirit is not really life. (John 10:10)

Note the three places of these temptations, the wilderness, the temple, and the high mountain. The extremes were employed by Satan in a strong effort to win this encounter. Having lost the first round, Satan switched both the scene and the approach. Since Christ trusted the Father, Satan would try to make that very trust the basis of sin, presumptuous sin. The scene too is changed from the roaring wilderness to the sacred precincts of the temple, indicating that there are peculiar temptations to sin in close proximity to faith.

#### **Verse 5**

The expression “holy city” is peculiar to Matthew and shows his love and affection for Jerusalem. The exact location of the pinnacle of the temple is not determined; but the context indicates that it was of sufficient height that only a miracle could prevent death to anyone who leaped from it.

#### **Verse 6**

Note the same employment of doubt as an instrument in temptation. “IF” is a big word in Satan’s weaponry of deceit. A paraphrase of this second temptation is as follows: “Since you have so much faith in God that is fine; just call all the people together in the temple and perform an outstanding miracle in the sight of all. You could leap from the pinnacle of the temple unhurt, and the people would instantly hail you as the Messiah. You can see that this is a genuine timesaver, a short-cut that will enable you to achieve the necessary recognition without the time-consuming labor and pains of teaching and preaching.”

“For it is written . . .” Satan reinforces the temptation with a plausible appeal to Scripture itself. (Psalm 91:11-12) Christ did not charge Satan with

misquotation or misapplication of the Scripture. As a matter of fact, the words do apply to Christ.

Christ rejected the temptation, not on the grounds that Satan had misused the word of God, but on the grounds that it would have constituted an unnecessary presumption and would have, in fact been making trial of God. Christ instantly cited the Scripture forbidding such presumption. (Deuteronomy 6:16)

### Verse 7

“On the other hand it is written . . .” This is the key to the Scriptures! Every passage of the word of God is to be understood in the light of other passages bearing on the same subject.

God’s will on any subject is to be understood in the light of all that is written. Christ made this principle clear in His words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus when He said, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.” (Luke 24:25)

The devil likes to quote Scripture. “Take a little wine for the stomach’s sake!” “Be not overly righteous!” “Eat, drink and be merry!”—who has not heard Satan quoting such passages as these?

“It is written . . .” This was Jesus’ method and He won the day. So shall His disciples win the contest if they use His method!

“You shall not tempt the Lord your God . . .” Jesus did not argue with Satan but simply announced the word of God forbidding the thing Satan suggested. In this temptation, Satan appears as an angel of light, quoting the word of God, pretending to be interested in a “short-cut” victory for Christ.

This was a dramatic change from the subtle insinuation of the first temptation. Failing in both maneuvers, Satan changed again; and, in the following temptation he attempted to overcome Christ, appearing before Him as a roaring lion, arrogant, overbearing, and pretentious to have world dominion.

## Verses 8-9

The mystery of how Satan could do such a thing remains unknown. Christ, in some way unknown to us, was transported through Satanic power to a great eminence where the devil made all the kingdoms of the world pass in review, as it were, before the mind of Jesus.

J. W. McGarvey (Commentary on Matthew, p. 42) is doubtless correct in pointing out the imagination as a key factor in this temptation. He wrote: "If they were presented only to his mental vision, it might have been accomplished by a vivid description, such as Satan is capable of, aided by the excited imagination of Jesus as He looked abroad from the top of the exceeding high mountain."

"All these things will I give You . . ." What did Satan mean by that? Did the devil propose a union of forces with the powers of Jesus for the purpose of establishing a world dominion with Christ as the nominal head but with Satan as the real ruler? Or was Satan's proposition an unqualified lie? It is the conviction of a lifetime that Satan lied to Jesus Christ in this third temptation.

Satan is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44) The Bible specifically refutes the idea that Satan has at his disposal all the world kingdoms.

Nebuchadnezzar was compelled to eat grass with the beasts of the field till seven times had passed over him; and why? Only that he might learn a simple truth, namely, "That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes." (Daniel 4:25)

It is impossible to suppose that Christ was ignorant of the truth mentioned in Daniel or that He was in any sense ignorant of the falsity of Satan's claims. How then, could He have been tempted? Any tempted saint can answer that Satan's lies have the power to seduce even when they are known to be lies. No sinner ever did wrong but Satan promised him pleasure, but no sinner ever got what he expected. "*The wages of sin is death, not pleasure.*"

It must be admitted that in this case, Satan told such a big lie that God-fearing men still believe it, nearly two thousand years after the fact. Face the truth; If Christ had yielded to Satan, Christ would not have won the kingdoms of this world; Satan would have won them, and God's redemptive work would have failed.

### **Verse 10**

Christ rejected Satan's proposal without regard to its truth or falsity. Satan's promise, whether true or false, had no bearing on the conduct of the Lord which was regulated altogether by the word of God, not by Satan's words. (Deuteronomy 6:13)

Christ applied that Old Testament passage to include devil worship. The prohibition is, in fact, against all worship except the worship of Almighty God through Jesus Christ. It is sinful to worship the devil, or angels (Revelation 19:10), or a man (Acts 10:26) or any object or being other than the infinite God through Christ.

### **Verse 11**

Christ won the encounter. In the third temptation, no less than in the other two, Satan was vanquished.

As the roaring lion, he audaciously demanded that the Son of God fall down and worship the devil! This was a bold arrogance without precedent. As a serpent, as an angel, or as a lion, Satan brought all his cunning into play against the Christ, but to no avail. "But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57)

"Then the devil left Him . . ." This, of course, was not the end of Christ's temptations which were to continue with abatement till the cross itself appeared upon Golgotha.

There is a devilish cunning in the Satanic method of leaving, for a season, and returning in full force another day. Luke indicated that this is what Satan did. (Luke 4:13) Satan always seeks the opportune time to exert his evil power. He blows softly with the south wind to entice the unwary ship out of its haven, and then to smite it with the fury of a violent Euraquilo (east, northeast wind)! (Acts 27:13-14)

"Angels came and began to minister to Him . . ." God did not leave Christ to die in the wilderness, after all. He was fed of angels. Satan's proposal to change stones into bread was as unnecessary as it was sinful. Christ found in dire extremity the same truth uttered by Abraham on Mount Moriah, "The Lord will provide!" (Genesis 22:14)



**DIVISION III**  
**ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**  
**AND REVELATION OF ITS PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND LAWS**  
**(4:12-13:52)**

**Verse 12**

"Delivered up..." refers to the imprisonment of John the Baptist by Herod. Christ's withdrawal into Galilee was precautionary to avoid an untimely martyrdom, and to set His disciples an example for staying out of trouble with authorities, provided it can be avoided honorably. Christ's withdrawal into Galilee gave occasion for the Master's Galilean ministry, all of which Matthew omits, probably because Matthew was not an eyewitness of the events of that ministry.

**Verse 13**

Between the last words of verse 12 and the first words of verse 13 there was an interval of at least a year's time.

"Leaving Nazareth..." is a reference to the rejection at Nazareth by the townspeople of that village who despised Him because of what they supposed to be His humble origin and environment. The choice of Capernaum as His residence may have been due to the fact that it was the chief city of Galilee, the site of a Jewish synagogue, a Roman tax station, and the headquarters for a Roman garrison. At least five of the Twelve resided there: Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew. Capernaum also rejected Christ and was denounced by Him. (11:23)

"Which is by the sea . . ." is the body of water usually called the Sea of Galilee but also known as Lake Gennesaret. This remarkable body of water is actually an extension of the Jordan River, lying 700 feet below sea level, and extends some twelve miles in length and six miles in width.

"In the region of Zebulun and Naphtali . . ." Capernaum was located in the territory of Zebulun near the border with Naphtali. The thought which impressed Matthew is that from the contemptuous borders of these minor tribes should rise the Light of all nations, a fact clearly prophesied by Isaiah.

#### **Verse 14**

Matthew made it clear that Isaiah was not the speaker, but only the prophet through whom God spoke. Matthew, who doubtless had a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew prophecies, quoted the passage from Isaiah.

#### **Verses 15-16**

“Beyond the Jordan . . .” Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by crossing the sea many times. The trans-Jordan territory was called “Perea” by the Romans. The expression Galilee of the Gentiles is a proverb emphasizing the low estate of those people in Galilee. Gentile customs, morals, and culture prevailed; and these were far lower than those of Jerusalem; and thus, the wretched and despised state of the citizens of Galilee, and especially of Nazareth, was proverbial.

“The people who were setting in darkness . . .” is a reference to the spiritual poverty and ignorance of Galilee. Darkness has ever been a symbol of moral destitution and spiritual blindness. All men must remain in darkness till the Light shines in their hearts through faith.

“Shadow of death . . .” is an expression that is used a number of times in the Old Testament. In this place it is only a further reference to the moral and spiritual condition of the people of Galilee.

#### Verse 17

Christ’s first preaching has a ring similar to that of John the Baptist (3:2) Repentance was the prime need of that generation. People had grown hard and indifferent to spiritual values. Repentance is still the prime need of this age and of every age. There must be repentance, even before the true life in Christ can begin.

#### **Verse 18**

Jesus called busy men to follow Him, in order to show that no idle or useless person can be a Christian. Socially, they were of the stable middle class which constituted at that time, and perhaps in every time, the solid portion of the entire social order.

“Simon who was called Peter . . .” This apostle was also called “Cephas” or “Stone” by our Lord. (John 1:42; I Corinthians 1:12; 15:5; Galatians 2:9)

“And Andrew his brother. . . “ Peter is always mentioned first in the New Testament references to the apostles, although his brother Andrew was a follower before Peter.

All these men had been present at Cana of Galilee where Jesus performed His first miracle and had been faithful followers of Christ for at least a year. The significance of the call mentioned in this passage is that, henceforth, these men were to forsake all and follow Christ to the exclusion of every earthly interest. (19:27)

“For they were fishermen . . .” Augustine said, “They did not lay aside their nets, but changed them!” Certainly, Christ did indicate a similarity between fishing and soul winning. Following after some of the similarities: skill is required; patience is essential; cooperation is helpful; methods vary with conditions; results cannot be accurately predicted; and under some situations an attractive bait is absolutely necessary.

Ministers should ever strive to make the kingdom of God as attractive to men as possible, though never by a compromise of its principles. A skilled fisherman provides an attractive lure for the fish. A gospel preacher should seek to entice the attention of men with as attractive and intelligent a presentation of truth as is humanly possible. A few have so flagrantly violated this principle as to bait the end of the pole, cast the naked hook into the water, and dare the fishes to come out on the bank and fight!

#### **Verse 19**

The place of every disciple is behind his Lord...as a follower. Later, Peter was to forsake this place and be rebuked by Christ who said, “Get behind Me Satan!”

“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men . . .” That is, following Christ, is every disciple’s true place.

#### **Verse 20**

“They . . .” These men had been unofficial followers of Christ for a year or more.

#### **Verses 21-22**

James was the first apostle to suffer martyrdom, and John was the last to die. These extremes suggest a mystical fulfillment of the request their mother

made of Jesus that one of them should sit on the right hand and one on the left hand in His kingdom. (20:21)

“Zebedee . . .” was the brother-in-law of the virgin Mary, according to H. Leo Boles (op. cit., p. 113). The reference is from Matthew 27:56 and John 19:25.

This would make James and John cousins of our Lord—their mothers, Mary and Salome, being sisters. Zebedee is never mentioned as a disciple.

### **Verse 23**

“All Galilee . . .” indicates an intensive preaching tour in that area.

“Teaching in their synagogues . . .” indicates the usual places where Jesus did most of His formal teaching.

“The gospel of the kingdom . . .” indicates the subject matter. The message of the kingdom was “good news,” indicated by the very term gospel a word derived from roots that mean “good news.” This can only mean that the kingdom was to be established in the lifetime of the people then living. It would have been no “good news” to them that it would be set up in say 1914, or long after they were dead.

### **Verses 24-25**

The various diseases, etc., mentioned show that Christ’s power to heal extended to every possible condition of suffering and handicapped humanity.

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### **The Beatitudes, Verse 1-12**

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Verse 1**

The traditional site of this mountain is seven miles southwest of Capernaum; the place is known as The Horns of Hattin. The custom of setting down to teach, a procedure that was long followed in the early church. Sitting to teach was an indication of authority.

Most of the cathedrals of Europe are still without pews or other seating facilities for the congregation.

### **Verse 2**

This indicates more than merely opening one's mouth. It denotes formality, preparation and declaration of the cardinal principles set forth in the ensuing discourse, called the Sermon on the Mount.

### **Verse 3**

The word "blessed" means "happy" and is so translated by some. The "poor in spirit" is understood in two ways, both of which harmonize with the Holy Scriptures.

- (1) It is that quality of recognizing one's spiritual destitution in such a degree as to enable the sinner to approach God, not as the Pharisee, but as the publican, supplicating the Father for all necessary and desirable blessings. The poor in spirit are the opposite of the proud, conceited, arrogant and disdainful.

Only the poor in spirit can enter God's kingdom. Others will never feel their need nor know their poverty till too late.

- (2) Another conception of the poor in spirit is seen in the account of this beatitude by Luke (6:20), "Blessed are the poor."

J. R. Dummelow (op. cit., p. 639) expressed it; "A Christian, whether rich or poor, must have the spirit of poverty, that is, he must possess his wealth as if he possessed it not, and be able to resign it at any moment without regret, and to say, with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven . . ." means that persons with the attitude of the poor in spirit shall have the privilege of becoming members of the kingdom, namely by entering it by means of the new birth.

### **Verse 4**

It is, of course, a paradox to say, "Blessed are those who mourn . . ." but that is exactly what this beatitude means. Tribulation results in patience.

What a generous and merciful arrangement of Almighty God that even life's sorrows shall bless and reward His servants!

Why should Christians mourn? They mourn for the world which lies in the darkness of sin. They mourn for the sins that mar their own lives. They mourn for loved ones and members of their families out of Christ. They mourn

for the slain who have fallen in the encounter with the evil one. They mourn from those sorrows and bereavements which are the common lot of all men. How unspeakably blessed, therefore, is the promise of our Savior, *“THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED!”*

#### **Verse 5**

Meekness and lowliness are related terms. Both Jesus Christ and the patriarch Moses are set forth in scripture as being meek.

“Inherit the earth . . .” does not refer exclusively to the “new heaven and the new earth” (2 Peter 3:13) but to this present earth as well. This is not a mere prophecy that the Christians shall be the landed gentry; but it is a statement that their relationship to the earth and its possessions shall be such as to bring them the greatest possible benefit and enjoyment of it.

#### **Verse 6**

Many manifest no hunger or thirst after the things of God; and what shall be said of this innumerable multitude? Why do they feel no hunger, no thirst? Like the absence of ordinary hunger, this spiritual lack of hunger is due to the awful cancer of sin gnawing out the heart of the victim. Some have perverted their desires and have no true hunger and thirst for spiritual things remaining. The ravages of disease, perversion, and starvation are thus able to destroy that eagerness of the soul that men should have with reference to the things of God.

“Righteousness...” in the scriptural view, means keeping God’s commandments (Luke 1:6); is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:17); and maybe obtained in only one way, namely, by obedience to God’s commandments, all of which “are” righteousness. (Psalm 119:172)

“They shall be satisfied . . .” The desire for righteousness is the only desire of man that can be truly and finally satisfied. Appetites of the flesh, all of them, can be satisfied only for the moment.

#### **Verse 7**

All types of unmerciful conduct are condemned by this verse. Cruel amusements, punishments, speeches, newspaper articles, letters—in short, ALL kinds of unmerciful and inhumane behavior are proscribed by the Son of God in this beatitude. Such things are forever excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

“They shall obtain mercy . . .” This is to say that those who are merciful toward others shall receive for themselves mercy from Almighty God.

### **Verse 8**

The “heart” in this passage is, of course, the mind. According to the Scriptures, it is the “heart” that **imagines** (Genesis 6:5), **understands** (Matthew 15:13), **reasons** (Mark 2:8), **thinks** (Luke 9:47), **believes** (Romans 10:9), and **loves** (1 Peter 1:22).

These passages are more than enough to identify the scriptural “heart” as the mind or seat of the intelligence.

“They shall see God . . .” This is true in two ways.

- (1) The pure in heart shall see God by faith, just as Moses endured, “as seeing Him who is invisible.” (Hebrews 11:27)
- (2) They shall see God and Christ Jesus in the eternal world. (Revelation 22:4; 1 John 3:2)

### **Verse 9**

Christ is the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6) The citizens of His kingdom shall be peacemakers.

- (1) Through spiritual instruction, they can bring peace to the hearts that are troubled.
- (2) They can bring peace to their fellow men who are at strife between or among themselves.
- (3) They can bring men, through preaching God’s word, or teaching it, to become reconciled to God, which is the greatest of all the achievements of the peacemaker.

Definite procedures for the peacemakers are laid down in the Bible. A peacemaker conceals the transgression of others, seeks a personal interview; and tries to save “the face” of the wrongdoer. (2 Timothy 2:22-26) Such shall be called the sons of God because they are most like God in His efforts to reconcile man unto Himself.

### **Verse 10**

Those whose righteousness is of such a quality that Satan will vent his wrath upon them are indeed blessed.

### **Verse 11**

In Christ's teachings, there is often the pattern of proceeding from the general to the specific as in the case of Christ's questions regarding His identity. (16:13-15) These verses give a glimpse of the hatred that must ever rest upon God's true people in whatever age they live. The faithful will be reproached for Christ's name and will be persecuted for refusal to walk in ungodliness. (1 Peter 4:16; 4:4)

### **Verse 12**

The apostles took to heart this admonition of the Savior to rejoice in persecutions. Christ firmly underscored the principle motive undergirding human submissiveness to God. There were, in fact, three of these: love, fear, and hope of reward. There is nothing dishonorable about any of these motives.

"So they persecuted the prophets who were before you . . ." Christ in this place puts the same dignity upon the apostles as pertained to the prophets of the Old Testament.

There are also many other New Testament passages which indicate most emphatically that the New Testament is God's true word. (Jude 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:17; 2 Peter 3:2)

### Relation of the Disciples to the World (verses 11-16)

In the Beatitudes, Christ emphasized the inner character of Christians and gave the Beatitudes as identification marks of His true believers. The importance of the inner life is seen in that this was the first thing outlined. Next, Christ turned His attention to the disciples' relationship to the world.

### **Verse 13**

Salt keeps food from being insipid and preserves it from corruption. Both these functions are performed by Christians for society as a whole. A little more salt (true followers of God) would have preserved Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction. (Genesis 13:32)

"It is good for nothing . . ." What a truly worthless state is that of apostate Christians! The Savior's estimate of him is that he is "good for nothing"!

Another pertinent observation regarding salt is that it must come in contact with that which is to be benefited by it. So must Christians come in contact



with the rest of mankind. Christ did not encourage monasticism or asceticism. It is also proper to observe that salt is indispensable. So are Christians.

Christ shows that Christians are truly indispensable to this world. *THEY ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH!*

#### **Verse 14**

This is further testimony to the indispensable nature of God's children. The world would be in total darkness without them. There is no reason to suppose that God would allow a wicked world to stand if it were not for the faithful remnant remaining in it and remaining faithful to God.

Christ also said, "I am the Light of the world." The light Christians give forth to others is truly derived from Christ. (2 Peter 1:19) Just as all light, energy, and power on earth are derived from the sun (center of our solar system) so all moral and spiritual light are derived from the Sun of Righteousness, our Lord Jesus Christ. (Malachi 4:2)

A city set on a hill cannot be hid. H. Leo Boles (Commentary on Matthew, p. 128) said: "The comparison (is) between a city on a hill and a group, or church, of His disciples. Their influence cannot be ignored in the world. There is no greater light for God than the church that is fulfilling its mission in the community."

#### **Verses 15-16**

This passage sets forth instructions regarding the Christian's light, or influence, in the world.

- (1) Christ forbade hiding it under a bushel that is, permitting business and commerce to obscure one's influence for the truth. (5:14)
- (2) He warned against hiding it under a vessel that is, permitting cares, duties, and obligations of life to take precedence over faith. (Luke 8:16)
- (3) He prohibited hiding it under the bed of licentiousness, laziness, or idleness. (Luke 8:16)

What then should be done with the light or influence of the Christian's life? It should be placed upon "THE STAND." And pray tell, what is that? It is nothing less than the church of Jesus Christ, namely, the local congregation. Revelation 1:20 identifies the lampstands as the churches.

“Let your light shine . . . The command is to glorify God through an abundance of good works. As the noted Negro minister, Marshall Keeble, was often heard to say, “The Bible does not say to make your light shine, but it says to “let it shine!” This, to be sure, forbids showiness and boasting.

Origen, (Ante-Nicene Father, Vol 4, p. 547) quoted this place and referred to the light of Christians as a “brilliant and unfading wisdom . . . the very reflection of everlasting life.” and argued from this premise that Christians should not bow

down before the sun, moon, or stars, seeing they themselves are light, and from the very same source!

“Good works . . .” It is noteworthy that Jesus never gave the slightest encouragement to the delusion that people are saved by faith “only.” Good works, from the very beginning, were considered to be a most necessary and primary element on the part of all who would truly follow Christ and would through Him hope to have the abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. Thus Jesus concluded His analysis of the disciple’s relationship to the world, making them to be both salt and light.

#### Verse 17

The Jewish nation had long held the Law of Moses in the utmost respect and honor. Any change in the status of their law was sure to be received unfavorably by them. Therefore, Christ quite early in His ministry took pains to spell out for them His true and proper relationship to the Law of Moses.

Christ took the Law of Moses out of the way; and yet He did so, not by violating it, but by fulfilling it! (Colossians 2:14-16)

Christ fulfilled the law:

- (1) by His own unswerving obedience to it,
- (2) by His exact manifestation as its promised Messiah, and,
- (3) by enlarging and expanding its teachings, lifting them to a higher and purer level, and by bringing all of the Old Testament teachings to perfection in the perfect Law of Liberty.

### **Verse 18**

“Not the smallest letter or stroke . . .” (Jots . . . tittles . . .) were the minutest markings and characters, forming parts of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

The New Testament teaches that all of the prophecies of the Old Testament shall indeed be fulfilled (Luke 24:44), that its narratives are “written for our example,” (1 Corinthians 10:11) and for our admonition and learning. (Romans 15:4)

Here is the principle that the New Testament is essentially an extension of the Old, minus its types and shadows, plus an elevation and perfection of all its latent spirituality.

However, the changes in Christ are so radically beyond anything ever dreamed of by the Old Testament prophets that the true connection tends to be obscured.

- (1) The law of sacrifice was fulfilled in Jesus’ death.
- (2) The Law of circumcision was replaced by that “circumcision not made with hands.” (Colossians 2:11)
- (3) The Passover gave place to the Lord’s Supper.
- (4) The Sabbath day became the Lord’s Day.

### **Verse 19**

In this verse, Christ plainly refers to His own commandments with the strong warning that men are under obligation to heed and observe the laws He gives. Today, there are some who speak of certain scriptures as “mere command.” But Christ made His commandments to be overwhelming importance and set forth the principle that “the least” of His commandments was to be received and honored with infinite respect and obedience.

### **Verse 20**

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

Revision of the Fifth Commandment in the Ten Commandments  
(Verses 21 -26)

**Verse 21**

What Christ did at this point in His teachings is bold, daring, and sensational beyond anything one could imagine today. Here was the case of a prophet, yet relatively unknown, placing himself squarely on record as superior to the Law of Moses, even to the Ten Commandments.

Christ in this chapter mentioned several of the Commandments, exposed their weakness, and specifically elevated His own will and teachings above them.

He also laid bare, in the most painful manner for the ceremonialists, the awful

weakness of the Ten Commandments, in that a person might indeed keep the letter of the law without being in any sense at all truly righteous in the eyes of God!

Of course, the Pharisees were the obvious and notorious examples of that very condition; they kept the commandments, but were children of the devil.

Jesus opposed the Pharisees and their way of life as essentially sinful in spite of all punctilious observances of tithes, ceremonies, and formalities of the Mosaic religion—embellished, of course, with countless traditions of their own.

“You shall not commit murder . . .” did not, however, prohibit hate, the cause of killing. The Pharisees might indeed keep the command while at the same time hating their enemy, hoping that a wild beast would slay him, that lightning would strike him, or that a poisonous serpent would bite him! Christ exposed the weakness and sinfulness of such views. He made anger with a brother a sin equal to murder; and also such derogatory statements as “Raca” and “Thou fool,” He made subject to the penalties of murder.

It may well be doubted if the church as a whole, even today, has any adequate conception of Jesus’ true meaning on this subject. When it is considered that a derogatory or uncomplimentary remark about a Christian brother is subject to punishment in the “hell of fire,” and when it is considered that much of the journalism so widely received by “churches of Christ” is filled with cruel, uncomplimentary, and even false and vicious statements about

brethren, the true follower of Christ must stand in awe of the penalties which divine justice shall certainly execute against evil doers.

#### **Verse 22**

J. R. Dummelow (op. cit., p. 642) says that “Raca” is an Aramaic expression meaning “empty head.” There are numerous epithets of similar import in constant use by many who fancy themselves to be Christians.

“Raca” or “Thou fool” are expressions which are essentially the same, and the plain teaching of our Lord in this context is that *ALL* insults of every kind are sinful and that all our derogatory and deprecatory expressions against one’s fellow human being are murderous. Those who resort to the use of such expressions are guilty in the eyes of the Lord. This is true because such expressions find their origin in a heart full of hatred and enmity.

It is at this very juncture (relations with fellow humans) that the Christian is different from others. He is even denied by his Lord the right of worship if his brother has anything against him!

#### **Verse 23**

This means that if one’s conscience is aware of sins committed against a brother, the first duty is to make it right with the brother, a duty more imperative, even, than that of worship, and which takes precedence over it.

#### **Verse 24**

It is useless to offer worship to God when some brother has been wronged and insulted till the would-be worshiper shall seek out the one wronged and make amends. Christ’s plan of maintaining harmony and fellowship in His church is really quite simple. It is “Go.”

Three definitions are outlined in which it is imperative that the true follower of Christ “go” to his brother:

- (1) When a brother has anything against such a one. (This passage).
- (2) When such a one has been wronged by a brother. (18:15-17).
- (3) When one shall observe that a brother has been overtaken in any fault. (Galatians 6:1)

Need it be said, that this is the only procedure laid down in God’s word for dealing with a brother’s sin. Furthermore, these divinely imposed procedures are applicable to all types of sins and errors committed by brethren.

Christ commands His servants to “go” to the brother who is sinned against or who has sinned against them, or when the brother has been overtaken in any “fault.” If obeyed, the Scriptures here outlined would prevent the sinful and destructive practice of venting animosities, pronouncing anathemas, shouting corrections, and launching vicious criticisms against one’s brothers in Christ.

#### **Verse 25**

Settling disagreements and healing possible sources of friction should be the pressing business of every day. In that manner, hatreds and enmities would not be left to build up strength. An attitude of conciliation and fairness can pull the sting from any thorny human problems, provided it is manifested spontaneously and early enough at the first sign of disagreement or conflict.

#### **Verse 26**

There are countless examples of human conflict ending in the most tragic results which could have been avoided altogether by the application of Christ’s teaching. “Until you have paid the last cent . . .” refers to reaping the last and bitterest fruit of a failure to handle problems in the manner here laid down by Christ.

### **Revision of the Seventh Commandment in the Ten Commandments (Verses 27-32)**

Once more, Christ selected as His target one of the great and highly respected words of the Ten commandments, blasting it with His “*YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.*” Christ made the lustful thought as sinful as the overt act. In the light of this, who is innocent? Adultery proceeds from impure thinking; and in this passage Christ’s law appears far higher and more discerning than the Ten Commandments.

#### **Verses 29**

The location of this verse in the midst of Jesus’ teaching on adultery makes the meaning clear. Christ expects His followers to avoid gross sin by keeping the fountain of the heart sweet and clean. That this requires exertion, self-denial, and determination of heroic proportions is seen in the implied comparison of plucking out the right eye. The giving up of cherished sin is far more difficult but just as necessary for those who would truly enter into life.

### **Verse 30**

This is the same thought as that in verse 29, repeated in a different figure for the sake of emphasis. Remember that Christ is still speaking of adultery; and the only proper meaning that can attach to these two verses (29-30) must relate to that subject. It seems plain enough that Christians should strive, at whatever cost, to avoid lustful thoughts.

### **Verses 31-32**

Thus Christ, improving on the Ten Commandments, attached guilt to lustful thoughts, and in this place makes marriages to divorced persons sinful except in the case of the innocent party of a divorce for adultery (19:9)

Interesting enough, Jesus abolished the death penalty for adultery. At least, this can be deduced from His words addressed to the woman who was taken in the very act by the Pharisees, "Neither do I condemn you." (John 8:11)

### **The Ninth Commandment Revised Verses (33-37)**

#### **Verse 33**

Christ does not quote verbatim from the Ninth Commandment, but rather deals with Pharisaical deductions, extensions and exceptions of the Great Word which said, "THOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS." It was far more offensive to the priestly mentality for one to violate his oath, especially with reference to some gift to the temple, than to bear slanderous witness against an accused on trial in a court of law, which is one of the primary meanings in the Ten Commandments.

Christ referred the whole question to higher ground, making it a sin, under all circumstances, to utter an untruth, thus by-passing altogether the question of violating an oath!

Under the interpretation of the Pharisees, the divine prohibition was against "swearing" a lie. This, in practice, meant that so long as one had not been properly "sworn in," or as long as one refused to deliver a formal oath, the offender could tell as many lies as he could without incurring guilt under the Law! That interpretation was not of God, but it was only of sinful men.

The glory of Jesus Christ is that He stripped off those superficial and shallow devices for circumventing God's Law and made the truth to shine before all men.

### **Verses 34-37**

The obvious meaning is that a Christian's word is his bond. He does not need to reinforce his words with any oath or any appeal for heaven to witness, or by any other device to underscore the truth of his remarks. A Christian's speech is limited to "Yes" and "No" with regard to an oath.

Speaking the truth in love is a badge of true discipleship. Falsehood, evil-speaking, slander, backbiting, gossip, and idle talk of all kinds—these are surely prohibited to the child of God.

Various references to heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and one's head, are only examples of oaths which people of that day commonly employed.

## **Other Teachings Contrasted with Jewish Law**

### **(Verses 38-48)**

#### **Verse 38**

The law of the jungle was far different:

- (1) If you kill my child, I will kill all your children, your wife, your brothers, your whole generation.
- (2) If you knock out my tooth (or eye), I will knock out *ALL* of yours and kill you also!

Thus the ancient Law of the Hebrews was a vast improvement in that it strictly limited punitive action to the extent of the original injury or loss that precipitated it.

#### **Verse 39**

The type of submissive meekness enjoined by Christ in these verses must appear very difficult to the people who have never tried it. Actually, this presents the most exciting and thrilling approach to life and its problems that can possibly be imagined. Those who have tried it unanimously affirm that it works.



When one strives honestly and faithfully to live up to Jesus' teaching in this matter, or any other, forces far beyond the knowledge of any man are working for the success of the obedient follower of the Lord.

“Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other cheek . . . “ has taken the sport out of many an evil attack against the defenseless.

#### **Verse 40**

This is exactly the same principle in another setting and is repeated for the sake of emphasis. Nor should too much be made of the fact that most of the losses in these verses seem rather trivial, a flick on the cheek, the loss of a coat, and going a mile.

They do suggest, however, that there may be larger areas where the child of God may not use the “submissive response” enjoined in these passages.

#### **Verses 41-42**

Does anyone live up to this? Certainly, one must agree that the Sermon on the Mount is still Mount Everest of the Christian religion, namely, the highest peak of all and only rarely scaled. Did Christ mean that a Christian by lending to all comers should suffer the plundering of all his goods?

We can only conclude that Christ was teaching a basic truth in this place, namely, that it is better to invest in people by helping and befriending them, than it is to invest in hoarding treasures for one's self. Of that there can be no doubt.

#### **Verses 43-45**

Leviticus 19:18 is the Old Testament passage which says, “Love your neighbor.” It does not, however, say, “Hate our enemy.” That was an addition to God's word by the scribes and Pharisees. Thus, the people of Jesus' day had fallen into the old and vicious habit of linking a sublime truth with a ridiculous error, thus “yoking the ox with the donkey,” to use an Old Testament figure of speech.

The principle of loving one's enemies is valid and binding upon all who would follow Christ. There is no room in the Christian heart, purged from sin and forgiveness of all transgressions, to entertain such a stifling and chilling a thing as hatred for anyone. Love in this place does not necessarily refer to sentimental and affectionate love such as one has for members of his family.

The kind of love meant is the love manifested by God Himself in that He sends rain on the just and unjust. The implication is that Christians shall treat his enemies with fairness and equity, doing unto them as he would desire men should do unto him.

#### **Verse 46**

The challenge is, that all men shall be “like their Father who is in heaven.” That is what it is really all about, that men should be like the pure and holy God whom they are taught to worship through Christ. God loves sinners, even dying for them when they were yet in sin; so Christians should love all men, sinners included—even their own personal enemies! To live the other way is to be no better than a publican, and in the Jewish lexicon, that was about as low as a man could get! Christ here enunciated a new and thrilling principle to take the place of the old proverb that “One rotten apple will spoil a barrel of good apples!” That is, “One good apple can heal a barrel of rotten apples!”

#### **Verse 47**

This is one of the most interesting statements Jesus ever made, “What do you more than others?” The implications of this are positively profound. Implicit in these words is the proclamation that Christians are different; they love more than others, will do more than others, and are in fact better in every way than others. Their righteousness is a matter of going beyond, giving the cloak also, going the second mile, turning the other cheek loving enemies, praying for those who persecute them, and, in short being “sons of your Father who is in heaven.” (Verse 45)

#### **Verse 48**

No one can say that Christ did not set a high standard for man to follow! To be perfect as God is perfect, what a challenge that is!

Nobody, but nobody, is ever going to be perfect; and yet, it is the genius of the Christian religion that perfection is required of its adherents. A contradiction? No, only a paradox. The goal or ideal is necessary that man may continually know that he is unworthy of salvation, that he can never in a million years merit it, and that any real perfection he might eventually attain must be the free gift of Christ.

An apostle is our authority for saying that no man is above sin. John wrote: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9)

Nevertheless, how boldly Christ flung down the challenge! Perfection, that’s what is required. Even if one were found so foolish as to believe he had attained it, his blindness to any sin would constitute the biggest sin of all. This verse, as much as any other in the Bible, throws man upon his knees and bids him trust in Christ alone for eternal life.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, Continued**

#### **Verse 1**

The prohibition in this verse is against a false motive for righteousness, namely, “to be seen.” Secrecy is not here enjoined in any absolute sense; because Christ also said, “Let your light so shine . . .” (5:16). However, secrecy is by far the best, where possible, as a test on one’s personal motive for deeds of righteousness.

#### **Verse 2**

The area of instruction covered here is personal and individual, the broad assumption being that every true follower of Christ gives alms; that is, helps other people. One’s obligation to be mindful of human need and suffering is not totally discharged by the support, however generous of any church budget. The reference to “sounding a trumpet” refers to an ostentatious practice of the Pharisees, termed “hypocrites” by the Lord; but here it has a much wider application and constitutes a prohibition against all forms of boastful and vainglorious conduct.

Notice the contrast of rewards in these two verses. There is the genuine and eternal reward in heaven, on the one hand, and the short-lived, uncertain and unsatisfying reward of popular applause or approval, on the other. The child of God should always have respect to the greater.

### **Verse 3**

This is a heavenly guideline for maintaining the desired privacy as applied specifically to alms-giving.

### **Verse 4**

Secrecy in giving personal aid and assistance to helpless or unfortunate persons is commanded by Christ and has these easily discernible qualities to commend it:

- (1) It assures purity of motive in the heart of the giver by removing the temptation to hypocrisy.
- (2) It protects and honors the privacy of the recipient, a privacy that is indispensable to his recovery and rehabilitation.
- (3) It protects the benefactor from a proliferation of calls upon his generosity.
- (4) It provides a noble basis for the development of true love and friendship between the helper and the person helped.
- (5) It honors this specific commandment of Christ; and, to the Christian, this is the most important of all.

### **Verse 5**

As in the matter of alms-giving, it is not a case of “if” but “when.” Prayer is a vital and constant condition of the truly spiritual life. In this passage Christ exposes the entire area of hypocritical and ostentatious prayers. The proper exercise of the privilege of prayer is violated:

- (1) by the choice of an improper place of prayer,
- (2) by the use of vain repetitions, and
- (3) by the employment of long and verbose monologue.

Each of these violations receives our Lord’s specific attention.

- (1) Improper place for prayer is indicated by “the street corners.”

How about crowded restaurants and public places? Thanksgiving for private meals is surely enjoined, but semi-public prayers of thanks could be another matter. To be sure, prayer may be offered anywhere, at anytime, from the belly of a whale, from the cross, in a storm, during battle, in a garden anywhere! Yet there are some places that do not fit the purpose of prayer. Prayers offered before congregations, at public gatherings, and in halls of parliaments and

legislatures are not proscribed; but any occasion or place selected that invites public scorn and contempt for religion is a far different matter. Prayers offered at mealtime are best when offered in the quiet reverence of private situations.

#### **Verse 6**

(2) The best place for prayer is characterized by secrecy, privacy, and quietness. The secret place, the private room, the inner chamber, the shut door—these are the best situations in which acceptable prayer may be offered.

#### **Verse 7**

(3) The third area of abuse of the sacred privilege of prayer is in the matter of vain, empty repetitions. The customs of Gentiles in regards to this abuse were well known. Water wheels, wind chimes, and endless chanting over and over of prescribed words are old and widely observed characteristics of pagan prayers; and these have continued down the centuries until these very times.

Any person familiar with the Rosary cannot fail to wonder how such a thing could be observed among the followers of Christ, that is, if considered in the light of Jesus words in this passage.

“They suppose they will be heard for their many words . . .” This not only condemns rote, repetitious prayers, but also limits how outrageously this divine injunction is violated, and sometimes by the very best of people!

#### **Verse 8**

A God who needs to be told what men need could certainly not help if told! Prayers, giving God information, are as ridiculous as they are for lacking reverence for God.

### **THE LORD’S PRAYER**

#### **Verses 9-13**

“Pray, then, in this way . . .” The Lord did not say, “Pray in these words,” but “in this way.” How strange it is that this very prayer should have become the very thing it was designed to prevent, namely a rote prayer! And what is the “in this way?”

It is:

- (1) short,
- (2) spontaneous,

- (3) God-oriented, the first three petitions being for things of God rather than for things of men,
- (4) extemporaneous by the Matthew and Luke accounts,
- (5) to the point, and
- (6) full of humility.

“Our Father who art in heaven . . .” The Biblical image of God presents Him as a loving Father. In the teachings of Christ, God is referred to as “Father” no less than 160 times.

Christ could and did pray, “My Father,” but His disciples must ever pray, “Our Father.” God is man’s Father because He created him, sustains him, and provides all that men needs.

Since God is man’s true and only spiritual Father, it is sinful and improper to refer this title, spiritually, to any man. (Matthew 23:9) God’s Fatherhood was dimly perceived by the Hebrews but is far more graphically presented by Christ. God loves men enough to give His Son (John 3:16); a sparrow cannot fall without His care (10:30); if men become prodigals, the Father waits patiently to welcome their return (Luke 15:22); and if men become cold, merciless bigots like this elder brother, the Father entreats even them (Luke 15:28).

Oh, what a Father to fallen man is God!

Christ revealed that heaven is the place where God is. Heaven is “up” in that a total set or system of higher values and principles is in operation there. God is not merely “in” heaven but is “everywhere.” (Acts 17:28) Therefore the spiritual definition of heaven is primarily not a place at all, in the ordinary sense, but a state of being higher and nobler than our earthly life, invisible to mortal eyes (1 Timothy 6:16), not subject to material limitations, nor to the presence of death or sin, and yet a true reality of the most transcendent importance and glory.

The Christian faith is a heaven-centered faith. Christ’s teaching places the utmost emphasis upon it, making it the abode of the Father, the ultimate home of the redeemed, and the source of all blessing.

The word “heaven” was ever on His lips. From heaven He came, of heaven He spoke, to heaven He pointed the way, from heaven He brought the Father’s message, from heaven angels came to support Him in the wilderness of temptations and in the garden of Gethsemane.

In heaven the skies were darkened when He was crucified; from heaven angels came to roll away the stone from His grave, not to let Him out, but to let the witnesses in and to announce His resurrection to the disciples.

To heaven the angels escorted Him to receive the everlasting kingdom; from heaven angels warned the disciples about gazing idly into heaven; and in heaven He is interceding at God's right hand.

From heaven He will come a second time to judge the quick and dead, to cast evil out of His universe and to welcome the redeemed into the home of the soul.

"Hallowed be Thy name . . ." The very first petition of this prayer is solicitous for the honor of God's name. Top priority belongs to the things of God and not to the things of men. Man's spiritual well-being, dependent entirely upon his relationship to God, is infinitely more important, even than daily bread—a point of view which comes difficult indeed for sinful men.

The third commandment in the Ten Commandments emphasizes this same point, that being negative, this positive enlightenment on the same truth. Men hallow the name of God when they honor His word, His church, His doctrine, His Son, His laws, and His Name.

"Thy kingdom come . . ." It should be remembered that at the time Jesus gave this example of an acceptable, spontaneous prayer, the kingdom was yet future. The establishment of His kingdom on that day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfilled this petition, that is answered it. The kingdom His disciples were instructed to pray for is now rounding out over two thousand years of successful existence on earth, and it seems strange indeed that men still pray this prayer in exactly the same words. Should this be? No! Especially if it is prayed with any thought that God's kingdom is not yet established.

"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven . . ." Men may know what is the will of God through study of His word and resultant renewing of the mind. (Romans 12:2) In a certain sense, the will of God is now being done. Nothing, not even evil, can exist apart from God's will; but this prayer is a petition that men's hearts may be responsive to God's will for man.

“As in heaven . . . “ is a reminder that the highest order of intelligent beings, even angels, comply with the will of God. Man has not been able to eliminate neither suffering nor death. These exist by God’s permissive will.

Such things as catastrophes, epidemics, plagues, tornadoes, hurricanes, and such things are a part of our world as God made it, or at least He allows it to be.

The ancient who bowed his head under the duress of sorrow or disaster and meekly said, “Oh God, thy will be done,” in all essential areas, stood upon the same ground the Christian occupies today when he prays this prayer.

Whatever the state of unity and harmony in heaven, it is God’s will that the same unity and harmony should prevail upon earth. This prayer, therefore, rebukes the common heresies and schismatic divisions so rampant in the name of religion.

“Give us this day our daily bread . . .” Note that the prayer is not for cake, wine, or luxuries, but for bread and that for only one day at a time. Millions today do not pray this prayer meaningfully because they have a week’s supply in the refrigerator, including luxuries. One should not pray for “my” daily bread but for “our daily bread.” This prayer bespeaks a profound trust in God.

It also suggests moderation. “Daily bread” brings one back to a level of actual need. Dependence upon God is also taught. True, man may have a month’s provisions stored up, but whether he lives to use them or not it totally dependent upon the Father’s will.

“And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors . . . “ Luke’s account uses the word “sins,” but “debts” certainly includes the same thought. This indicates that Christ did not think His disciples would lead sinless lives. (1 john 1:8) Forgiveness is absolutely preconditioned upon the petitioner’s forgiveness of others”

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. . .” This indicates the danger in temptation and stresses man’s weakness. The reference to the “evil one” is a reminder that man’s foe is a person, an ubiquitous enemy who sows tares in the wheat (13:28), snatches the word out of men’s hearts (13:19), and goes about as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)



“For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen . . .”  
The doxology is most appropriate and has a positive value in affirming the fact of the kingdom’s being already established.

This is inherent in the use of the present tense.

### **Verses 14-15**

This is a repeat of the divine prerequisite for forgiveness, namely, a forgiving heart. Luke quoted our Lord as saying, “If he repents, forgive him.” (Luke 17:3) This verse applies specifically in those cases where a brother or sister is tempted to withhold forgiveness even from one who has repented and must not be construed as an improvement of the condition laid down here.

It appears that forgiveness actually has two centers, human and divine. Christ forgave the ones who crucified Him, saying, “Father, forgive them;” but it is clear that this forgiveness was extended on the human level only. It did not mean that the murderers of our Lord were pardoned immediately in heaven. Some of them, at least, repented and were forgiven when they obeyed the gospel on Pentecost. That forgiveness was from above, in heaven. (Acts 2:26ff) The same two levels, human and divine, are observable in the case of Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 7:58-60) Stephen forgave him (on the human level) as the deed was done; but Saul was forgiven in heaven when he had obeyed “from the heart that form of doctrine.” (Romans 6:17)

It is the Christian’s duty to forgive all men without regard to their repentance. If he should think to forgive only those who repent and ask, his forgiveness duties would be practically eliminated altogether.

### **Verses 16-18**

Fasting, like prayer and alms-giving, is clearly indicated as a Christian duty, but is delimited by these words to the status of a private, personal, and individual devotion. Widespread neglect of this duty does not countermand it.

### **Verse 1**

Christians must curb the acquisitive and hoarding instincts. “For not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15)

Earthly possessions cannot satisfy. The pursuit of earthly treasures is a disease that feeds and increases upon itself.

There is the uncertainty of earthly treasures. Christ here mentioned moth and rust and thieves, elementary sources of loss which have hardly changed since our Lord spoke these words. Riches make themselves wings and fly away. (Proverbs 23:5)

Even at its best, however, and even when most nearly under control, a man's natural selfishness is a source of awful and constant danger to his eternal welfare.

#### **Verse 20**

The inducement that giving to righteous causes is for "yourselves" should not be overlooked. All that one gives or does for the kingdom of God will accrue to his eternal credit. Not even a cup of cold water will lose its reward. (10:42)

#### **Verse 21**

The principal concern of the Savior is seen in this verse, "Where is your heart?"

The love of Christ and His kingdom, the constant choice of spiritual rather than carnal values, and the preference for eternal things as contrasted with things material and secular, these considerations mark the broad purposes of the new life in Christ. Possessions must be possessed; they must not possess their owners.

#### **Verses 22-23**

This is the topic sentence of this section of the Sermon on the Mount, and it comes in the form of a climax. Christ laid bare the deceitful and double motives which prompt men in their religious actions.

Looking back into this chapter it will be noted that:

- (1) men do alms for two motives;
- (2) they pray for two motives;
- (3) they fast for two motives, and
- (4) they even see double!

The evil eye is the one that explores every action, regardless of how sacred it is, for the purpose of discovering what motive might also be served by the doing of it. The corrupting power of this behavior is total; "How great is that darkness!" Any act, even that of prayer or charity, without the proper motivation, becomes sinful. The problem was one of unmitigated hypocrisy,

caused by the attempted service of both God and the devil at the same time, or, in another frame of reference, the dual service of God and mammon or wealth.

#### **Verse 24**

Dr. F. F. Bruce, noted English scholar and frequent contributor to Christianity Today, compares this verse, especially the words, “No man can serve two masters,” with James 1:1 which has “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” and concludes that they are a valid argument for the deity of Christ. James had indeed heard our Lord declare that no man can serve two masters and it is Bruce’s contention that James was not flaunting the fact that He indeed was serving two masters, but that the two are one!

The sharp truth is that one must choose whom he will serve. The erroneous assumption that he can merely go along with a foot in either camp is a vain and fatal delusion.

The heart can acknowledge only one master. Knowing the difficulty that man has in breaking away from material domination, Christ, in the next few verses, reveals God’s providential care for His children with a view to convincing man that God will take care of him, if only man will seek God’s kingdom first.

#### **Verses 25-26**

The area of need explored by these words is not incidental but basic. It is a question of food, clothing, and shelter. Jesus’ argument is that God who made man and gave him life will also provide him with the means to sustain it, reinforcing his argument by the fact that God does this very thing for the lower creation.

Surely, God could not be charged with watching out for sparrows and neglecting His children! The mystery of how God cares for the myriads of His creatures both great and small is an unfailing marvel.

The weight of our Lord’s argument here is overwhelming when it is recalled that of all God’s creatures, from insects to the great animals of the forest, man alone is constantly anxious about his survival on the planet. What a glimpse this gives of the ruin and wretchedness that have resulted from man’s sin and rebellion against his Maker.

### **Verses 27-29**

Although the emphasis in this entire context is away from the material and workaday needs of life, there is no repudiation of such prosaic virtues as work, thrift, responsibility, and diligence.

E. M. Edgar (The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 16, Luke I, p. 358) wrote: “Consider how poor the life is which makes eating and dressing the chief thought. A man’s life is intended to be much more assuredly than this; and, yet, are there not some who have no thought beyond this? . . . There is not a poor man but who may feel that he was born for higher thoughts and things than to “keep the pot boiling.”

### **Verses 30-31**

This entire passage continues to stress man’s need for utter trust and dependence upon God who cares for the grasses and the fowls of the air and will surely, therefore, care for His human children.

God’s care for grasses and birds, such as lilies and sparrows, and, in fact, for all the countless creatures that He has made a profound impression upon the thoughtful mind.

### **Verse 32**

The word “Gentiles” means “nations,” and may also be freely translated as “pagans” or “heathens” and refers to all natural men everywhere as distinguished from the Hebrews who were a people presumably prepared in heart to discern spiritual things and to receive the Messiah when He should appear.

God’s knowledge of man’s need is enough to assure God’s provision of things needed.

### **Verse 33**

This is a divine appeal for men to put first things first. The kingdom of God should be placed first

- (1) in importance,
- (2) in point of time and
- (3) in emphasis.

The righteousness men should seek is that of Christ, not their own. This means that God’s commandments should be honored, rather than men’s, and

His doctrine should be received and practiced instead of the commandments and traditions of men.

#### **Verse 34**

Thus ends a rather long and urgent section of Jesus' teachings, all directed squarely toward the removal of anxiety from men's hearts. Bridges should be crossed only when men come to them. Anxiety is impractical, impious, and impotent.

### **CHAPTER 7 SERMON ON THE MOUNT, Concluded**

#### **Verse 1**

The word "judge" in this verse is translated from a Greek word, "*krino*," indicating that the type of judging forbidden in this place is that of presuming to determine salvation, or the lack of it, in others. Not even Christ did this while on earth. "I came not to judge the world but to save the world." (John 12:47) The exercise of such judgments is all the more sinful in that it is premature. "Judge nothing before the time." (I Corinthians 4:5)

Discerning and judging, however, are two different things. Making a private, personal, and tentative appraisal of others is not forbidden; but "judging" is prohibited. One must deplore the conduct of self-appointed "fruit-inspectors" whose flagrant violations of this commandment have wrought untold damage in the church.

#### **Verse 2**

A presumptuous preoccupation with other people's destiny encourages reciprocal judgment from them, resulting in all kinds of bitterness, recriminations, and vindictive hatreds.

#### **Verse 3**

One who judges others is compared to a person presuming to cast a splinter out of his brother's eye while a plank is in his own eye! This is a vivid picture of a person who ignores his own grievous sins while trying to correct the relative minor shortcomings of another.

The mote and the beam represent the disparity between that which is tiny, insignificant, almost invisible, and that which is obvious, flagrant, and obtrusive.

The mote hunter is the nitpicker (the specialist in fine, disputed points) who focuses on the most minute deviations while ignoring far more basic and important considerations.

#### **Verse 4**

A mote, although trifling and insignificant can nevertheless be a serious and painful handicap when located in the eye. Thus, Jesus cannot be charged with making even the slightest sin or fault a matter of indifference.

That is not the point under consideration. What He is emphasizing here is the evil inconsistency of Big Guilt correcting Little Guilt.

The ridiculous picture of a man with a plank in his own eye casting a splinter out of his neighbor's eye must have brought a chuckle from those who heard the Master's words.

#### **Verse 5**

This shows that Christ does not minimize any moral fault, however tiny. It is implicit in the comparison that the mote should be cast out of the eye. Tiny as it is, it may not be accepted lightly.

Judging and disposing of the faults of others is:

- (1) dangerous,
- (2) hypocritical, and
- (3) futile.

If one would truly aid another, his first consideration is to get the plank out of his own eye. He should prepare himself by acknowledging his own sins and turning to him alone who is the sinner's friend.

#### **Verse 6**

J. R. Dummelow (One Volume Commentary, p. 649) thinks this passage means: "That the most holy things ought not to be offered indiscriminately to all persons." In such a view, the dogs and swine would refer to mean and vicious persons who have no desire to apprehend spiritual things.

Clement of Alexandria (The Stromata, The ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. II, p. 312) said, "It is difficult to exhibit the true and transparent words respecting the true light to swinish and untrained hearers."

Another view is that the sacred abilities and powers of life should not be squandered upon the appetites and lusts of the flesh which can never be

satisfied, but which end by “rending” the giver. This, of course, is true, but is not necessarily what Jesus said here.

### **Verse 7**

Christ said, “They ought to pray and not lose heart.” (Luke 18:1) This is the Savior’s great promise that prayer will be answered.

God answers prayer:

- (1) gradually,
- (2) literally, as in the case of Jonah,
- (3) by denial of the request, as in the case of Paul’s thorn in the flesh,
- (4) by sending something other than was requested, as in the case of our Lord’s prayer for the cup to pass by which was answered by his receiving strength to drink it, and
- (5) after delay, as in the case of Jairus’ prayer for Christ to heal his daughter.

### **Verse 8**

These words are far more than a promise to answer prayer; and, depending on what men pray for, they may be even a threat. If one pursues unworthy goals, he may attain them. Prayers should be disciplined to request only those things which are truly desirable and should always submissively include the provision, “Yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” (Matthew 26:39)

Of all the rash things, a rash prayer is the rashest. Rachel prayed, “Give me children, or else I die.” (Genesis 30:10) God gave her children, and she died. (Genesis 35:18) The children of Israel lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.” (Psalm 106: 14-15)

### **Verses 9-10**

Christ’s argument here from the predictable conduct of men has strong overtones teaching the likeness between God and man. Man was created in God’s image. (Genesis 1:27)

The basic kinship between God and man is a broad principle underlying the entire Judeo-Christian revelation. The apparent relation between a loaf and a stone is that of appearance. Some stones resemble ancient “loaves” of bread.

### **Verse 11**

Note the contrast between “know how to give” and “give.” Although God is like man in man’s highest and best capacity, He is also far better than man. Men, indeed know how to do good but do not always do it. God, on the other hand, will surely do that which is right.

### **Verse 12**

This is the Golden Rule. Since it is in this place connected with our Lord’s teaching on prayer, the observance of this principle, therefore, becomes one of the conditions of acceptable prayer, along with a forgiving heart, opportunity, and general submissiveness to the Father’s will. This verse haunts the human race; and now and then, some wise man has caught a glimpse of its true importance.

### **Verses 13-14**

The relative number of the saved and the lost is plain from this. They shall be as the few to the many. This eternally recurring contrast between the numbers of the saved and the lost with reference to each succeeding generation should not be discouraging.

Wheat does not grow grain all the way to the ground but only in the ear. Although salvation is obtainable and available for all who truly desire it, the plain fact is that the majority in all generations will despise it. It will be remembered that Christ Himself used this grain as a figure of the saved and the lost in Matthew 3:12.

The relative number of redeemed souls in any generation is not the scale by which God’s success may be measured. God will keep on saving men till the “fullness” of His purpose is achieved. (Romans 11:25)

The term “narrow” is meaningful. Truth can be no other way than narrow, as attested in any field of knowledge whatsoever. Why should it seem strange, then, that entering eternal life should be any other way than by the “narrow gate”? The narrowness consists of the restrictions, disciplines, and requirements throughout the whole area of Christian living.

Only those who are truly spiritual, who have set their minds upon the things in heaven, shall enter and negotiate the straitened way that leads to life; and yet, “Whosoever will may come!”



### **Verses 15-16**

This warning naturally flows out of what Jesus had just said. The broad way will have its advocates, false teachers, who will attempt to widen the narrow way and breach the strait gate.

It is essential that Christians recognize false teachers or prophets. By their fruits you shall know them. To be effective in deceiving God's people, it is essential that false teachers be disguised, hence the "sheep's clothing."

This means that the church itself shall be the theater of operations for these destructive teachers. They will appear as ministers, officers, and advocates of religion. The one sure test is their fruits. That which sows discord, divides, debilitates, hinders, or thwarts in any way the true spiritual family of God is to be rejected. The great test is the false teacher's attitude toward Christ. Those who question His authority or go beyond His word are clearly of the evil one.

The only proper way in which this admonition can be heeded is for the Lord's sheep to know the Shepherd's voice, that is, they must know His word and doctrine.

The remainder of the Sermon on the Mount is devoted to those things which will enable the child of God to distinguish between true and false teachers of religion.

### **Verses 17-20**

This teaching pertains primarily to the identification of false teachers whose true character is inevitably exposed by the results of their efforts. The teacher that divides and scatters the flock must be rejected. Evil fruits, or results constitute certain and unmistakable identification with the "wolves" Jesus mentioned here.

### **Verse 21**

False teachers are clearly religious persons, crying, "Lord, Lord." Their failure is not that of inactivity but indulgence in the wrong activity. They not only deceive but are themselves deceived, as appears in what follows. Their grand error is in doing their own will instead of Christ's.

### **Verse 22**

The fact that "many" such persons exist identifies them as followers of the broad way. The religious nature of their errors is emphasized by their

prophesying, casting out demons, and doing many mighty works in Christ's name.

What was wrong with all this? They did those mighty works in Christ's name but without His authority or sanction. No one can doubt that this is exactly the situation with reference to the vast majority of religious actions today practiced in the world. They are done in Jesus' name, but not by His authority. This means simply, that the things done were not commanded by Christ. What is the projected result of such conduct?

### **Verse 23**

In verse 22 above, "that day" obviously refers to the judgment; and in this verse Christ claims for Himself the right to consign men to banishment from His holy presence. The entire tone and tenor of this sermon is predicted on the assumption that Christ is God.

This verse contains, without doubt, one of the most terrible thoughts in the Scriptures. Many souls shall diligently serve God and do many mighty things in His name, only to discover at last that they have never really served Him at all. This blessed warning from Christ should stop every man short and suddenly till he is sure beyond all possibility of deception that he is truly doing Christ's will.

### **Verse 24**

The key to everlasting life is in Jesus' saying, "These words of Mine!" Throughout the New Testament, the final, ultimate and exclusive authority in true religion is the word spoken by Christ. Jesus commanded the church to teach "whatsoever I have commanded you." (Chapter 28:20)

Jesus declared that the words He spoke would judge men at the last day. (John 12:48)

"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God." (2 John 9)

The apostles warned that men ought to learn how "not to exceed the things which are written." (1 Corinthians 4:6)

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you." (Colossians 3:16)

Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." (Chapter 24:35)

The most important fact to know with reference to Christianity is that it is “of Christ!”

“A wise man who built his house upon the rock . . . “ The “rock” is nothing more nor less than “these words of mine,” namely, the words of Christ.

### **Verse 25**

Rains, floods, and winds, in this place, suggest oppositions from above, beneath, and all around. The stability of the wise man’s house was due to the fact that it was built, not upon “a rock,” but upon “the rock.” Only the life founded upon the principles of Christ shall stand. His teaching is *the rock*—all else is shifting sand.

### **Verses 26-27**

The focus of attention here should be upon the revelation of what the true rock actually is. It is namely the words or teachings of Christ. This is the point so many seem to miss.

### **Verses 28-29**

The significance of this great sermon was not lost upon those who first heard it. They understood, although probably not all of them believed, that Jesus in this magnificent discourse laid claim to authority surpassing that of :

- (1) the scribes,
- (2) the Ten Commandments,
- (3) Moses,
- (4) the Holy Scriptures, and
- (5) all earthly and human authorities.

The truly perceptive must surely have detected the advance indications that here indeed was THE MESSIAH.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Verse 1**

The first result of the Sermon on the Mount was to establish on a vast scale the popularity of Jesus. It did not occur to the great multitudes that followed Him that the strict principles He advocated would, in fact be rejected by the vast majority of them who so eagerly followed.

### **Verse 2**

Leprosy was, and is, a dreadful disease and was considered as a type of sin under the law of Moses; not that lepers were considered sinners, but the disease itself in its destructive course through the body bore remarkable suggestions of the similar ravages of sin in the soul. Elaborate rules were set up to isolate the leper and guard against his association with the community. (Leviticus 13:49 and 14:2ff) The leper believed in Christ but appeared to be uncertain of our Lord's willingness to heal him.

### **Verse 3**

Touching the leper, Jesus again showed His power and authority over and beyond the law of Moses which forbade touching a leper. (Leviticus 13:44-46) All who touched a leper were considered unclean themselves; and anyone, except Christ, touching a leper would have been defiled; but not only did Jesus' touch fail to defile Him, it cleansed the leper.

The miracles of Jesus were usually instantaneous, complete, unquestionable, and attested by countless witnesses. The "lying miracles" (2 Thessalonians 2:9) of later times are never comparable, in any of these particulars, to the miracles of Christ.

### **Verse 4**

Mark's account reveals that the leper disobeyed the Lord's command not to publish the matter. (Mark 1:44-45) Christ, on several occasions, made similar requests to conceal such miracles.

It may border on speculation to inquire why our Lord thus prohibited certain ones from telling it abroad, and yet on other occasions even encouraged it.

Richard C. Trench( Notes on the Miracles, p. 237) wrote: "The injunction to one, that he should proclaim, to another that he should conceal, the great things which God had wrought for him, had far more probably a deeper motive and grounded itself on the different moral conditions of the persons healed.

Richard C. Trench (Ibid., p. 238) also noted a practical reason in the case at hand. For this miracle to be properly attested, it was necessary that the appropriate gifts should be offered after Moses' commandment and that the priests should verify it. Richard C, Trench (Ibid., p. 238) wrote: "Till this was

accomplished, he should hold his peace; lest, if a rumor of these things went before him, the priests at Jerusalem (out of envy) out of desire to depreciate what the Lord had done, might deny that the man had ever been a leper, or else that he was not truly cleansed.”

### **Verse 5**

Here, quite early in the New Testament, we are confronted with one of those persons, a centurion, who appear in such a favorable light throughout the New Testament. A centurion was an officer in the Roman legions, having command of a hundred men, hence his title.

Richard C. Trench (*Ibid.*, p. 241) observed, “Probably, in the general wreck of the moral institutions of the heathen world, the Roman army was one of the few in which some of the old virtues survived.”

Many of the Lord’s most wonderful deeds were done in Capernaum. The miracle before us, the raising of the daughter of Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, and other outstanding demonstrations of His power and Godhead were exhibited there; and yet, in the final analysis, that city rejected Him!

### **Verse 6**

From Luke, it is plain that this officer came to Christ through the use of intermediaries who also brought testimony of the Jews in regard to the general favor in which this centurion was held by the citizens of Capernaum. This presented no difficulty, for every court of law still holds that what a man does through a duly constituted agency, he himself actually and legally does.

Thus, Christ Himself was said to have made and baptized more people than John the Baptist, though He did not do so personally! (John 4:1-2) The good character of this man is further certified by the fact that he was deeply concerned for the welfare of a slave, called here a servant.

### **Verses 7-8**

The term “servant” in this narrative actually means “bondservant,” or slave. When word was relayed again to the centurion that Jesus would come and heal his servant, he took quick appraisal of the situation, and in a marvelous demonstration of true humility, confessed his own unworthiness that the Holy One should come into his house. Sermons by Augustine, LXII, said of the

centurion that: “Counting himself unworthy that Christ should enter his doors, he was counted worthy that Christ should enter into his heart.”

It must be allowed that here indeed was great faith. Even today, there are those who suppose that Christ could do more on earth if He were personally present as in some millennial reign; but the centurion properly understood that the physical presence of the Lord was not necessary for the accomplishments of any of His wise designs.

#### **Verse 9**

By implication, he recognized Christ as the Great Commander, the chief authority, not merely on earth but of heaven also, and having under his authority all things, even the things of the unseen creation.

#### **Verse 10**

The centurion’s faith contrasted sharply with the lack of it in the Jewish leaders who, although they should have been the first to recognize Christ and believe on Him, were nevertheless His carping critics and sworn enemies. Jesus’ first comment was directed toward the shameful and tragic condition. It was, then and here, announced by Jesus that the Gentiles would be received into the kingdom of God and that many “sons of the kingdom,” that is, Jews, would not enter.

#### **Verse 11**

In addition to the interest provoked by the projected entry of the Gentiles into Christ’s kingdom, there is also the obvious intention of Jesus to declare that the patriarchs mentioned here are truly saved and that they make up a part of the great family of the redeemed.

#### **Verse 12**

The “outer darkness” is a reference to hell, or the place of final disposal of the wicked. It is interesting that Christ used various expressions descriptive of the final place of destiny for the wicked, referring to “unquenchable fire” (3:12) in one place, and to “outer darkness” in another.

The sons of the kingdom mentioned are the leaders of the Jewish nation who rejected Christ.

### **Verse 13**

Quite properly, there is no detailed account of the servant's illness. The details, which might have been very interesting, are overshadowed by the faith of the centurion and the resultant teachings of the Lord.

### **Verses 14-15**

Matthew's status as an eyewitness of these wonderful deeds is unintentionally evident in his detailing of the very part of her body which the Master touched.

Peter's being a married man is proof that celibacy was not a requirement of either disciples or apostles. Peter's mother-in-law attested the completeness of the healing by rising at once to minister to the Lord. Men are saved to save others. Those who were healed were healed to serve others!

### **Verse 16**

Demon possession is a problem for some. The sophisticated mind of this scientific age, as a usual thing, simply does not believe in such things as demon possession. It seems quite obvious that Christ did.

Christ is divine, His judgments are altogether true and accurate, and, whether any such things exist today or not, they certainly existed then.

John Pitt (Faith Healing, Fact or Fiction, p.38) said: "The evidence is thus clear; our Lord did believe in demons as causative agents in some forms of sickness; He did not believe in a devil-infested world."

### **Verse 17**

The passage quoted by Matthew is Isaiah 53:4. Matthew constantly appealed to the prophetic writers of the Old Testament, citing their long established and widely known words as proof of Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.

### **Verses 18-19**

Christ decided to go to the other side of Lake Galilee to escape the press of the multitudes; and, at this juncture in His ministry, there presented Himself this to a scribe, probably the very first person of any importance, socially, to offer to become a disciple of Jesus. The Lord did not rush to accept him, recognizing no doubt, that the scribe was carried away by our Lord's current popularity, and having utterly no understanding of the eventual sacrifices involved in becoming His disciple.

### **Verse 20**

This shows the poverty of Jesus, from an earthly viewpoint; and yet we through His poverty are made rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9) We are not told if the scribe followed Jesus after this, or not, but the strong implication is that he did not. Perhaps, like the rich young ruler, he found the conditions too rigorous.

The title “Son of man,” as applied by Jesus to Himself, is one of deep interest. It was His favorite designation of Himself, and He used it no less than forty times; but only once (Acts 7:56) is it ever found on anyone’s lips except His own.

Note: Some believe our Lord took this title from Psalm 8:4, “What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?”

Why, then, did Jesus lean so heavily upon “Son of man” as a title for himself? First, it served to conceal His true identity during the period when He did not want it generally known that He was the Messiah, for there is every indication that the title was not recognized as a proper name for the Messiah until much later.

The Son of David indicated a legal relationship; the Son of Abraham had a racial limitation; the Son of Joseph and the Son of Mary stressed a family relationship; the Son of Adam identified Him with the one who had brought ruin upon mankind; the Son of God during the early part of His ministry was premature.

The choice of Son of man as His title removed all the limitations implicit in other titles and identified Jesus Christ, not as belonging to any race, family, nation, or kingdom exclusively, but to the human race.

### **Verses 21-22**

The proposition set forth by the disciple mentioned here was not that his father was dead and that he desired to be excused to hold the funeral. Far from it. He was one of the group known as “wait a little” Pharisees, who always proposed something else to do first. He meant that he was not free to be a disciple till after the death of his father but that he would be glad to follow Jesus after his father died.

Jesus allowed no delay, encouraged no procrastination, and commanded that those spiritually dead should be left to bury their own dead.



Well did Jesus know that if this disciple returned home to the old ways, the old viewpoint, and the old habits, he would never more wish to follow his Lord.

**Verse 23**

Why did not Matthew write merely that “they boarded a ship”? The significance is that the apostles observed the same protocol which from the most ancient times, and until this day, is observed by every ship on earth, especially the naval ships of all nations. Those of the highest rank enter and leave first. Thus. The disciples already recognized Christ as Lord.

**Verse 24**

Many travelers to Palestine have commented on the violent storms which so often lash the Sea of Galilee—their intensity augmented by the steep mountain gorges that rim its shores, and by the greater density of the atmosphere so far below sea-level. Such storms are common still; but that this was no ordinary storm is evident from the terror it struck into the hearts of those bold men who were so familiar with the usual character and intensity of such disturbances.

**Verse 25**

The contrast between Jesus asleep in this storm and Jonah asleep in another is notable. Jonah’s conscience was dead through sin and rebellion; Jesus’ conscience was calm through innocence. Jonah was the source of danger on his vessel; Christ was the source of safety on His. The apostles’ turning to Christ in this extremity is exactly what they should have done; but their lack of faith that prompted it is deplorable and was rebuked by the Master.

**Verse 26**

It is important to note the significance of the word “rebuked.” Richard C. Trench (op. cit., p. 156) wrote: “To regard this as mere oratorical personification would be absurd. Rather, there is here a distinct tracing up of all the discords and disharmonies in the outward world to their source in a person, a referring them back to him, as their ultimate ground. Even as this person can be no other than Satan, the author of all disorders alike in the natural and in the physical world.”

The great calm was matched only by the marvelous rest and confidence that came into the hearts of the disciples. Like the instantaneous miracles of healing,

this wonder exhibits immediacy and completeness. The winds did not merely falter and die down; they ceased!

#### **Verse 27**

It was then plain that every area of existence was totally under our Lord's authority. The spiritual world, the physical world, time, life, and death were, and are, utterly subject to His will. The force of this incident is multiplied when it is recalled that the rugged Galilean fishermen were perfectly capable of handling any ordinary turbulence with skill and efficiency.

#### **Verse 28**

Gadara was one of the ten cities of Decapolis ("ten-cities"), all but one of which were east of the Jordan River. The ensuing wonder about to be performed upon a city's most notorious derelict was well calculated to provide a sensational witness of Christ's glory throughout the entire section. Mark and Luke mention only one of these persons, the principle one.

Note that neither Mark nor Luke state that there was "only one" of these men. The fact of demon possession is plain here. These were possessed not merely with one, but with many, demons.

#### **Verse 29**

The kingdom of evil, at this point, was fully aware of who Christ was (and is).

If Satan had any doubt prior to this, Christ's rebuke of the winds and the sea removed it. These demons freely admitted and, in a sense, confessed Jesus as the Son of God, admitting that He had the power to torment them "before the time." This shows that the time of ultimate judgment and punishment of the condemned is set for future fulfillment and that the whole demonic world is fully aware of it.

#### **Verse 30**

The unbelieving world, in a vain effort to fault the Son of God, has shown the desperate nature of its case by seizing on this incident as grounds for reproach of the Savior.

The implication is overwhelming that these swine were owned by Jews, contrary to God's law; however, this cannot be proved. The true justification of Christ's actions here turns upon other principles. He did not destroy the swine;

the demons did! The argument that He permitted it may be applied with equal force to every disaster, physical or otherwise, that ever happened on earth.

Mark places the number of these animals at “about two thousand.” (Mark 5:13)

### **Verse 31**

This shows that the emissaries of Satan are restricted and may not enter even a herd of swine without the Lord’s permission. This request of the demons is a prayer of sorts and indicates that God may indeed answer any prayer that is in harmony with His will, regardless of the wickedness of the petitioner. Thus He permitted Satan to “sift” Peter. Also, Satan’s request with reference to Job was also granted.

How unhappy must be the state of demons which cannot rest except when engaged in tormenting or destroying other beings in God’s creation; and, even then, there is no suggestion that they are in any true sense actually happy, except in a relative or accommodative sense.

### **Verse 32**

Note the quick and destructive results which followed the entry of the demons into the swine. Perhaps it was precisely for the purpose of showing what always follows when Satan has control that Jesus permitted this incident to happen. Satan entered the heart of Judas; and one has merely to turn a few pages to read the total destruction of Judas, physically and spiritually. Satan’s character as the destroyer is revealed by the action here; and, in view of the overriding importance of this knowledge to all mankind, the loss of the herd of swine was a trifling incidental. As soon as the demons had their way, the swine perished. This is always the case when Satan has his way. Judas permitted Satan in his heart (Luke 22:3), and very soon afterwards, he went out and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:5)

### **Verse 33**

From the other synoptics, it is learned that the demoniacs were clothed, in their right minds, and sitting at the feet of the Master. How strange it is that such a scene did not endear the people to Jesus. Surely, for such a wonderful recovery, the city fathers of Gadara should have been happy to make up the loss

to the owners of the swine, if, indeed, they were legally held. But no! There had been a property loss, and every human value was lost in that consideration.

For men of a materialistic and secular nature, a question of property overrides all others. There was the business of those 2,000 missing swine.

#### **Verse 34**

What about all the sick, infirm, diseased, bedridden sufferers of Gadara? What about all the other demon-possessed in that city? Was no thought whatever given to the advantage that had come to the miserable sufferers of Gadara in the sudden appearance before their gates of the Great Physician? Ah, no! They judged themselves by their reaction to this marvelous opportunity.

There is no record that Jesus ever went near the place again, which shows how far-reaching are the consequences, flowing out of one wrong decision.

Christ simply and immediately complied with the request of the citizens of Gadara and shipped immediately to His own city (Capernaum) directly across the lake. This body of water some 12 or 13 miles in length and only about six miles wide did not require long to cross. Deductions from this abrupt departure of Jesus are significant:

- (1) Christ will not force His gospel upon any man or upon any community.
- (2) The fact that Jesus never returned to Gadara shows how a single decision may have the most extensive consequences.
- (3) The future history of this area was determined in a single day, even in an hour, when these hapless citizens, ignoring the fantastic blessing which had come to two of their number, and thinking only about the loss of the swine, requested the Savior of the world to leave their shores.

Countless souls today are continually making decisions just as tragic.

#### **Verse 2**

This is one of those “mighty works” mentioned by Jesus in His reproach of Capernaum. (Matthew 11:23) Mark tells that he was borne by four men, and Luke relates the breaking up of the roof to let him down to Jesus.

“Seeing their faith . . .” refers not merely to the faith of the four but of the man with the palsy as well. He could not have permitted or encouraged such

activity on his behalf if he had not truly believed in Jesus. What a reward he received, "Thy sins be forgiven!" Christ dealt with the sin problem first, for it was most important. Also, here is the possibility that in this case sin was the cause of his illness. Christ's announcing the forgiveness of this man's sins was clearly the assertion of the prerogatives of deity. "Who can forgive sins, but one, even God." (Mark 2:7)

### **Verse 3**

The thinking of the scribes that only God could forgive sins was altogether correct. Moreover, if Christ was not God, as He claimed to be, they were correct in attributing blasphemy to Jesus. Christ Himself accepted both assumptions and demonstrated His divinity in the miracle that followed.

### **Verse 4**

Two things are plainly apparent in this verse:

- (1) that Christ knew men's thoughts, an ability only God could have, and
- (2) the Scriptural "heart" is the part that thinks, thus equating it with the mind, or the seat of the intelligence.

### **Verse 5**

One of these is as easily "said" as the other; but the overwhelming impact of this lies in the plain truth, presented here by Christ, that a person who cannot do both can do neither!

### **Verse 6**

"That you may know . . ." is equivalent to saying men could not know Jesus' power to forgive sins without such a demonstration of His power. Jesus' handling of this entire case shows that the power to forgive sins pertains to God alone and that only divine power can accomplish it.

A clear understanding of these words of Christ would prohibit the unwarranted

assumption of authority by those (Catholic priests) who make it their business to

forgive other men's sins!

### **Verse 7**

Another mighty wonder performed by the Master followed the usual pattern:

- (1) It was complete.

- (2) It was immediate.
- (3) It was accomplished by a mere word.
- (4) There were no incantations.
- (5) There was no agonizing.
- (6) There was no loud prayers.
- (7) It was totally accomplished with the utmost ease in the presence of His enemies, without prior staging, and without any props.

### **Verse 8**

The fear of the multitude is proof of God in a dramatic display of authority over sin and disease. The words “unto men” are at first surprising. Why is it said, “Unto men,” whereas men simply cannot do the things mentioned here?

Richard H. Trench (Notes on the Miracles, p.237) explained it thus: “They felt truly that what was given to one man (to Him who had just set himself forth under the title of “The Son of Man” was given for the sake to all, and given ultimately to all, that it was indeed given “unto men.” Jesus did give the apostles full authority to announce men’s forgiveness, with authority to bind and loose on earth with equal consequences in heaven.

How many of Jesus’ mighty deeds were done “as He passed by.” He seized the golden chances as they came. Whatever came to hand, that He did to the glory of God. Note that he saw a man. Some would have seen only a tax collector, but Jesus saw the scholarly student of the prophecies.

How often men’s eyes are blinded by prejudice, social bias, or self-interest, and they fail to see the man. How comforting is the thought that the Savior always saw (and sees) the man, whatever the outward circumstances that may disguise him from his fellows!

Matthew, like the four fishermen, had already some knowledge of Christ and His teachings when the call occurred. The brevity of this account shows the humility and modesty which characterized this ancient publican who rose to such heights in the service of the Lord.

Matthew’s call was a challenge to the Pharisees and other snobbish groups of that day. A publican was a social outcast. Nothing good was expected of such a person; and, in this call, Jesus showed that the church has a mission to the downtrodden as well as to others.

Publicans (sinners) were renters of the Roman taxes, an occupation particularly odious to the Jews, and the more so on the part of one of their own race who was thus leagued with despised oppressors of the land. That the Messiah would attend a feast with such a man and even name him to the apostleship was a fact which few people of that day, especially the rulers, could accept with any degree of tolerance. Their bitterness toward the despised and socially unacceptable masses was the prime reason for their failure to recognize Jesus as their Lord. Snobbishness is still a reality in many hearts.

#### **Verses 10-12**

The Pharisees, by directing their questions to Jesus' disciples instead of to Him, were attempting to open a wedge between them and were trying to inoculate the disciples with their own blind prejudice.

Jesus' rejoinder to the effect that the sick, not the whole, require a physician, was rich in irony. It passed over the fact known to all, that spiritually the Pharisees themselves were about the sickest people of that generation.

The whole population was fully acquainted with the greed, cunning, duplicity, and general wickedness of those evil men who sat in Moses' seat.

#### **Verse 13**

Both here and in Matthew 12:7, Christ quoted from Hosea 6:6. The context in that passage shows that Christ was here comparing the Pharisees with the reprobate priesthood of Hosea's times. In Hosea 6:9, Hosea declared, "And as raiders wait for a man, so a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem; surely they have committed crime." This, of course, must have infuriated the Pharisees who, as subsequent events would prove, with every whit as wicked as the Lord indicated.

#### **Verse 14**

At this point, the disciples of John were already beginning to be jealous of the rising popularity of Christ. (John 4:1-3) The use of the participle "were fasting" in Mark 2:18, show that this feast in the home of Matthew probably took place on a Monday or Thursday, when the Pharisees and disciples of John the Baptist were observing their customary feasts. The Pharisees had not overlooked any occasion for making trouble. They had obviously tried, with

some success, to maneuver a breach between the followers of Christ and those of the Baptist.

In an answer as diplomatic and as devastating as the famous reply on the tribute money, Jesus gave three parables, the last of which is given only by Luke, in which he fully defends both his own and John's respective views. These parables are:

- (1) new cloth on old garments,
- (2) new wine in old wineskins, and
- (3) the person familiar with old wine does not desire new wine. The reference to the relaxation of rules during a wedding, however, was the most devastating of all.

#### **Verse 15**

This was an answer calculated to convince John's disciples, because John had already identified Jesus as the bridegroom saying, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom." (John 3:29) The habit of the Pharisees of indulging every appetite, to the point of gluttony and drunkenness, at a wedding, makes this a center shot. Since Christ is the bridegroom, this is a wedding (in a spiritual sense)! It is likely that this reply was greeted with howls of laughter. Yet there is a tragic note here also. The holy bridegroom will be "taken away from them," that is murdered by these same pious hypocrites who were so solicitous about the strict observances of their petty fasts.

#### **Verse 16**

The illustration in this place is simply that of trying to patch an old garment with a piece of new, that is, an unshrunk cloth, which, if attempted, would prove unavailing as soon as the garment was washed. The application is that Jesus did not come to apply Christianity as a new patch upon the old garment of Judaism.

Christianity was not designed as an addition to Judaism, nor as a patch upon an old system but as an excitingly new and different religion altogether.

#### **Verse 17**

This illustration refers to the system of putting wine into bladders and skins of animals. Only new wineskins could serve for unfermented new wine, after fermentation, the skins hardened and became brittle, thus becoming entirely unsuitable for new wine, yet continuing to serve well enough as containers for



old wine. The application was that Christ did not pour the new wine of his teachings into old wineskins (John's disciples) but into new wineskins (His disciples). It is noteworthy that none of Jesus' disciples had previously been followers of John.

The reason is explained in this passage. It took new hearts, fresh viewpoints, unaccustomed to the practices and prejudices of old ways, to contain the marvelous new teachings of Christ.

### **Verse 18**

This miracle of raising Jairus' daughter from the dead is the first resurrection recorded in the New Testament. There were three such wonders, forming a sequence.

- (1) Jairus' daughter had been dead only a little while.
- (2) The son of the widow of Nain had been dead longer and was being carried to the tomb.
- (3) Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days. (Luke 7:12; John 11) Christ considered raising the dead a part of His ministry. (Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22) Christ delegated this power to the apostles. (Matthew 10:8) Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, acting under this commission. (Acts 9:40)

Regarding Jairus' daughter, the quibble is raised that she might not have been dead but had merely swooned; however, the statement of the damsel's father, the presence of the hired mourners, and their laughing Jesus to scorn, knowing her to be dead, remove any thought that only a swoon had occurred. Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue, and was among the most respected and honored citizens of Capernaum. It is strange that after so much was done by Jesus for so many, including wonders worked on behalf of the city's leading citizens, that Capernaum rejected Him.

### **Verse 19**

Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus into the inner chamber where this great deed was wrought.

### **Verse 20**

Pontius Pilate, quoted in ancient writings (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VIII, p.460). In his so-called Report of the Procurator Concerning Our Lord Jesus

Christ contains this: “And a woman that had an issue of blood for many years, and whose joints and veins were drained by the flowing of blood, so that she did not present the appearance of a human being, but was like a corpse, and was speechless every day, so that all the physicians of the district could not cure her—there was not any hope of life left to her. And when Jesus passed by, she mysteriously received strength through His overshadowing her; and she took hold of His fringe behind; and, immediately in the same hour, power filled up what was in her empty, so that, no longer suffering any pain, she began to run swiftly to her own city Kepharnaum, (Capernaum) so as to accomplish the journey in six days.”

#### **Verse 21**

Here again is noted that characteristic of the Scriptures which reveal what men said within themselves. In this chapter is recorded what the Pharisees said within themselves, and here is related what this woman said within herself. The surmise of this woman that only a touch was required to heal her was altogether correct. One of the profoundest statements in the Bible is Mark 6:56.

“As many as touched it (the fringe) were being cured.” “If with all our striving, we may but touch Him, we shall be made perfectly whole!

#### **Verse 22**

Jesus rejected whatever superstition there may have been in the woman’s act. A suspicion that some element of superstition might have motivated her comes from the fact that she touched a particular part of His garment supposed to be especially holy. That was the tuft, or tassel, which, according to Numbers 15:37, every Jew wore on the four corners of his cloak to remind him of God’s commands, and which was considered the holiest part of His apparel. Jesus of His own will, had healed her; and that she had not merely taken advantage of some supernatural influence radiating from His person.

#### **Verse 23**

The flute-players were the hired mourners who took part in every funeral of that day. The large crowd and the general tumult were due to the prominence of the family in which this tragedy had occurred.

### **Verse 24**

It should be remembered that Christ said the same concerning Lazarus who had been dead and buried for four days. (John 11:11) The actuality of death is not the point in either case, but the nature of death. It is a sleep. In death, as in sleep:

- (1) there is a loss of consciousness;
- (2) both are terminated, sleep by awakening; and death in the resurrection;
- (3) there is a rejuvenation or rebuilding of powers during the period of waiting; or, more properly, both are followed by an improved state of the person;
- (4) there is no total destruction and loss of the person in either case;
- (5) and there is no loss of personality or identity.

Jesus thus gave an utterly new concept of death; from that came the custom, universally observed among Christians, of writing “asleep in Jesus” upon the tombs of the departed.

“They were laughing at Him. . . “ should be read in close connection with what immediately followed and is recorded in the next verse.

### **Verse 25**

They scorned Him, but it resulted in their being put out of the room. Then, as in all ages, scorers proved witnesses only against themselves. What an opportunity they denied themselves! Even afterwards, it must have been a source of remorse to some of that company that their conduct had made it impossible for them to witness one of the great wonders of all time, and to see that remarkable out-flashing of the glory from the Majesty on high.

Mark recorded the actual words Jesus spoke to the maiden, “Talitha Cumi,” an Aramaic expression meaning “Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise!” There was no strain or pressure on Christ. Christ was delayed, due to the incident concerning the woman with the issue of blood, in reaching the home of Jairus. Thus, it might be said that Jairus’ prayer for our Savior’s aid was answered after delay. Prayers are often answered, not at once, but after delay; and the child of faith should not despair during the interval when it appears that no answer is forthcoming. God in His own time will bless those who call upon Him in faith.

### **Verse 26**

Jesus requested that the deed should not be publicized; but, in this case, there was no possible way to prevent its being widely known. Breaking up a funeral already in progress would be an event almost impossible to conceal. From this, it is supposed that Jesus merely meant that Jairus should conceal the truth till Jesus and His disciples could have safe passage through the throng of people.

### **Verse 27**

“As Jesus passed on . . . “ The symbolism of this incident is magnificent. Although the learned Pharisees and doctors of religion could not see Christ as the Messiah, or Son of David, these blind men could! Even a blind man knew that the

Messiah had indeed appeared in the person of Jesus Christ. From various Old Testament passages, it is clear that blindness is a type of sin. (Deuteronomy 28:29; Isaiah 59:10, and in the New Testament, Ephesians 5:8; and Matthew 15:14) Isaiah said of the Messiah and His times, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened.” (Isaiah 35:5)

“Have mercy on us, Son of David . . .” has seven words as do so many forceful expressions in the Scriptures.

### **Verse 28**

Christ tested the faith of the two men by waiting till He had entered the house and they had followed, and also by asking them if they believed He was able to do it. They passed the test, and Jesus healed them.

### **Verse 28**

Jesus often touched the person of the ones He healed. “Be it done to you according to your faith.”

### **Verses 30-31**

“Jesus sternly warned them . . .” It must follow, then, that those recipients of the Lord’s healing grace were most reprehensible in their violation of His orders not to tell it.

Richard C. Trench (op., cit. p. 215) said, “Take God’s word as absolute rule of law, and to worship Him not with self-advised services, but after the pattern

which He has shown . . . that obedience is better than sacrifice, even though the sacrifice be intended for God's special honor."

**Verse 32**

(On demon possession, see chapter 8:28ff.)

**Verses 33-34**

The Pharisees were absolutely unwilling to admit any good thing in Jesus. When they were unable to deny His wonderful deeds, they questioned the source of His power.

In addition to accusing Christ of being in league with the devil, they made a big issue of the cures wrought on the Sabbath day; and, it may be assumed, they denied, whenever practical, that any good deed had been done.

**Verse 35**

The total number of Jesus' miracles must have been truly fantastic. There were mighty deeds in all the cities and villages and upon all kinds of sicknesses and diseases, as well as upon demoniacs. What significance, in the light of this, must be in the words of John. (John 20:30-31)

**Verse 36**

This records Jesus' own reaction to the extensive tour of Galilee mentioned in the preceding verse, in which the opposition of the Pharisees had been so evident, with the consequent confusion and distress of the people. Christ viewed the situation with profound pity for the multitudes and proposed, at once, to correct it by sending out His disciples as missionaries to bear widespread testimony to the truth. The word "compassion" in this place gives an insight into the benevolent and gracious heart of Christ. It indicated a combination of love, pity, concern, and deep emotional feeling for the "lost sheep" of the house of Israel.

**Verses 37-38**

Christ here asked His disciples to pray for that which He Himself was about to initiate, namely, the sending forth of more witnesses to the truth of the kingdom. The sending forth of the Twelve was Jesus' own response to the marvelous opportunity for reaping a great harvest of souls.

Christ asked the disciples to pray about it; and He Himself continued all night in prayer before naming the Twelve. (Luke 6:12-13) In view of this, should

Christ's disciples today undertake any project without prayer for guidance and blessing? If Jesus leaned so heavily upon the arm of prayer, how much more should His disciples ask, and seek, and knock to obtain that providential support, without which every human endeavor must inevitably come to naught?

## **CALLING AND COMMISSION OF THE TWELVE**

### **CHAPTER 10**

#### **Verse 1**

The difference between a disciple and an apostle is a matter of authority. The disciples became apostles upon their reception of authority from the Lord.

#### **Verses 2-4**

There are four listings of the Twelve in the New Testament, always occurring in groups of four, with positions 1, 5, and 9 always listing Peter, Phillip, and James the son of Alphaeus in that order.

It is conjectured that Peter, Phillip, and James the son of Alphaeus were the respective leaders in each of their groups of four. The twelve apostles have a rank and dignity in the kingdom of heaven beyond that of all others. The number twelve is suggestive of the twelve tribes of Israel; and just as the patriarchs were the foundation of all that came afterwards for Israel, just so the Twelve are the foundation, in one sense, for the church of our Lord. (Ephesians 2:20) Even Paul confessed that he was not of the Twelve (1 Corinthians 15:5), and that he was not worthy to be accounted an apostle, because he "persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:9)

The twelve were not princes of the blood, but fishermen, a tax collector, and followers of other ordinary occupations. They were industrious, more than ordinarily successful in business, keen of mind, sensitive of soul, honest, perceptive, and courageous. They were ambitious, hard-working men, an excellent lot indeed, but they apparently possessed no skills or talents of an extraordinary nature.

#### **Verse 5**

These words prove that the commission Jesus here gave the Twelve pertained only to them and that special mission and is far different from the

commission later given to the entire church. (Matthew 28:18-20) Therefore, requirements Jesus made of the Twelve on that occasion should not be construed as mandatory upon God's ministers today. The church is commanded to preach to "all nations;" the apostles were sent to Gentiles or Samaritans.

#### **Verse 6**

Conditions in Israel at that time were dark and discouraging. The leaders were notoriously corrupt.

#### **Verse 7**

The kingdom would soon be set up. Mark 9:1 reveals that Christ promised it to be done during the lives of some of the apostles. The kingdom was set up (on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ.

#### **Verse 8**

There is no suggestion here that Judas was in any manner excluded from the power and ability conveyed by this commission. If Judas was, even at this hour, a servant of Satan, it would lend color to the charge of the Pharisees that Jesus cast out demons by the prince of demons.

#### **Verse 9**

Covetousness is a sin that eventually claimed Judas, and seeds of it are in all men. If the apostles had been free to take money, they would have returned rich in silver and gold, but poor in those virtues Christ came to establish.

#### **Verse 10**

The mission of the Twelve was totally spiritual. Christ took temptations out of their way by forbidding them even to take a wallet! Barefooted, without staff, and with only one coat, they went forth as the embodiment of the Lord's premise, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "The laborer is worthy of his support . . ." is the Savior's first utterance of the principle that His ministers are entitled to their support.

#### **Verse 11**

Among the Israelites, there were many, perhaps, in that day (like aged Simeon) who were looking for "the consolation of Israel;" it was into such homes that the apostles were to go. Prohibiting them from going house to house was in their interests and would prevent being caught up in rounds of dinners, entertainment, and social activities, which would have hindered their work.

### **Verses 12-13**

Not the house, but the family was to be saluted. “When you enter the house, salute the family.” This conveys the idea that the apostles were to pronounce a benediction or blessing upon the homes they entered, or at least to make some expression of good will on behalf of every member of the home into which they came.

No curse or malediction was to be uttered, ever. Retributions belong to God alone.

### **Verse 14**

The Jewish rabbis taught that the dust of heathen cities defiled, and the symbolical action of shaking off the dust of the feet indicated that any person or city rejecting the apostles’ words was no better than the heathen. (Acts 13:51)

### **Verse 15**

Why were the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah less reprehensible than the sins of cities and villages that rejected the apostles? Simply because they sinned in ignorance, whereas the cities of Jesus’ day sinned against the light. The day of judgment is an expression often used by Christ and refers to the final reckoning of all mankind before the Great White Throne.

### **Verse 16**

The serpent was considered a symbol of wisdom among the ancients, especially the python. The maid at Philippi who followed Paul and Silas was said to have a “spirit of divination” (Acts 16:16), but the Greek word denotes that she had a python! The dove as a symbol of harmlessness and innocence derived significance from Noah’s use of it as a messenger in the ark. The brutal and vicious dangers to which the apostles would be exposed were not concealed by the Lord. Their mission was dangerous and fraught with countless perils. The figure “sheep in the midst of wolves” is peculiarly apt and expressive. One wolf in a flock of sheep is a source of incredible slaughter and destruction. Far worse, even than that, would be a few sheep in the “midst of wolves!”

### **Verse 17**

The mention of synagogues identifies the enemies mentioned a moment before. Opposition to Christ and His holy religion, at first, came almost exclusively from the Jews.



### **Verse 18**

The prophecy was fulfilled when the apostles were arraigned before Herod (Acts 5:18; 12:1), before the Sanhedrin, and perhaps before other authorities.

### **Verses 19-20**

This is one of the strongest statements in the New Testament of that inspiration which guided the apostles into all truth. God' ministers now must study. Paul commanded even Timothy to study. (2 Timothy 2:15) Paul himself studied diligently and placed a high priority upon his books, especially the parchments." (2 Timothy 4:13)

### **Verse 21**

Tradition teaches that all of the Twelve were martyred, and yet the details are known in only a couple of cases.

Jesus' words are surely indicative of the bitter hatred that would prevail in the hearts of so many against His church; and, certainly, the beginnings of that hatred were borne by the apostles.

### **Verse 22**

The diabolical hatred that was vented against the Twelve exists yet. "One who has endured to the end . . ." This is the principal admonition in all times and places to apostles, disciples, servants, and followers of Christ. Unless one endures to the end, all is lost.

### **Verse 23**

Origen (Against Celsus in *ibid*, Vol. IV, p. 425) quoting this passage wrote: "Jesus, in teaching His disciples not to be guilty of rashness, gave them (this) precept. He added the example of a consistent life, acting so as not to expose his self to danger, rashly, or unreasonably, or without good grounds."

It is plain that Christ desired that His disciples should avoid bringing against themselves any persecutions due to unwise, rash, or improper conduct; and they were cautioned to avoid animosities by flight whenever possible. The words "till the Son of man come" do not refer to the final judgment but to the coming of Christ in His kingdom.

### **Verse 24**

Christ's followers shall receive the same type of opposition, hatred, and persecution that He received. Christ also used it to mean that the disciples of

the Pharisees were as blind as their leaders (Luke 6:40) and that, as Christ humbly washed the feet of others, so should His disciples. (John 13:16)

#### **Verse 25**

“Beelzebub” is actually “Beelzebul” in the Greek. “Baal,” the old god of the Canaanites, was coupled with “zebul” which means “dunghill!” By this, they called the old god of their ancient enemies “the dunghill god!” Their unqualified hatred of Christ is seen in their employment of this vile word as a name for Him.

#### **Verse 26**

The Pharisees would not succeed in hiding the truth but would result in its being published. Persecution actually provided then, as always, the following benefits for the thing, doctrines, or persons persecuted:

- (1) it intensifies the zeal of the persecuted party;
- (2) arouses sympathy for the underdog;
- (3) if intense enough, multiplies centers of dissemination for the hated truth.

#### **Verse 27**

The mystery which had been kept in silence through times eternal (Romans 16:25) was at that time, by the apostles, to be made known unto all men. God’s great secret of redemption was about to be published!

Clement of Alexandria (The Stromata in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol II, p. 313) construed the words as: “Bidding them receive the secret traditions of the true knowledge and expound them aloft conspicuously.”

#### **Verse 28**

Tertullian (On the Resurrection in *ibid*, Vol. III, p. 570) wrote: “Here we have a recognition of the natural immortality of the soul, which cannot be killed by men; and of the mortality of the body which may be killed; whence we learn that the resurrection of the dead is a resurrection of the flesh; for, unless it were raised again, it would be impossible for the flesh to be “killed in hell.”

The question of hell, that is, “Gehenna,” will be examined more fully under Matthew 25:41. Suffice it here to note that Gehenna, or the Valley of Hinnon, was used by Christ as a metaphor to describe the place of eternal punishment of the wicked.

### **Verse 29**

The proof that God does actually watch over the tiniest citizens in His universe is seen in the fact of that the sparrows one sees now are the descendants of sparrows which have lived upon the earth for uncounted thousands of years.

### **Verses 30-31**

The message of this passage is simply that of God's providential care for His children. Reference to numbering the hairs of the head suggests the infinite detail and solicitude of that loving care lavished by the Father upon His human creation. Some of the ancients made deductions from this passage which appear quite astonishing to Christians today.

### **Verse 32**

The notable promise, made here for the first time by Christ, is that He will confess those who confess Him. The usual limitation on these words is that if one confesses Christ and remains faithful till death, then in the judgment, Christ will confess him! However, is there the strongest indication that something much more immediate is meant. True, Jesus did not say when He would confess those who confess Him; but He gave an example of it the very first time a man confessed Him. That is in the case of the apostle Peter (Matthew 16:17-18) whom Jesus confesses then and there.

From this it would appear that when any person confesses Christ and is buried with Him in baptism, Christ confesses those who have been born again in the presence of God and the angels. It is possible that such is precisely the occasion when the redeemed have their name written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 20:15; 21:27)

Inscriptions in the book of life do not wait upon the judgment, nor even upon the death of proved fidelity of the persons thus honored; but their names are written there while they still live and work on earth. (Philippians 4:3)

Confession of faith in Jesus Christ as God's only begotten Son is a basic requirement of the Christian religion. (Romans 10:10) Paul called it "the good confession" twice in a single utterance; (1 Timothy 6:12-13 and the following reasons may be cited for calling it the "good confession."

- (1) Jesus made it under oath and was condemned to death for doing so. (John 19:7; Mark 14:62)
- (2) God made it from heaven on three different occasions. (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; John 12:2 8.)
- (3) All men must make it eventually. (Philippians 2:11)
- (4) It is unto salvation, (Romans 10:10), being made thereby a part of the plan of salvation.
- (5) Christ will confess those who make it. (Matthew 10:32)
- (6) It has been made by the saints of all ages.
- (7) And, it constitutes, actually a concise summary of all Christian doctrine, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God!

### **Verse 33**

This is the negative of the proposition stated in the preceding verse; but it is not likely that denial of Christ is limited to any formal, blasphemous remark but pertains to all godlessness, or failure to confess Him. Men may deny Christ by their works as well as by their words. (Titus 1: 16)

The common profane exclamation, "My God," is a double sin, being idle and profane in the first place and, secondly, claiming a relationship to God which none of the apostles ever used in addressing deity, and which was constantly used by Christ as an affirmation of His divinity.

### **Verse 34**

That a sword should be identified with Christ in any sense is a warning of the severity which is one characteristic of His glorious nature.

"Behold the kindness and severity of God." (Romans 11:22) One who obeys Christ despite filial or parental opposition feels the edge of that sword. A young woman who maintains her ideals and purity in an office where low standards prevail soon feels that sword in her heart. All who live for Christ and bleed inwardly when His name is profaned or His word denied, have felt it.

The sword of Christ is:

- (1) a sword of separation,
- (2) the word of God (Ephesians 6:17,; Hebrews 4:12),
- (3) the sword of civil authority (Romans 13:1-8,
- (4) the sword of judgment (Genesis 3:24,

- (5) the sword of correction (Revelation 2:16), and
- (6) the sword of victory, (Revelation 19:13). Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, was acquainted with that sword. “And a sword will pierce even your own soul.” (Luke 2:35)

### **Verse 35**

Lines of cleavage between Christ’s followers and the world cut sharply through the dearest and most intimate relationships on earth. In every church, almost in every household, there are scars caused by this sword.

### **Verse 36**

It was a faithful servant who betrayed William Tyndale to his death. It was the trusted disciple, Judas, who sold his Lord. The long and tragic history of the inquisitions, massacres, and bloody disturbances which have attended efforts of the faithful to honor and serve the Christ, afford countless examples fulfilling the Savior’s words. Even in modern times, every form of discrimination, partiality, bias, preferment, and rejection have been exercised against Christians, not merely by the world of strangers but by closest friends and relatives, and members of the family.

### **Verse 37**

This is one of the “hard sayings” of Christ. Luke’s account phrases it even more bluntly: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

Actually, these accounts (Matthew’s and Luke’s) have identical meanings; and, by comparison, it is learned that “hate” as used in this context actually means “to love less,” and does not imply malice or vicious hatred in the ordinary meaning of the word “hate.” The teaching in this place is simply that Christ must be first in the lives of those who would truly follow Him.

### **Verse 38**

How does one take his cross? Cross bearing is the assumption of a burden, a task, or an obligation, which one has the power to refuse, but which is willingly received, carried forward, and discharged because of the good to be accomplished and the glory believed to accrue to the name of Christ.

The cross, as set forth here, is not a mere ornament nor some unavoidable burden like sickness, old age, or taxes.

There are orphans to be fed, schools to be built, endowed, and maintained. There are churches to be built, and countless good works of all descriptions; and when men willingly, not through compulsion, provide support and encouragement for these and many other endeavors, they take up the cross, provided always that they do so through love for Christ and in His service.

### **Verse 39**

This verse emphatically states the law of true spiritual living. Note the qualification "for My sake". Whatever good one does, or whatever sacrifice is made, if such is not undertaken for the glory of Christ, it may not claim the reward promised here.

Practically all Ante-Nicene writers hail this verse as the sacred talisman of the martyrs who approached the flame, or the wild beasts, or the burning sands, with this verse in their hearts and on their lips. This blessed meaning of these holy words is freely allowed; but there is a message here, not merely for martyrs but for every member of God's family in every generation.

That person who gives his life without reservation in the pursuit of God's will is also losing his life in the sense of this verse. To submerge one's own life and will in those of Christ, so that he may say with Paul, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in Me." (Galatians 2:20), is to lose one's life, and also to find it. This is the great antidote for selfishness.

### **Verses 40-42**

These words conclude the charge of Jesus to the Twelve as they were about to depart on this mission. The principle taught here is that receiving the apostles is equivalent to receiving Christ, and that receiving Christ is equivalent to receiving God. The importance of the apostolic mission is underscored by these words. It is "through their word" (John 17:20) and "through your apostles" (2 Peter 3:2) that all the benefits of the Christian faith may be acquired.

All spiritual blessings are of and through Christ; and unless related to Him, the best of good works must fail of any heavenly reward. On the other hand, the least of good works, even a cup of cold water, in His name, is sure of eternal acceptance and credit. Note: Even a single cup of cold water given to them shall

not lose its reward. These little ones is a term of endearment spoken by Christ of the Twelve.

The departure of the Twelve on their mission took place about five weeks before the second Passover of Jesus' ministry. They were gone about a month during which Jesus taught in both Galilee and Jerusalem, where He went to keep the Feast of Purim at the beginning of March. (John 5:1) The Twelve rejoined Him before the Passover (John 6:4); and, shortly after that, Christ fed the five thousand. (Luke 9:10)

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **MESSENGERS FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST, UPBRAIDING CITIES THAT REJECTED HIM, AND THE GREAT INVITATION**

#### **Verses 1-3**

The month's separation of Jesus and His disciples caused John to grow uncertain as to whether Christ was indeed the Messiah or not. The uncertainty probably arose from the following circumstances:

- (1) John had been cast into prison, and Christ had made no move to free him;
- (2) John was suffering cruel and unjust persecution and probably foresaw his approaching martyrdom;
- (3) Jesus' identity as the Messiah was not being proclaimed at that time with the dogmatic certainty which John doubtless expected;
- (4) the reasons for Christ's reticence about His Messiahship could not have been clear to John.

In fact men would be somewhat in the dark about this, even today, had it not been for Luke's concise statement of the strait in which Jesus found Himself at that moment. "I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am till it is accomplished." (Luke 12:50)

The philosopher John Locke traced the narrowness of the path our Lord had to travel. It was His purpose to die for the sins of the world; but His purpose would have been thwarted if He had been put to death for sedition. The popular misconception that the Messiah would supplant the Romans made it very difficult to walk the fine line between convincing all men of good will. On the

one hand, that He was actually the Messiah, while on the other hand, at the same time dispelling any thought that He would take the secular government away from the Romans.

It is easy to see why Christ would openly declare Himself the Messiah while conversing with the woman at the well of Samaria, (John 4:26), whose word was worthless in court because she was a Samaritan, and upon other occasions fall back upon more noncommittal expressions such as “you say.”

It was absolutely necessary that John be confirmed in his conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, but not by any declaration that would result in Jesus being brought into court as a seditionist.

J. R. Dummelow (One Volume Commentary, p. 664) summed up Christ’s skilled handling of the question in these words: “By a reference to Isaiah 61:1, He declared plainly enough, and yet not too plainly , that He was the Messiah. He worked a number of miracles in their presence in proof of His Messianic claims (Luke 7:21), and finally sent them back to John with a message in which He expressly mentioned His miracles, and promised a blessing on those who should attach themselves to Him. The spectacle of Christ’s miracles must have been particularly impressive to the disciples of John, who performed no miracles. (John 10:41)

It should be noted that in times of personal misfortune, suffering, hardship, or persecution, one’s faith is inclined to waver; and those things which seemed so positive and certain under more favorable circumstances and in brighter days tend to be dimmed and obscured.

Any sufferer who struggles with life’s tribulations and feels that his prayers have not been answered can find deep and sympathetic thoughts for John and his doubt. Note too that John took the wise course by presenting his difficulties and uncertainties directly to the Lord. If he had inquired of the Pharisees, or others, he could have found no alleviation of his distress. Take it up with Jesus. That is always best, and in fact is the only way to solve problems and doubts. Note that Jesus said, “Go show John again . . . “ (Matthew 11:4) This teaches that even the best men and the most faithful disciples need to be told “again and again” the wonderful things of Christ and His kingdom.



#### **Verse 4**

“Go and report to John the things which you hear and see . . .” This is a constant and unvarying need in all ages for the church to keep stressing over and over again the great facts of the gospel. The Great Commission stresses teaching the taught, as does Paul’s readiness to preach the gospel to members of the church in Rome. (Romans 1:16)

#### **Verse 5**

The miracles Jesus mentioned to John’s messengers were precisely those which Isaiah identified with the advent of the Messiah. (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1) This was Christ’s unique way of letting John know that He was indeed the Christ without phrasing it in terms that would have secular overtones.

#### **Verse 6**

This earnest plea from Jesus’ very heart and soul is a moving and powerful request that John would not take offense at our Lord’s inability openly to declare Himself at that time, nor at differences such as marked their attitudes toward fasting. The absence of any further inquiries from John shows that John understood.

#### **Verse 7**

Jesus immediately launched into a dissertation on John and his ministry that revealed the very highest estimate of both.

“The reed shaken in the wind” suggests something of little importance, trivial, a minor curiosity. It also suggests a man of weak and vacillating purpose. John was not that. It was Jesus’ way of saying, “John will stand firm. He is no reed bowing in whatever direction the wind blows.”

#### **Verse 8**

John’s rough garment of camel’s hair put him in a different world. The implication would give greater strength to John and would tactfully remind him that he was no fawning flatterer of Herod who would change his witness of Christ in order to curry favor.

Nearly 2000 years after Jesus spoke those words, it is still true that the clothing that brings the highest price and is held as the most desirable is nearly always marked by its “softness!” There is a quality of permanence and aptitude that marked all of our Lord’s utterances.

### **Verse 9**

John was the last and greatest of the prophets, foretelling:

- (1) the near approach of the kingdom of God,
- (2) that Jesus would take away the sin of the world, and
- (3) that the Jewish nation would be destroyed for rejecting Him. He was more than a prophet in that he did not merely foretell the Messiah but presented Him to the people and identified Him. He was the greatest also in his proximity to Christ, which is the final ultimate test of greatness.

### **Verse 10**

Christ's selection of this prophecy from Malachi 3:1 and application of it to John proves two things:

- (1) that John the Baptist is that first messenger mentioned in that passage, and
- (2) that Jesus Christ is the Lord, "the messenger of the covenant" who even then had suddenly come to His temple.

### **Verse 11**

Just as John was the greatest of the prophets because of his proximity to Christ, the apostles, and indeed all Christians, are greater than John because they are even closer, being "in Him" as a result of the new birth. Since Christ is Lord, this statement concerning John became the fulfillment of the prophecy that John would "be great in the sight of the Lord." (Luke 1:15)

The statement proves that:

- (1) John was not in the kingdom of Christ, and
- (2) the kingdom had not then been set up, else John would have been in it.

The least in God's kingdom are greater than John because:

- (1) their sins are forgiven, whereas those of John were merely rolled forward to the cross, and
- (2) they enjoy full fellowship with Christ in His kingdom.

### **Verse 12**

This verse is admitted to be one of the most difficult passages of the New Testament. This verse in all probability was accurately understood and

expounded by J. W. McGarvey (The Fourfold Gospel, p. 283) who wrote: “Jesus here pictures the kingdom of heaven as a besieged city. The city is shut up, but the enemies which surround it storm its walls and try to force an entrance . . . The gates of Christ’s kingdom were not opened till the day of Pentecost; (Acts 2); but men, hearing it was about to be opened, sought to enter it prematurely, not by the gates which God would open. . . . but by such breaches as they themselves sought to make in its walls.”

Instances of such violence are:

- (1) Some tried to make Him king by force. (John 6:15)
- (2) The mother of James and John sought to obtain secular appointments for her sons in the kingdom. (Matthew 20:21)
- (3) Some supposed the kingdom would appear immediately. (Luke 19:11)
- (4) The apostles quarreled over who should be the greatest. (Luke 22:24-30)
- (5) The apostles themselves seemed anxious for it to be done “at this time.” (Acts 1:6)

Furthermore, they envisioned a restoration of rule to Israel! J. W. McGarvey (Ibid., p. 284) wrote: “The people were full of preconceived ideas with regard to the kingdom, and each one sought to hasten and enjoy its pleasures as one who impatiently seizes upon a bud and seeks with his fingers to force it to bloom. The context shows that even John the Baptist was then seeking to force the kingdom.”

### **Verse 13**

This signifies the end of all previous dispensations in John the Baptist, the notable person upon whom the hinges of God’s economy began to open into the New Covenant. His proximity to Christ made him greater than Abraham, Moses, David, or any other of the great Old Testament worthies, revealing that the true test of greatness is proximity to Jesus.

### **Verse 14**

Basing their confident expectation of the return of Elijah before the advent of the Messiah upon Malachi 4:5-6, the Jews of Christ’s day expected a literal return of the natural Elijah and had even tried to shake the faith of the apostles in Jesus’ Messiahship because in their view Elijah had not yet come. Elijah did

actually return and met with Christ on the mount of Transfiguration; (Matthew 17:3) but in this passage, Christ revealed that the true intention of the prophecy was not a literal return of Elijah, but his spiritual return in the person of John the Baptist.

The Pharisees should have been able to see this for themselves for these reasons:

- (1) The birth of John the Baptist was announced in the temple to Zacharias, one of the priests, in his regular course of duty, a fact which Pharisees knew.
- (2) This annunciation was made by an angel who quoted, almost verbatim, the remarkable words of Malachi's prophecy, applying them, even before he was born, to John the Baptist.
- (3) John's raiment of camel's hair and the leather thong was designed to identify him with Elijah. (2 Kings 1:8 and under Matthew 3:4)
- (4) The annunciator also said, "He shall go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17)

Elijah actually came, therefore, in both ways:

- (1) literally, on the mount of Transfiguration, and
- (2) spiritually, in the person of John the Baptist. This did not prevent the Pharisees, however, from trying to subvert the Lord's apostles by the allegation of their own biased views on the subject. (Matthew 17:10)

### **Verse 15**

This means that those who desire to know the truth may find sufficient knowledge in the words of Christ, that spiritual things are discerned by those who are spiritual. The Pharisees did possess ears, but not such ears as were disposed to hear any of the noble truths pertaining to the kingdom of heaven.

### **Verse 16**

Christ loved little children and made them models of kingdom virtues (Matthew 18:1-6) and flatly declared that unto such "belongs the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:14)

But here, Jesus used unruly and misbehaving children as a simile for the obdurate and unreasonable generation which rejected Him and His kingdom.

**Verse 17**

Translating this simile into the vernacular, it is just this: Some wanted to play 'wedding' and others said, "No! That is too happy." Then they said, "Let's play funeral," and the others said, "No! That is too sad!" Jesus then proceeded to show that, in Himself and John the Baptist, that generation had rejected both poles of righteous conduct without any reason whatever.

**Verses 18-19**

John was an ascetic, living in the wilderness on the roughest of fare. Christ was sociable even attending weddings, and eating with publicans and sinners. That unreasonable generation rejected both. John they accused of having a demon; and Christ they vilified as a "glutton and winebibber." There was clearly no place in that society for any type of manifestation of God's righteousness, no matter what direction it took.

The following criticisms were directed against Christ:

- (1) He was called a glutton.
- (2) He was called a winebibber.
- (3) They said He cast out demons by the prince of demons (9:34).
- (4) They called Him Beelzebul, (10:25).
- (5) They called Him a sinner, (John 9:24).
- (6) They said He had a demon, (John 7:20).
- (7) They said He was a Samaritan, (John 8:48).
- (8) They charged Him with violating the Sabbath, (Matthew 12:2).
- (9) They referred to Him as a "deceiver," (Matthew 27:63)
- (10) They accused Him of friendship with publicans and sinners, (Luke 15:2)

Here they overreached themselves, because what they intended as a slander is in fact the glory of our Lord, namely, that He is a friend of publicans and sinners.

"Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds . . ." means that both John and Jesus were doing the will of God.

### **Verse 20**

The New Testament records only a few of the mighty works done in Capernaum and only one at Bethsaida Julius, where the five thousand were fed. The wonder of why those cities did not repent remains and can be explained only upon the basis that the majority are not disposed to repentance, even if Christ Himself should be their instructor, even if the disciples should be their preachers, if the leading citizens should have their sick healed and their dead raised, as was true of Capernaum where Jairus' daughter was raised and the servant of the centurion was cured.

### **Verse 21**

All three of these cities, situated within three or four miles of each other, were prosperous and populous in that day; and at least two of the Lord's apostles, Peter and Andrew, came from Bethsaida. (John 1:44) Capernaum was the residence of Jesus and is called "His own city." (9:1)

### **Verse 22**

Again we have an example of our Lord's designation of the final judgment as "the day!" The amazing thing in this place is the relatively lighter punishment projected for Tyre and Sidon. Christ plainly declared that Tyre and Sidon would enjoy a more "endurable" status. This, to be sure, is far from saying that their state should be described as "desirable!"

### **Verse 23**

This indicates that if Christ, instead of an angel, had visited Sodom, the people would have repented, and the city would have been spared. How favored, then, must be considered those men who have the privilege of knowing Christ and His saving gospel! A more terrible punishment awaits those who sin against the Light. The gospel will either bless or curse those who hear it. Paul wrote, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to the one an aroma from death to death, and to the other an aroma from life to life, and who is adequate for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

"Will not be exalted to heaven . . ." refers to the prosperity and general favor in which Capernaum reposed. This appears from the fact that her debasement is

not to be in Gehenna, but in Hades, indicating a loss of her position and destruction of her beauty.

**Verse 24**

The mystery of why more was not done for Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, and other wicked cities of the remote past, should be contemplated with the deepest reverence for the wisdom and righteousness of God. It is not given men to know the “why” concerning many of the deep things of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10)

**Verse 25**

Jesus, in this prayer, addressed God as “Father,” and called Him “Lord.” This is in marked contrast to some today who speak in their prayers to God, addressing the Eternal as “You!” Christians should give honor to whom it is due. (Romans 13:7)

The basis of rejoicing that the Father had revealed his wisdom to “babes” is found in the apostle’s lack of sophistication, pride, and intellectual arrogance. They were not worldly wise, wedded to preconceived notions, or doctrines. The advantage of this, from Christ’s point of view, was noted by J. W McGarvey (Commentary on Matthew, p. 101): “The wise and prudent were so wedded to tradition and false theories that the truth would not have been so safe in their keeping, as in that of men fresh from the masses of the people.” Also from McGarvey (p. 102): “It is certain that the chief corrupters of the truth in every age have sprung from the former class of men; and that the fact that the gospel was originally established in the earth by the labors of the poor and illiterate in the face of bitter opposition from the rich and powerful, is an overwhelming argument in its favor.”

However, it should be rejected that the Lord's apostles were lacking in truly intellectual gifts. They were, it is true, unspoiled by the philosophy and vain deceit of men, but they were diamonds in the rough, peculiarly fitted to receive without bias and to communicate without adulteration the pure truth of the gospel of salvation.

**Verse 26**

This shows the oneness between Christ and the Father and also indicates the propriety of including expressions in prayers, besides requests and thanks.

### **Verse 27**

There is positively no other way to know God except through Christ. (John 14:6) Man's only hope of eternal life lies in a knowledge of God, and this is possible only through Jesus Christ. In a practical sense, this means that the New Testament is the only source of accurate knowledge of God in matters pertaining to salvation; for, of all the books on earth, there is not another source, save only the New Testament, of the teachings of Christ.

## **THE GREAT INVITATION**

### **Verses 28-30**

Christ only knows the Father, that He will give all the weary rest, that only those may know God to whom Christ reveals Him—these are all statements that cannot be reconciled with ordinary man. Christ was more than a man, and every line of the New Testament emphasizes this transcendent fact.

These last three verses of chapter 11 are called the Great Invitation. Those invited are “all you that labor and are heavy laden.” Christ's teaching has a special appeal for the poor, the downtrodden, the despised, rejected, and suffering of earth; but it is incorrect to assume that only these are invited. Rather, all men are invited to fly unto Jesus for peace and redemption.

The Great Invitation excludes no one. The common burden of sin, sickness, death, doubt, disillusionment, and sorrow is an invariable heritage of every man coming into the world. Reasons why men should come to Christ are:

- (1) for the rest He will give,
- (2) for the rest they will find, and
- (3) because Christ is meek and lowly in heart, thus fully qualified to provide sympathy, love, understanding, and whatever else may be required to alleviate human distress and to provide eternal life.

The means of accomplishing all this is the “yoke” of Christ. What is that? Men are naturally leery of yokes; and Christ adds that His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Christ's burden (His “yoke”) is the burden that makes all other burdens bearable. Under the yoke of Christ, men can withstand all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. They can carry whatever burdens of sorrow, misfortune,



disease, or mortality that may come upon them—burdens which, if undertaken with His “yoke.” would surely crush the unfortunate attempting to carry his burden alone.

It only remains to be seen, “How many men take Christ’s yoke upon them? This is done, as He said, by those who “learn” of Him. This refers to hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, being baptized, and walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. Men take Christ’s yoke upon them by obeying the gospel and taking up their full duties and obligations in the church which is Christ’s body. That such is surely a burden or “yoke,” none may deny; but it is a burden which makes all other burdens light.

**CHAPTER 12**  
**QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SABBATH,**  
**BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT,**  
**SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH,**  
**THE EMPTY HOUSE AND**  
**THE RETURN OF THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT**

**Verse 1**

This action of Jesus’ disciples should have been passed over and ignored altogether; but the bitter, hair-splitting Pharisees, finding no genuine fault in the conduct of Jesus and His disciples, attempted to make a case out of this. Their knowledge of so trifling an incident shows how minutely they observed all His deeds.

The time was April or May, when the corn was formed in the ear but not yet harvested. The grain was likely wheat; Indian corn would not be known till after Columbus discovered America.

**Verse 2**

This charge was false. God’s law did not prohibit the preparation and eating of food on the Sabbath day. It is true, however, that the disciples had violated a Pharisaical “interpretation” of the law; and such interpretations were held even more sacred by the Pharisees than the law itself. In the Pharisees’ view, the disciples were guilty of threshing wheat!

Such pedantry, nit-picking, and magnification of trifles would also have made them guilty of irrigating land, if they had chanced to knock off a few drops of dew while passing through the fields! The Pharisees were out to “get” Jesus; and any charge was better than none.

#### **Verses 3-4**

What David and his companions did on that occasion was not lawful, nor does Jesus say that they were blameless in so doing. That was not the point of bringing up the conduct of David.

J. W. McGarvey (Commentary on Matthew, p. 104) wrote: “If Christians may violate law when its observance would involve hardship or suffering then, there is an end to suffering for the name of Christ, and an end, seen, of self-denial.”

Why then did Christ mention those unlawful actions of David? It was because the Pharisees wholeheartedly approved of that far more flagrant case of Sabbath-breaking by David (for David’s action was unlawful; the disciples was not), and yet were willing to press an accusation of wrong-doing against the Christ for something of infinitely less consequence. That the Pharisees did approve David’s conduct was well known; and, if they had not approved it, they could have turned Jesus’ words against Him saying, “So, you class yourself with David—both you and David are sinners.” That they did not so respond proves that they approved of David’s conduct. Thus, their hypocrisy was open for all to see.

#### **Verse 5**

This reference is to the fact that an exception was made for the priests who served in the temple, and who could, therefore, do work on the Sabbath that would otherwise have been unlawful.

Christ’s stress on the exception called attention to an analogy between Himself and the temple. He referred to His body as “the temple” stating that He would raise it up in three days. (John 2:19) The argument is that, just as the priests served in the temple on the Sabbath day and were guiltless, His disciples might also serve Christ, the Greater Temple, without incurring restrictions (which they had not done), their doing so in the service of Christ would have granted them exemption.

“Profaning” the Sabbath does not refer to any actual profanation, but means that their actions, if performed otherwise than in temple service, would have profaned it.

#### **Verse 6**

Who but God Himself could be greater than the temple God ordained? Christ again made a statement fixing a gulf between Himself and all ordinary men. Jesus’ disciples were totally within the law, and were like the temple priests—guiltless!

Those expositors who assumed the charge of the Pharisees to have been correct, making Jesus’ justification of His disciples to be merely that “David did it too,” appear totally to have misunderstood this portion of God’s word. And then, to go forward and formulate, a law authorizing in prescribed circumstances the breaking of God’s laws, is to forget that Jesus said, “Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19)

#### **Verse 7**

Christ said the disciples were guiltless. Therefore, He was not attempting to justify their conduct on the basis that David had been guilty of Sabbath breaking. Christ’s quotation from Hosea 6:6 was a plain reference to the corruption and guilt of the Pharisees, and suggests that a proper attitude of mercy in their hearts would have rejected the criticism of this action before it was made. The real trouble was not in Christ and His disciples but in the hearts of the Pharisees.

#### **Verse 8**

This proclamation of His own authority took the whole matter out of the context of their law, and their interpretations, and their opinions, and even out of the Law of Moses. Christ had the right to set aside all of those; and, in the final analysis, His disciples needed no permission except Christ’s to do whatever He permitted. This place has been cited as proof that Christians should keep the Sabbath day, but the opposite is taught. The Sabbath should be ignored and rejected, utterly, unless Christ commanded it (which He did not); for Paul said, “He took it out of the way having nailed it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:14)

### **Verses 9-10**

Their question, Matthew declared, sprang not from a desire to learn, but from hope of a chance to accuse.

### **Verse 11**

The obvious answer was affirmative. The Pharisees, with one accord, made an exception for “the ox in the ditch.” (Exodus 23:4-5; Deuteronomy 22:4)

### **Verse 12**

Christ continued to prove that His conduct and that of His apostles was altogether correct and lawful. He did not lay claim to any “excusable violations” but he claimed strict and wholehearted compliance with the law, the whole law. (Matthew 5:17)

### **Verse 13**

Christ demonstrated the principle He had just enunciated. It was both in “preaching and bringing” the gospel to men that Jesus surpassed all other teachers. (Luke 8:1) Christ always fitted the deed to the precept and the precept to the deed.

### **Verse 14**

Hatred and blind rage will always try to destroy that which cannot be removed by more conventional means. Mark’s mention of the Herodians in their conference shows the grounds upon which the Pharisees would attempt His legal murder that is, by accusing Him of sedition.

### Verse 15

Knowing of the evil plot to kill Him, Christ withdrew, as Mark added, to the Sea of Galilee. (Mark 3:7) This was in keeping with Jesus’ own rule. (Matthew 10:23) Significantly, He healed them all. There were no failures.

### **Verse 16**

To have given wide publicity to His deeds at that time would have prematurely precipitated His eventual showdown with the Pharisees; and Christ was not yet ready for that. Although He intended to die, He intended also to accomplish His death at a time and manner fully in harmony with His own eternal purpose.

### **Verse 17**

The reason for this reference is that it shows that Christ was doing exactly what it was prophesied that He would do.

### **Verse 18**

The area into which Christ then entered had a heavy Gentile population. "Judgment," as used in this place, means God's truth."

### **Verse 19**

Jesus was no street corner egotist, bawling for attention. Techniques of the rabble rouser, the sensationalist, and the soap-box orator were beneath His dignity.

Albert Barnes (Barnes' Notes, p. 129) wrote: "The meaning is that he should not seek publicity and popularity."

### **Verses 20-21**

The bruised reed and dimly lighted lamp are symbols of weakness and feebleness of faith, applicable in this place, no doubt, to the general spiritual condition of the Gentiles, but also a pledge that Christ does not despise the faith of any of His children, however weak and ready to perish. (Albert Barnes, Ibid. p. 129) wrote: "He saw in the bruised reed a symbol of the soul, broken and contrite on account of sin, weeping and mourning for transgression. He will not break it. That is, He will not be severe, unforgiving, and cruel. He will heal it, pardon it, and give it strength."

The metaphor of the smoking flax referred to the string-like fabric, or wick, one end of which was contained in the bowl of ancient lamps, and the other end lighted. Flax was the material of which such wicks were made. "Smoking flax" indicated a lamp, nearly out of fuel, and almost ready to go out.

There is also in this place a contrast between worldly conquerors and the Pharisees, on the one hand, riding rough shod over the weak and helpless; and , on the other hand, the lowly Christ, withdrawing from popular clamor, solicitous for the bruised reed or the smoking flax.

But make no mistake. Christ, not the Pharisees, was the victor. Look at the last word of the quotation from Isaiah. He will send forth judgment "to victory!" Christ will continue in the way of the meek and humble. His methods did not

lead to nor tend towards defeat—far from it. Total and final victory was, and ever shall be, His.

#### **Verse 22**

“Dumb” in this place means “mute,” the original meaning of that word. Extensive events developed for this gracious deed, the populace hailing Him as the “Son of David” (a popular name for the Messiah), and the Pharisees accusing Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub.

#### **Verse 23**

The contrast in attitude between the Pharisees and the multitudes showed that Christ was getting His message over to the majority of the people in spite of the bitter opposition of the leaders.

#### **Verse 24**

Charges of the Pharisees were not honest. They would have denied the miracles if possible; but unable to do that, they spoke maliciously about the source of His power. “Beelzebub” was a combination of two ancient words, “Baal,” the name of the old god of the Canaanites, and “zebul,” meaning “dunghill.” Beelzebub, as he came to be called, was said to be the prince of devils, or demons. How shameful it was that they linked the name of the Savior with that false god.

#### **Verse 25**

The argument in this and the following verse is simple, but profound. If Satan was really casting out Satan, a ridiculous absurdity on the face of it, then Satan’s kingdom was being destroyed. Jesus knew their thoughts, a knowledge that only God could have.

#### **Verse 26**

Christ, in this argument, took full advantage of the fact that the Pharisees, in malice, had overreached themselves by making an argument that was fraudulent and illogical on the face of it.

#### **Verse 27**

Christ here referred to the widespread practice of some of the disciples (sons) of the Pharisees of casting out demons, or pretending to do so, which practice the Pharisees openly accepted, and upon which they based claims of divine approval of both themselves and their doctrines.

Christ's argument was: "You Pharisees accept so-called 'mumbo jumbo' and evident witchcraft connected with them, but you reject My miracles which are accomplished with only a word of authority. If the miracles of your disciples are acceptable, surely mine, the Christ's, should also be acceptable."

### **Verse 28**

In this, Christ turned their own arguments, against them. His works, accomplished by God's power, were proof enough that the kingdom of God was at hand. "Come upon you" does not mean that the kingdom had been set up at that point, but that the King had certainly appeared, and that its establishment was near.

### **Verse 29**

In some real sense, Satan was "bound," else the Lord could not have cast out demons. Satan is still "bound." Satan is limited and restrained by divinely imposed boundaries encompassing all infernal activity.

1. Satan cannot tempt a child of God more than is possible to bear. (1 Corinthians 10:13).
2. He could not enter even a herd of swine without our Lord's permission. (Matthew 8:32)
3. God's specific permission was necessary in the satanic harassment of the patriarch Job. (Job 1:12)
4. Satan sifted Peter only after the Lord allowed it. (Luke 22:31)
5. Satan and his angels are reserved "in chains of darkness" till the day of judgment. (2 Peter 2:4)
6. He sowed tares in the wheat, but could do so only "while men slept." (Mathew 13:25)
7. He snatches the word of God from men's hearts, but he can do so only when hearts are hardened. (Matthew 13:4)

From these and countless other implications in the Scriptures, it may be positively concluded that Satan does not share control of the universe with God. Whatever Satan may do, it is always under God's permissive will; and all that he does will finally serve the eternal purpose.

### **Verse 30**

H. Leo Boles (Commentary on Matthew, p. 268) wrote: “In the great conflict between life and darkness, good and evil, the kingdom of God and of Satan, there is no middle ground; there is no neutral position; there is no third power to which these miracles may be attributed. These Pharisees were obligated either to join Christ or to be against Him. They had to become allies of God or co-workers with Satan; there was no other alternative.”

### **Verse 31**

There is an unpardonable transgression, and here is an example of it, “blasphemy against the Spirit.” H. Leo Boles (Ibid., p. 269) wrote: “This passage speaks not of “a sin against,” but of “blasphemy against” the Spirit. This does not exclude a class of sins which are unforgivable and known collectively as “the sin” against the Holy Spirit.

The gospel of Mark 3:29-30 reads: “But whoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. Because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” Mark spoke not of “the” but “an” eternal sin, showing that the transgression under consideration in this place is one of a class of sins designated as “eternal.”

Let us note the whole class of eternal sins first and then consider the example of it committed by the Pharisees.

The word of God teaches:

- (1) “There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.” (1 John 5:16) John spoke not of sin “until” but “unto” death. Such a sin is, therefore, not until physical death, but is unto spiritual death.
- (2) “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.” (Hebrews 6:4-6)



- (3) “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.” (Timothy 5:6)
- (4) And regarding certain violations of the Lord’s Table, Paul declared: “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.” (1 Corinthians 1:30) “Sleep” in this place is a euphemistic expression for death.
- (5) That the Holy Spirit in one’s heart can be “quenched” is evident from the admonition, “Do not quench the Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 5:19)
- (6) Concerning apostates, “The last state has become worse for them than the first,” (2 Peter 2:20-21) indicating a condition worse than being lost, and which is fulfilled only by being lost without possibility of recovery.

Now of this general condition, variously described as death while one lives, a sin unto death, the quenching of the Spirit, worse than being an alien sinner, and impossible to renew, and for which there is no need to pray—all such sins qualify for Mark’s description, “an eternal sin.”

What, then, is the sin that does all this? It may be any sin, hence the deadly and dangerous nature of all sin. The eternal sin is the one that destroys the soul of the sinner.

Now, with reference to blasphemy against the Spirit, Christ named it as “an eternal sin,” making it unforgiveable. It was not the only sin that could have destroyed the Pharisees, but it is the one that did.

The peculiar aggravation of their wickedness springs from their reviling Christ although they knew Him to be righteous. Contrary to what they knew, they said He had an unclean spirit. They put falsehood for truth, darkness for light, evil for righteousness, and shut their eyes and hearts against the Lord. Their blasphemy was of a kind that blotted out the hope of heaven; and there can be little doubt that the same type of blind, senseless opposition to the Lord today would have the very same consequences.

Seven different sins against the Holy Spirit may be noted in these references:

- (1) lusting against (Galatians 5:16);
- (2) resisting (Acts 7:51),
- (3) grieving (Ephesians 4:30);

- (4) lying to (Acts 5:3);
- (5) insulting (Hebrews 10:24);
- (6) blasphemy against (Mark 3:29); and
- (7) quenching (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

It is implicit, however, in the very nature of all sin that any sin, persisted in, can result in quenching the sacred fire within the soul and issue at last in eternal death.

### **Verse 32**

Many did speak against Christ, but when the Spirit of God came at Pentecost, they obeyed the gospel message and were saved. Those who spoke against the Spirit, rejecting the gospel which He delivered through the apostles, were not saved. No other means of redemption was given. Those who rejected the Spirit received no forgiveness then, or ever. One should avoid reading into this passage any hope that some sins will be forgiven in this world to come which remains unforgiven now.

### **Verse 33**

J. R. Dummelow (op. cit., p. 669) wrote on this passage bringing it into sharp focus: "Pharisees, be logical. You say that to cast out devils is good, but that I Who do it I am corrupt." That is as if you said, "The fruit of this tree is good, but the tree itself is corrupt." Make up your minds which way you will have it. Either say that My works are good and therefore that I am good also, or else that My works are corrupt, and that therefore I am corrupt also. You cannot separate a tree from its fruit, for a tree is known by its fruit. Nor can you separate a man from his works, for he is known by them."

### **Verse 34**

The evil works of the Pharisees proceeded from inner corruption. Their hearts were not right in the sight of God. Men should keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

### **Verse 35**

This is an elaboration of what Christ had already said. Such full attention to the Pharisees' slanders endows the entire event with tremendous significance; and, when it is recalled that their sin consisted principally of "speaking against" Christ, the implication is mandatory that an evil mouth can damn the soul

forever. Evil and unbelieving words are not merely evil within themselves, but are like the escaping bubbles to the surface of the lake, that betrays the rotten carcass beneath. Evil words proceed out of evil hearts.

### **Verse 36**

This is a strong admonition to guard what is spoken. "Idle" words are not necessarily those casual and insignificant sayings indulged in the course of social fellowship, nor such words as may be calculated to bring a smile to care-worn faces, but rather, they are the words that betray a bias of the soul against God and expose the evil heart of the sinner. Again Christ referred to "the day," of judgment.

### **Verse 37**

Speech is one of the greatest endowments of humanity; and the greater the gift, the greater the sin of perverting it to unworthy purposes. It would be impossible to sum up all the sins of mankind in that area of sinful speech.

Words, as used by millions, constitute the bulk of human shame and wickedness. (James 3:2) Beyond everything else, man should watch what he says. One's words can justify when they confess Christ, or teach the truth, or serve to make peace, bestow a blessing, or give encouragement; but on the other hand, when words condemn, cast a reflection, subvert the truth, utter profanity, vulgarity, hatred, or malice, or any one of a million other evil things—then such words bring the condemnation of those who speak them.

### **Verse 38**

This arrogant request came from a group who had already accused Jesus of being in league with the devil and who had already seen signs aplenty; but in this case, they were demanding a sign of their own choosing.

Luke stated that they sought a "sign from heaven." (Luke 11:16) By that, they no doubt meant some spectacular wonder without moral value but which would appeal sensationally to a man's curiosity.

There is more than a suggestion that the Pharisees' request for a sign was but a renewal of Satan's temptation of their Lord in the wilderness. Christ always refused to perform wonders for His enemies like Herod or the Pharisees. He did work miracles for the benefit of John's disciples (Luke 7:18-22), and raised Lazarus that the people might believe. (John 11:42)

### **Verse 39**

The “adulterous generation” refers not merely to the morals of the people but to the rejection of Israel’s covenant with their God. Albert Barnes (op. cit., p. 134) wrote: “The relation of the Jews to God was represented as a marriage contract with God as the husband and the Jewish people as His wife. (Isaiah 57:3; Hosea 3:1; Ezekiel 16:15) Hence, their apostasy and idolatry are often represented as adultery.”

The “sign of the prophet Jonah” refers to the resurrection of Christ, the greatest and most wonderful miracle of all time. Jesus’ announcement of this “sign” at that time was actually a prophecy of His death, burial, and resurrection.

### **Verse 40**

The use of “whale” in some versions is in error; the word is “sea-monster.” The Bible states that “God prepared” a great fish (Jonah 1:17). In the book of Jonah is related also how God “prepared” a gourd, (4:6) a worm. (4:7) and a sultry east wind. (4:8) Why it should be considered for God a more difficult matter to prepare a great fish than any of those other “preparations” is surely a mystery!

Regarding the truth of the Jonah narrative, it appears absolutely incredible that Christ, one of the Godhead, would have made a mere folk tale the principal prophecy and sign of His resurrection from the dead.

From Jesus’ reference to it here, it appears that the experience of Jonah was an authentic event which God “prepared” to be a prophecy of a still greater one, the resurrection of Christ.

The question of “three days and three nights,” as signifying the time of our Lord’s remaining in the tomb, is one of the most widely discussed issues in the New Testament.

The traditional view that Christ was crucified on Friday and raised on Sunday draws its principal support from Matthew’s word that Christ should be raised on the third day. (Matthew 16:21) This view asserts that if He was crucified on Thursday and raised on Sunday, then He would have been raised on the fourth day.

Some respected students of God’s word take another view. R. A. Torrey (Difficulties in the Bible, p. 109) said: “There is absolutely nothing in favor of

Friday crucifixion, but everything in Scripture is harmonized by Wednesday crucifixion.”

Torrey’s argument is the following:

- (1) Christ was crucified the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42).
- (2) This does not necessarily mean the day before the ordinary Sabbath, because the Jews always honored the day before the Passover (15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan) as a special “high Sabbath,” no matter what day of the week it fell upon. (Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:7; Numbers 28:16-18).
- (3) The truly important question is, therefore, whether “day before the Sabbath” refers to an ordinary Saturday, or the special “high” Sabbath related to the Passover, and occurring on any day of the week, depending where the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan fell.
- (4) John’s gospel plainly says it was “the preparation of the Passover,” (John 19:14) and that it was a high day.” (19:31) These Scriptures plainly show that the ordinary Sabbath was not meant.
- (5) Thus, Christ was crucified on the day before the “high day,” or first day of Passover. Since the Passover (15<sup>h</sup> of Nisan in the year 30 A.D. fell on Thursday, the “day before” would make it Wednesday on which Christ was crucified.
- (6) Scriptures supporting this view are: Christ said He would rise “after three days.” (Mark 8:31; 10:34) “This is now the third day, since these things were done.” (Luke 24:31)

Whatever one thinks of Torrey’s argument, it must be admitted that it is supported by more Scriptures than the traditional view.

Warning! Devout souls will not be troubled by this question; for, if it had been necessary to know the day of the week; the Lord would have revealed it. Furthermore, to resolve this question finally and dogmatically, it would be positively necessary to know the exact year of our Lord’s passion; and that is not certainly known. Not even the exact year of His birth can be determined. It can never be known what day of the week was the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan until the overriding question of what year is fixed. This, of course, is the weakness of Torrey’s position. He takes the year 30 A.D. as the base of his calculations.

The heart of the earth . . . is a figurative expression for the grave which is also called “the lower parts of the earth.” (Psalm 63:9; Ephesians 4:9)

#### **Verse 41**

Of surpassing interest in this passage is Christ’s reference to “the judgment.” Some fancy they see seven judgments in the word of God; but Christ continually spoke of only one.

The judgment was a constant theme of Christ’s teaching. Christ’s view of the judgment envisioned a day of wrath and glory toward which all the world is moving, a day on which God shall rise in righteous anger and cast evil out of His universe. Christ’s word on this subject makes it impossible to hold “our age” as the judgment; for “it is appointed unto men to die once, and after this comes the Judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27) Nor is the day of death to be viewed as the “day of judgment.” That comes after death. The verses before us show that the judgment is a simultaneous judgment of all nations and conditions of men, regardless of the ages in which they lived.

“The judgment” of Scripture is a specific occasion, a cataclysmic day, upon which every man ever born on earth shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the deeds done in the body. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

How commendable was the repentance of the men of Nineveh! They repented without any command to repent, without any promise of relief if they did repent, with no invitation to repent, without evil, a small desire on the part of the preacher that they would repent (but, on the contrary, a fervent hope that they would not), and without any appreciation on Jonah’s part when they did repent! A preacher will know how to elaborate this!

Christ’s being greater than Jonah is seen in the contrast between the messengers—one secular, the other spiritual; between the messages—one true, the other untrue; and between the miracles that certified each—one disgorged by a sea-monster, the other raised from the dead.

#### **Verse 42**

The superior faith of the Queen of the South is seen in that she came upon a paucity of evidence, responding to rumor, or hearsay.

Christ as greater than Solomon was expounded by James H. Childress as follows:

- (1) Christ was greater in His birth,
- (2) His wisdom,
- (3) His temple,
- (4) His throne,
- (5) His prayers,
- (6) in His mansions, and
- (7) in the sacrifice Christ offered. Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple “twenty-two thousand oxen, and a hundred twenty thousand sheep.” (2 Chronicles 7:5) Christ offered His own blood within the holiest place of all for the sins of all men. (Hebrews 9:14)

### **Verse 43**

This parable of a wandering demon applies to the Jewish nation, which is “the man.” The “going out” represents the spiritual birth of Israel under the preaching of John the Baptist. The “swept and garnished” period (in next verse) refers to the lack of any meaningful change in the character of the people, and the relatively innocuous neglect of Christ during the early part of His ministry. The restlessness of the demons showed the anxious and unrelenting hostility of the forces of evil and their determination against Christ.

“Waterless places were supposed to be attractive to demons, who were thought to take advantage of people who borrowed water, and were said to take up residence in crumbs, or fragments of food. Christ flaunted all those popular notions by borrowing water from the woman at the well of Samaria, (John 4) by commanding the disciples to gather up the fragments after the feeding of the five thousand, and the four thousand, and by Himself frequenting desert places.

Although the primary application of the “swept and garnished” condition must be to Israel’s lack of fruits of repentance, it is also proper for the Christian teacher to base a warning to all Christians upon these words. No house can remain long empty, unused, swept, garnished, or idle. Such is a true description of the spiritual condition of many. They are “good, but good for nothing.” Their righteousness consists of emptiness, superficial decoration, and negative goodness. However, that life that is not constantly improved and dedicated, and pressed, and worn out in service to God, will finally revert to a condition worse than at the first. The evil spirit cast out of a man is ever lurking and seeking an

opportunity to return with seven companions worse than himself, and to take over and plunge the soul in greater wickedness than ever. That is exactly what happened to Israel.

#### **Verse 44**

The failure of Israel to carry forward the good impulses initiated by the preaching of John and the early popularity of Christ and His teachings became the occasion for a far more terrible thing than mere neglect and casual indifference. In the diabolical intentions of the wicked leaders, coupled with the relative “emptiness” of the people regarding any genuine righteousness, Christ clearly saw that the Pharisees would be able to deceive and command them all in a catastrophic rejection of Himself as the Christ. That is why the warning came at that moment, when the evil heart and purpose of the Pharisees had become so evident to Christ.

#### **Verse 45**

These words were doubtless spoken in sorrow. They were a firm, dogmatic, prophecy of Israel’s rejection of Christ, reminding one of 2 Peter 2:20. What a state is worse than being unsaved? It is the apostasy from which it is impossible to be renewed. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

#### **Verse 46**

If the mother of Jesus in this passage was His literal mother, then there is no reason to suppose that His brothers were not His literal brothers.

#### **Verse 47**

Whoever delivered that message apparently expected Jesus to drop everything and honor the intrusion. He did no such thing. He plainly declared that the ties of flesh and blood would not take precedence over the spiritual ties of the kingdom itself.

#### **Verses 48-49**

Probably due to His foresight of the gross idolatry that would flourish around the name of His mother, Christ was careful to guard against it. Mary was never set forth as a female deity by Christ. If she had been, in any sense, the “Mother of God,” Christ’s treatment of her on this occasion was improper. Although there is no hint that they were aware of it, Mary and His brothers were



interfering with His work; and Christ refused to see them, at least until the business at hand was completed.

### **Verse 50**

Relationship to Christ does not depend on fleshly kinship but on obedience to God's will. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13)

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **THE SEVEN PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

#### **(ALSO, REASONS AND PARABLES)**

##### **Verses 1-2**

"The house" in this case was that of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum. For the Sermon on the Mount, Christ went to the hills; but on this occasion, He went to the seashore. The use of the boat, anchored in a quiet place offshore, and with the placid water providing a perfect sounding board for His words, made it possible for Jesus to be distinctly heard by a vast throng of people.

##### **Verse 3**

Christ here began a new type of teaching, using parables, partly for concealment, partly for illustration.

A parable is a story which is made the vehicle of a spiritual message. It differs from a fable in that the parable could have happened, and probably did.

In a fable, there are many impossibilities, such as an animal talking, etc. The parable also differs from the myth in that the latter bears no relation whatever to reality.

#### **I. PARABLE OF THE SOWER.**

##### **Verses 3-9**

This parable of the sower is a vivid picture of a farmer, sowing wheat from a bag strapped over his shoulder, scattering seed by thrusting his hand into the bag and hurling the seeds in an arc, somewhat in front of him as he walked through the field. A hard trampled path crossed the field, and some of the seeds

fell upon it, where they were quickly gathered by the birds. Part of the field had very thin soil; and the seed that fell there sprouted quickly and withered quickly.

A portion of the field was infested with thorns; and the seed in that area, after a long struggle with the hardier thorns, failed to produce a harvest. The good ground was the productive part of the field which reward the sower's efforts.

The genius and divinity of our Lord lie in the fact that He saw so much more in such an incident than any man ever saw before.

“He who has ears, let him hear . . .” This was Christ's invitation to study the innocent story for its hidden meaning. Even yet, the true and full implications of this rich narrative come only to those with perceptive minds and hearts, attuned to the detection of spiritual truth.

#### **Verse 10**

Of the seven parables in this chapter, the first four were addressed to the multitudes, and the last three were spoken to the disciples. The apostles were quick to notice the dramatic change in the Savior's teaching methods and promptly asked the reason for it.

#### **Verse 11**

Christ turned to teaching in parables after opposition developed against His divine mission; and this verse shows that Christ designed the parables, at least in part, to conceal His teachings from those who were not sincerely seeking to know and do His will.

The harmless and innocent stories which he Great Teacher told gave nothing at all for the Pharisee's spies to report. Mysteries of the kingdom mentioned here refer generally to Christ's redemptive message which appeared mysteriously enough to those secular and materialistic persons who had no proper conception of the Messiah's purpose. “Mystery,” as used in the New testament referred to things concerning the kingdom of God, hidden from all previous generations; but then, in Christ, revealed to the apostles, and later to all mankind. (Romans 16:25-27; 1; Corinthians 2:7-8)

#### **Verse 12**

This means that those who had perceptive and willing hearts and truly desired to know God's will could, by proper application, know more of the

kingdom of heaven and thus are richly rewarded; but that those who did not have such character would consider the parables as mere riddles and so love their chance to know the Lord.

### **Verse 13**

How wonderfully were the parables designed to accomplish Christ's purpose! They were marvelous devices for the separation of His hearers and polarizing them with reverence to the approaching kingdom. Spiritually minded disciples would read the deeper meaning and know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

### **Verses 14-15**

Christ was acting in full accordance with the ancient prophecies which foretold His coming into the world. (Isaiah 6:9-10; Acts 28:26-27)

The words "repent and be healed" near the end of the prophecy in Isaiah 6:10 can also be translated, "be converted."

### **Verse 16**

The blindness and sin of many shall not militate against joy and blessing of those who heeded our Lord.

Israel, as a nation, indeed rejected the Christ; but some of her more noble sons, including the apostles, shall receive full measure of the heavenly gift. The principle holds for all who truly love and seek Christ.

### **Verse 17**

In this verse, Christ referred to the hidden nature of God's eternal purpose for man's salvation. The ancient prophets and even the angels of God desired to "look into" those things which they could not fully understand. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

How blessed indeed were the disciples of the Lord who were privileged in Him to see the embodiment of the total mystery of redemption. Neither men nor angels knew it till Christ revealed it to the Twelve.

### **Explanation of the Parable of the Sower, Verses 18-23**

#### **Verse 18**

"Hear then the parable of the sower." Christ named this parable. It is not, therefore, the parable of the soils, or of the birds gobbling up the seed, or of the rocky ground, or the thorny ground, but the Parable of the Sower.

The sower in this analogy stands for God, the Great Architect of redemption.

The central place belongs to Him. Men may or may not receive His word; but the seeds still fall, and the harvest is still produced, regardless of human failure, indifference, or opposition.

### **Verse 19**

It is plain that the various classes of soil represent the various conditions of human hearts. The birds stand for the evil one. The seed is the “word of the kingdom.” The hardness of the trampled path suggests unreceptive and evil men.

### **Verses 20-21**

The shallow soil, overlaying rock, produced quick but with impermanent results. This stands for the easy convert, easily lost. The sun’s scorching heat in the analogy stands for tribulations and persecutions because of the word. The shallowness of the ground represents impressionable, easily influenced persons, who have little stability.

### **Verse 22**

The thorns that choke out the words and cause unfruitfulness in hearers of the word of God are the cares, riches, and pleasures of life. (Luke adds “cares,” 8:14)

This represents a class of hearers which may be described as capable of salvation, possessing many excellent qualities, but who subordinate the most important things to secondary considerations and are thus robbed of eternal life. Cares, riches, and pleasures are not, in and of themselves, evil; but a well may be as effectively choked and stopped with the load of flowers as by a load of rotten carcasses.

### **Verse 23**

The good ground stands for the fruit-bearing hearer of God’s word; but why the varying degrees of yield? Christ’s repetition of this in the explanation shows that it has spiritual significance.

Such things as preparation of the soil, cultivation, protection from enemies, the enter into the yield of a given crop. By analogy, Christians who have been properly cultivated by home training and education, who are protected from spiritual enemies by wise choice of friends and companions, who begin to serve the Lord early in life, and who are blessed with favorable opportunities for

teaching and influence of others, may well reap a more bountiful harvest than others who had not such advantages.

Since this is the first parable explained in the New Testament, it is appropriate to note that in this single parable Christ pointed out the following comparisons:

- (1) The seed is the word of God.
- (2) The wayside soil is the hardened hearer.
- (3) The shallow soil is the unstable hearer.
- (4) The thorny ground is the hearer who permits other things to choke out the word.
- (5) The good ground is the faithful hearer who bears fruit.
- (6) The birds of the air are the evil one.
- (7) The sun's heat is tribulation and persecution.
- (8) The thorns are the cares, riches, and pleasures of life.
- (9) The various multiples of yield are the variable fruitfulness of hearers.
- (10) The sudden sprouting of seed on shallow soil stands for the ease with which unstable souls are converted.
- (11) The sower sows for God.

## **II. THE PARABLE OF THE TARES**

### **Verses 24-30**

Christ fully explained this parable, and for the notes on the explanation, see under verse 36.

## **III. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED**

### **Verses 31-32**

This and the parable of the leaven which immediately followed it constitute a pair with these similarities:

- (1) both stress the small beginning of the kingdom;
- (2) its gradual increase, and
- (3) the extensiveness later attained.

The church itself is the "body of Christ;" and, therefore, it is no violence to refer this parable primarily to the church or kingdom of God. Christ said the

“kingdom of heaven” is like, etc. The wonder of how the kingdom began in an obscure province by the birth of a child to humble and obscure parents in a stable, and how the kingdom grew to encompass people of every kindred and nation is aptly illustrated by this parable.

In the parable of the sower, Christ used the birds to represent the devil, and upon that it would seem wise to seek a meaning here. Coupled with John’s prophecy of the apostate church, that it should become “a hold of every unclean and hateful bird.” (Revelation 18:2) This parable makes it very unlikely that the ultimate corruption of the kingdom of heaven is intended; that is, as manifested in the so-called Christendom of modern and medieval times. A glance in any direction during the current century will afford many glimpses of foul birds that have built their nests in the kingdom! Yet, just as the birds could not corrupt the mustard tree, neither can evil men succeed in thwarting God’s purpose, however closely they may be allied with the visible church and its activities.

That this and the parable of the leaven were parables outlining the success of God’s kingdom and were thus designed to alleviate the distress of the disciples and to encourage them, such distress arising from the fact that in the parable of the sower, three-fourths of the soils were unproductive, and that in the parable of the tares an enemy succeeded in corrupting the whole field with tares! It is as though Christ had said by means of these two short parables, “Nevertheless, My kingdom shall not fail but shall attain marvelous success!”

Note the following analogies in this parable:

- (1) The small seed shows the small beginning of the kingdom.
- (2) The large plan shows its ultimate glory and success.
- (3) The birds of the heaven in its branches suggest an identification of evil and extraneous operations closely connected with the kingdom, yet not a part of it.
- (4) The field is the world.
- (5) The one who sowed the seed is Christ, our Lord.
- (6) The seed is the word of God.
- (7) The mustard tree stands for the visible church in all ages.

#### **IV. THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN IN THREE PECKS OF MEAL**

##### **Verse 33**

In the parable of the mustard seed, one may impart some meaning of demerit to the birds, because they form no essential part of a mustard tree; but in this parable the leaven becomes a part of the whole three measures of meal; and, therefore to construe the leaven as evil would be to make this a prophecy of the complete, final, and total corruption of the church itself, which cannot be. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)

One difference in these two short parables is that, whereas a man sowed the mustard seed in his field, it was a woman who took and hid the leaven in three pecks of meal. This may indicate that the church is meant, since the church is represented often as a woman, and as the bride of Christ. This view would make the leaven to be the word of God which the church preaches, or the influence emanating from it.

Note: The following analogies would appear to be valid.

- (1) The leaven represents the kingdom of heaven in its influence.
- (2) The leaven imparts its character to the whole loaf, the church changes the character of people influenced by it.
- (3) The leaven rises silently, suggesting the manner of the church's growth.
- (4) A little leaven is capable, given time, of leavening a vast amount.
- (5) The influence of the church will become very wide and extensive.

The fact that a woman took the leaven may not be a vital part of the illustration; but, if so, probably represents the church.

##### **Verses 34-35**

This concluded the first four parables which were addressed to the multitudes. This restriction of Jesus' teachings to parables only was confined to certain occasions, especially this one.

The things “hidden from the foundation of the world” were mysteries mentioned earlier in this chapter.

### **Verse 36**

The desire of the disciples for an explanation of that parable is understandable. It must have appeared dark indeed before the Lord illuminated it.

### **Explanation of the Parable of the Tares of the Field:**

### **Verse 37**

The identity of the one who sowed the good seed is plain. It is Christ. Christ said the field is “the world.” And from this it is alleged that the parable has no reference to prohibitions against the disciple’s exercise of discipline against members of the church. Note, however, that authority for church discipline does not require support from this parable, since it stands on more the sufficient authority mentioned otherwise throughout the New Testament. Besides gathering tares into bundles to burn them is far too strong a figure for church discipline and has even less application to opposed activities of disciples without and beyond the confines of the church, namely, “in the world.” Therefore to make “the world” in Christ’s explanation to mean the unregenerated portion of humanity would mean that Christ here forbade His disciples to exterminate the unregenerated, a temptation which it is very unlikely any disciples ever had.

It is possible that the “world-wide church” is intended or meant by this, a view supported by the fact that Christ said, “The kingdom of heaven is like” this, and also from the statement in verse 41 that the angels shall gather “out of His kingdom,” indicating that purging tares out of the kingdom is actually the thing under consideration.

We have seen that the mild and loving discipline to be exercised by the church of our Lord is amply provided for in other New Testament writings, apart from this parable; and, it seems what is forbidden here is exactly the thing that was done in the brutal, savage excommunication so characteristic of the church of the Middle Ages, which mounted the Spanish Inquisition and many other diabolical institutions upon the pretense of purifying the church.

It is in this frame of reference that the view is held which makes “the field” the church in the whole world. It appears that Christ did not give this parable to warn His disciples against casting “out of the world,” but “out of the church,” since it is only in the church that any such power, opportunity, or temptation exists for disciples to do any casting out.



Thus, it may be said that this parable puts a terminator on church discipline in that there is a point beyond which it cannot go. Plucking up, binding into bundles—this is not allowed to Christians, however urgent the considerations of discipline.

### **Verse 38**

The fact that the tares did not appear until fruit was “brought forth” (verse 26) shows that they were indistinguishable from the wheat till that time, a fact strongly indicating that they were “in the church,” else they could not have been confused with the wheat.

### **Verse 39**

The enemy who operated while men slept is the devil. The tares are the people, sons of the devil, masquerading as Christians. The harvest is the end of the world, when the Lord will send His angels and gather “out of His kingdom” all things that cause stumbling. (Verse 41) The final separation of the good from the bad is not a prerogative of men but of God and His angels.

### **Verse 40**

The fire into which the tares will be cast is hell, the lake of fire. (Revelation 19:20; 21:8 Mark 9:44) The ultimate fate of the wicked is a doom so intolerable and overwhelming that Christ came down from heaven and endured the pangs of suffering and death to deliver men from such a fate. Only a fool could set aside such warnings, delivered at such cost, and authenticated in every conceivable manner. “Fear the One who after He was killed has authority to cast into hell.” (Luke 12:5)

“The end of the age . . . “ mentioned here, is noted in more detail under Matthew 28:18-20.

### **Verse 41**

Here again, in Jesus’ explanation are the words “out of His kingdom,” indicating the area under consideration to be primarily the church, but on a world-wide scale. The burden of teaching in the parable seems to be that God and His angels, rather than men and their devices, are to separate the wicked from the just.

As to how persons get into the kingdom, an enemy (the devil) planted them there. Significantly, this was done only while men slept (verse 25), and shows

the limitation upon Satan's activity in this endeavor. Most of the sorrows and shortcomings in the church occur when men are asleep, failing to keep watch as the Master commanded.

**Verse 42**

This shows the terror and frustration of the doomed. The furnace of fire refers to hell.

**Verse 43**

This entire parable sets forth the divinity and glory of Christ. He is the Son of man who sends His angels to sever the wicked from the righteous. It is His angels who cast the wicked into torment.

The following analogies are explicitly set forth in this parable:

- (1) Gathering into His barn represents salvation of the righteous.
- (2) He that sowed the good seed is Christ.
- (3) He that sowed the evil seed is the devil.
- (4) The good seed are Christians.
- (5) The bad seed are children of the devil.
- (6) The field is the world.
- (7) The harvest is the end of the world.
- (8) The burning of the tares represents hell.
- (9) The reapers are the angels in the end of the world.
- (10) "While men slept" suggests that Satan must abide his opportunity and may not fully countermand the truth except with God's permission and man's lack of attention.

Gathering "out of His kingdom" suggests purging of the church at the last day, in judgment.

**V. PARABLE OF THE TREASURE HIDDEN IN THE FIELD:**

**Verse 44**

These parables (this one and the two immediately following) were spoken in the house, not to the multitudes by the seashore. In this case of the treasure, it was found when the finder was not looking for it; but in the case of the pearl, its discovery followed a long and diligent search for it. There are other notable differences.

In the treasure is a likeness of the kingdom; but in the other, it is the merchantman searching for the pearl. The treasure hidden in the field teaches the supreme regard men should have for the kingdom of heaven; and that, whatever incident or opportunity leads to the knowledge of it, the finder should exercise every human effort to obtain it, even to selling all that he has, if necessary, to come into possession of it.

The great consideration is that the kingdom of heaven is indeed a treasure, a treasure surpassing all others in riches and desirability.

Analogies:

- (1) The kingdom of heaven is a treasure.
- (2) It is hidden to some, indeed too many.
- (3) Some find it accidentally, or unintentionally, while doing something else.
- (4) Once found, a man should obtain it, regardless of cost.

## **VI. THE PARABLE OF THE MERCHANTMAN SEEKING GOODLY PEARLS:**

### **Verses 45-46**

Although it is not stated here that the kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of great price, a number of analogies suggest themselves. The pearl is a symbol of difficulties overcome, since it is caused by an annoyance to an oyster. It is a life-created thing of great value and beauty. Significantly, the gates of the Eternal City are said to be “each one a pearl.” (Revelation 21:21) Thus, through obstacles overcome, one may enter the home of the soul.

The prime comparison, however, regards the merchantman engaged in the search. This was Jesus’ emphasis: “Seek first the kingdom of God!” Seeking is a vital and very necessary part of knowing and sharing the mysteries of God’s kingdom—but so is decision!

Some search all their lives for the truth and at last find it. Others, as in the hidden treasure, are not looking for it at all, as for example, when some sinner marries a Christian wife or husband, but then, in the light of opportunity, rises to claim the prize!

Analogies suggested:

Seeking is an essential part of finding the kingdom. Once found, it should be obtained, regardless of cost. A pearl of great price suggests the kingdom because:

- (1) It is not of the earth, like gold, but of life.
- (2) It is created by the overcoming of a difficulty.
- (3) It will form a gate to the Eternal city.

The merchantman set a good example because:

- (1) He was not content with admiring, or wishing.
- (2) He did not shrink from the cost.
- (3) He sold all he had and bought it. He did so at once, then and there, with no delay.

### **PARABLE OF THE NET THAT WAS CAST INTO THE SEA:**

#### **Verses 47-49**

This is another of the parables Jesus explained, and again, not one analogy but many are noted:

- (1) The sea is the world.
- (2) The net is the church.
- (3) The enclosed fishes of "every kind " are members of the church.
- (4) The good fishes are the truly spiritual children of their Father.
- (5) The bad fishes are like the tares, sons of the evil one.
- (6) The fact that both kinds are in the net shows their proximity of the good and bad in the kingdom, who are all accounted by men to be "in," but some of whom are wicked.
- (7) The beach represents the end of time.
- (8) The net's being "filled" shows that God will attain His full purpose in the redemption of men.
- (9) The sorting of the fishes represents the judgment of the last day.
- (10) The sorters are the angels.
- (11) The casting of the bad away is the casting of the wicked into hell.
- (12) The gathering into vessels represents the salvation of the godly.

(13) The vessels represent heaven.

The fishermen, who may be understood to be the Lord's disciples of all ages, draw the net upon the beach; and yet it is not they but the angels who are said to sever the wicked from the just.

One overwhelmingly important deduction to be obtained from this remarkable parable is in the fact that no fishes were taken into the vessels that had not first been captured in the net.

In the large analogy of the sea as the world, the net as the church, and the vessels as heaven, it is thus quite plain that Christ intended to teach that membership in the church is prerequisite to entry into the eternal kingdom in heaven. God's church, or kingdom, is the appointed way of gathering from the great seas of human population the number of the redeemed. Furthermore not all so-called Christians will be saved. A great many are in the net, the church, who must be accounted as "bad," and who shall suffer eternal banishment from the face of the Father.

First glance may leave the impression that this parable covers the same ground as that of the tares, but there are marked differences. The emphasis on that one is upon the present intermixture in the church, and in this one upon the certainty of the final separation of the righteous and the wicked. The emphasis in the former is upon "who" will make the separation, and in this one upon the "certainty" of that separation. In both cases, it is clear that angels, not men, shall effect the separation.

#### **Verses 51-52**

J. R. Dummelow (One Volume commentary p. 675) identified the old and the new as: "The old truths which God had long made known to the Jews, as well as the new truth declared by Christ."

There is another meaning in this place, and it is contained in the unceasing wonder that the same things can be both old and new simultaneously! What is newer, or older, than the great thoughts of the Eternal God which men of each passing generation are privileged to think after Him by means of the Scriptures?

Note: This suggests that teachers and preachers should adapt messages to their hearers. It is certainly not amiss to see this "new and old" aspect of every sermon or lesson.

### **Verse 53**

There is a strong temptation to find in these seven parables some mystical or secret meaning. The efforts of men to do this, however, are far from convincing. Unity and harmony do indeed appear in the group taken as a whole.

The Sower stresses the obstacles to be overcome by the word, which succeeds anyway. The Tares presents the enemy opposing God's purpose, even within the church itself, and warns the church against taking matters into its own hands. The Mustard Seed and Leaven show the growth of the kingdom from small beginnings to great power and influence, both outwardly and visibly, as shown by the tree, and also inwardly and secretly, as shown by the leaven. The Mustard Seed and Leaven concern the general impact of the kingdom upon the whole world, whereas the next two, The Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price, show the impact of the kingdom upon the individual and the supreme worth of God and His kingdom to the individual person. The Draw Net presents the final end of God's purpose when the precious shall be separated from the vile, and each class shall inherit the destiny it deserves.

## **DIVISION IV**

### **THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE TO CHRIST**

#### **SOME REJECTING AND SOME RECEIVING HIM**

**(Matthew 13:54-16:20)**

### **Verse 54**

Jesus' rejection by His own community is also an eloquent testimony to the greatness of His deeds. Why did they reject Him? Among other reasons, because of the very greatness of His wonderful deeds, His wisdom and mighty works, which they held to be inconsistent with the humble environment in which they had seen Him grow up. Their very rejection of Christ is a witness to His power and glory. He was such a wonderful person that they simply could not reconcile Him with the obscurity and humility of His childhood and youth.

### **Verses 55-56**

This was the first council of unbelief ever held against Jesus the Son of God. It occurred not in some ivory tower of learning, nor in some gathering of wise

and learned men. It occurred in the wretched and miserable village of Nazareth; and the protagonists of this dark drama of rejection were not intellectuals, nor educated and cultured men, but were prejudiced gossips, vulgar, and ignorant buffoons, but still entitled to one marvelous distinction: *THEY WERE THE SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS OF ALL THE UNBELIEVERS WHO EVER LIVED!*

Satan has long sponsored the lie that unbelief is sophistication, intellectuality, erudition and “smartness!” But in this original pilot-project for the rejection of the Christ, the truth is evident. Unbelief is not a courageous rejection of ancient dogma; it is not a brilliant conclusion of philosophical intelligence.

Nazareth rejected no doctrine, manifested no intelligence, and could lay claim to no particular power, culture, or worth of any kind that could have endowed their rejection with any semblance of justification or honesty.

The blighting unbelief of Nazareth which blinded their eyes against the only Person who saved that town from oblivion—their unbelief was not intellectual superiority, nor moral courage, not logic, nor philosophy, nor moral courage, nor honest doubt. What was it?

- (1) It was unworthiness. That town had justly earned an unsavory reputation. As Christ said, “Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19)
- (2) It was egotism. Look at the self-glory of the words, “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” What ridiculous snobbery of an inflated ego is implicit in such words as those!
- (3) It was mental laziness. They could easily have ascertained the truth by a little investigation; but no, it was far easier to deny the news filtering down to that wretched little village than to check up on it and find it true. The lazy mind takes the lazy way out.
- (4) It was illogical. Strange that Nazareth should have rejected the Holy One who was welcomed with “Hosannas” in Jerusalem.
- (5) It was moral cowardice. The gossips of Nazareth did not have the moral courage to kneel at the feet of Jesus.

- (6) It was the opiate of the people. Unbelief sealed Nazareth off from what was happening in the world. It was an escape mechanism by which they avoided doing anything.
- (7) It is self-pity. They were offended in Him. Christ had not consulted them; His success had bruised their local pride.

The problem of the identity of the four brothers and three sisters of Jesus mentioned in this place, did not exist in ancient times. They were all the children of Mary and Joseph, born after Jesus was born. This rejection at Nazareth occurred on the second visit of Jesus, the first being described in Luke 4:16ff. The second rejection, recorded also by Mark (6:1-6), was final and determinative. Mark's words, "He marveled at their unbelief," show the shock and amazement which attended the conduct of the people of Nazareth.

#### **Verses 57-58**

The human side of Christ's dual nature was foretold by Isaiah who noted that the Messiah would be "despised and rejected of men." (Isaiah 53:3) Nazareth provided the first in a series of rejections; but it should be remembered that this was precisely what was prophesied, the very unbelief of the people becoming, therefore, a further testimony of His divinity.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **MARTYRDOM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST**

### **WITHDRAWAL OF CHRIST TO BETHSAIDA**

### **FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND**

### **WALKING ON THE SEA**

### **HEALING THE MULTITUDES**

#### **Verses 1-2**

This Herod was a son of Herod the Great by the second Mariamne, daughter of Simon. He had inherited the tetrarchy of Galilee of Peraea. On a visit to Rome, he was enamored by Herodias, his niece, who was the wife of his half-brother, Herod Philip II, who at that time were private citizens in Rome. Herod seduced her, divorced his own wife, married her, and made her his queen. Herod's comment concerning John, recoded in these two verses, was made in the aftermath of John's murder, which is detailed in this chapter. His remarks



pointed up his guilt and also the conviction he held that John was indeed a righteous man.

### **Verse 3**

The Jews fiercely resented Herod's incestuous marriage with Herodias for three reasons. First, he was already married, second, she was his niece; and third, she was his brother's wife. The Jewish law expressly forbade a man's marrying his brother's wife, even after the brother's death, much less while he was still alive; the one exception being that when a man died without an heir, his brother was commanded to marry the deceased's widow and produce an heir to his estate. (Leviticus 18:16; Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

Herod's imprisonment of John was due to the hatred of Herodias and shows what an evil influence can sometimes be exerted by an unprincipled woman in a high place. Had it not been for the designs of the cruel, heartless, and immoral Herodias, John the Baptist might well have lived to see the Christ after His resurrection.

### **Verse 4**

John did not belong to that school of preachers always careful not to "stick out their necks." He, like Priscilla and Aquila, who "laid down their own necks" (Romans 16:4), for the apostle Paul, was fearless in declaring God's law.

### **Verse 5**

This exposes Herod as equally guilty with Herodias for the murder of John. The purpose was already in his heart; and, had it not been for fear of the people, he would already have martyred John.

John's holy reputation was justly earned, and he surely deserved a better fate than to fall under the evil eye of a beast like Herod.

### **Verse 6**

Earthly rulers mark their birthdays; Christ required of His disciples that they celebrate His death. Herodias' daughter Salome, "did leap in the middle," as an ancient translation has it, meaning that the dance was probably a belly dance.

### **Verse 7**

Extravagant promises of the type here were characteristic of kings and rulers of that period, the promise sometimes being limited by the words, "unto half of my kingdom."

### **Verse 8**

This giddy, irresponsible request came at the instigation of Herodias who was still smarting under John's fearless rebuke of her incestuous marriage with Herod. She took her revenge in the macabre scene that closed Herod's birthday party.

### **Verses 9-12**

This scene of his bloody accent on Herod's birthday party was the old prison of Machaerus, some five miles east of the Dead Sea. One can reflect only with sorrow upon the feelings of the godly John when informed of his fate.

Herod heard only the music and dancing; John heard only the grating of the prison door as the headsman came to lead him to the block. Yet, through the power of faith, any man in his right mind would prefer the fate of John the Baptist to that of Herod.

Herod, while fully capable of murder, and intending it at one time, nevertheless seemed at the moment to have been in the mood to spare John; but he had opened his mouth with a foolish promise, and fear of what his guests might think forced him to go through with it. Countless times, Satan has maneuvered some cowardly soul into a situation where some terrible deed is committed for fear of turning back. Satan surely is a master at setting a stage like that booby trap into which Herod fell.

John lost his head; Herod lost his throne as a result of that shameful deed. Aretas, father of Herod's first wife, invaded Herod's tetrarchy; Herod fled to Rome, where Caligula banished both him and Herodias to Lyons in Gaul on a charge of misgovernment. Things of the kind related in this passage probably account for the Jewish detestation of birthday parties which were long held by the orthodox to be a part of idolatrous worship.

### **Verse 13**

The desert mentioned here is not a waterless place, but an uninhabited place. Wide level grassy places may still be seen there, so far from the city as to have made it impractical for the people to go and buy bread.

The people, seeing that Christ had gone across the lake to Bethsaida with the Twelve, merely walked round the northern end of the lake and met Him there.

#### **Verse 14**

Christ had already withdrawn up into the mountains near Bethsaida, but when He saw the vast throng of people, He came down and met them on the grassy plain. Jesus' healing of all their sick richly rewarded all those who thus exerted themselves to follow Him.

#### **Verse 15**

The disciples in this instance came up with the usual solution for difficult problems and the one usually resorted to by the Christians of all ages when some difficult situation presented itself namely, "Send the multitudes away!" How frequently the church has sought to solve problems by sending them away, instead of meeting the need.

#### **Verse 16**

Christ knew what He was about to do, but this commandment tested the faith of the Twelve. Their first objection was to the effect that they did not possess sufficient resources for such a task; but Christ asked them to produce what they did have!

Andrew had found a lad with five loaves and two little fishes, and these were brought to the Lord. Not a very large store was this, for serving five thousand men besides the women and children.

#### **Verses 17-18**

The little that men have is enough, if it is dedicated to the Lord. This profoundly impressive miracle of creation is recorded in all four gospels. Psalm 78:19 recorded the question, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" And in this instance, God in Christ did that very thing.

#### **Verse 19**

Christ tested the faith of the multitude by the command to sit down on the grass. The store out of which food was to be supplied for so vast a company was evident to all; and it is a mark of their confidence in the Lord that they sat down.

Christ was the chef on that occasion, not the waiter. He gave to the disciples; they gave to the multitudes. This is eternally true of all who would truly serve Christ; they must receive from Him all that is imparted to others.

Christ's giving thanks is a reminder, through example, that men should express thanks for food.

### **Verse 20**

How Jesus did this wonderful thing is not revealed. Christ in this wonder manifested His creative power as He did at the miracle of Cana in Galilee, where He changed the water into wine. It was another link in the evidence that made Jesus “that Prophet” like unto Moses who fed the people with bread from heaven.

Saving the fragments and gathering them into baskets suggests a number of things. The super-abundance of Jesus’ power is noted in the fact that they had twelve times as much left over as they had at the start. Also, since there was a popular superstition to the effect that demons lurked in crumbs, Christ flaunted it by saving the crumbs.

Another thing concerns the ownership of the twelve baskets of fragments. It seems fair that the lad who had provided the original was the only legitimate owner of all that was left, baskets and all.

This is a parable to the effect that no man ever gave anything to Christ but that he got it back, compounded and multiplied.

### **Verse 21**

What an astounding deed of creative might was that which fed so great a multitude from a little lad’s basket! Also, let it be observed that the status of woman has been dramatically altered by Christ and the impact of His teaching upon men’s hearts. No one in our age would think of numbering an audience without taking any account of the number of women and children present.

### **Verse 22**

Why did Jesus need to “constrain” the disciples? The key to this is in John’s account where it is related that the multitude was about to take Jesus and make Him king by force, a thing the disciples no doubt desired and would have abetted in every possible way if Jesus had not ordered them to the other side of the lake.

### **Verse 23**

This enthusiastic desire of a vast concourse of people to make Jesus king by force must have been a genuine temptation to Christ. Satan was renewing the temptation to take a short-cut to popular acclaim.

This is evident from the manner in which Jesus responded, namely, by going to the mountain, alone, to pray. Christ met every crisis in His life in exactly that way.

#### **Verse 24**

It will appear a little later that Satan was the instigator of that storm. Failing to induce Christ to accept the mantle of material kingship, the devil was of a mind to drown all His apostles in the sea!

Note: There appears to be a progressive design in our Lord's schooling of the Twelve. In Chapter 8, it was recorded that He was asleep in the stern of the ship during a storm; but in this instance the disciples were alone. In that case, they had Him on board and could arouse Him in an emergency; but in this, Jesus was out of sight, and they were learning the hard way what it means to walk by faith and not by sight.

#### **Verses 25-26**

This was an astounding occurrence, and the fear of the Twelve is understandable. If they recognized the form of Christ, they may have thought He had been killed; but for whatever reason, they were thoroughly afraid and troubled.

#### **Verse 27**

Christ's coming to those storm-tossed disciples symbolizes the way He has often come to His troubled disciples in all ages, walking to them over life's troubled waters; and, as always, He may pass them by, unless they cry out and call upon Him as did the apostles here.

"Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid . . ." How grandly have those blessed words echoed down the centuries in men's hearts. Christ's holy religion is one that casts out fear. Fear not! That is the first and last commandment of faith.

#### **Verse 28**

The true meaning is, "Since it is You, etc." Peter, impetuous as always, dared the impossible, and with what memorable results. He actually did, for a while, at least!

### **Verses 29-30**

Peter succeeded at first, but then he failed. He did actually walk on the sea; but when he took his eyes off the Savior and began to consider the difficulties, he began to sink.

What a lesson shines in this. As long as men have respect unto the Lord and behold Him in all their ways, they go forward; on the other hand, when men become analysts of the difficulties, they fail.

Was there something of the show-off in Peter's conduct here? Perhaps. It will be recalled that, later, he professed to have more faith than the others; and there may be some suggestion of the same attitude in his conduct on the occasion mentioned here. In any case, the Lord did not permit him utterly to fail, but only enough to strengthen his faith in the Lord.

### **Verses 31-33**

Peter's failure was due to lack of faith; and the rebuke was therefore deserved. He apparently profited by it. The acknowledgement of the disciples that Jesus was in fact the Son of God showed that Christ's schooling of them was achieving His purpose. The great calm was proof of Jesus' power. The grand design of Christ's purpose is plain.

Rejected at Nazareth, improperly acclaimed by the rabble at Bethsaida-Julius, Christ is recognized by the disciples as the Son of God. That was the big thing that He came to teach, and the germ of this world-shaking truth was already firmly implanted in the minds of the apostles by the time this remarkable event was concluded. From that overwhelming experience, Peter no doubt drew the faith to confess Christ as recorded in Matthew 16:16.

### **Verses 34-35**

It has been noted that Christ was rejected at Nazareth; John's martyrdom caused Christ to leave Herod's territory; the multitude at Bethsaida had tried to make Him king; and in this passage is another instance of the Master's being widely acclaimed and accepted. Since the master plan called for Christ's rejection, even those instances of His acceptance were practically all marred by some vitiating circumstance. This is seen in the efforts of those at Bethsaida to make Him king by force, in the woman at Samaria's well having been a Samaritan of doubtful morality, and in the Gentile orientation of others.

None can say how many Christ healed. All of their sick must have been a truly great number. What a blessing He bestowed upon that land.

“As many as touched it, were cured . . .! This seven-word jewel is one of the most illuminating and encouraging remarks in the sacred text. A mere touch is not much contact, but it is enough! Those who were touched were not merely helped; they were made perfectly whole.

He needed no staff as did Moses; He needed no mantle, as Elijah; He required no instrument except Himself. His word alone cast out demons, stilled the tempest, changed the water into wine, and raised the dead.

**CHAPTER 15**  
**CEREMONIAL AND REAL DEFILEMENT**  
**THE CANAANITE WOMAN**  
**JESUS RETURNS TO GALILEE**  
**FEEDS THE FOUR THOUSAND**

**Verses 1-2**

Matthew 13:54—16:20, concerns the response of various persons and groups to Christ and His teaching. In these verses we see the first raindrop in a gathering storm of opposition from the heads of the Jewish nation.

This opposition by the powerful party of the scribes and Pharisees was launched against Jesus by the raising of what seems to be a very small and petty quibble about washing hands; but this opposition, so mildly stated here, was vicious and unrelenting and would never cease for an instant till these men would shout in a frenzy of hatred, “His blood be on us and our children!”

There is more to the quibble than meets the eye. The tradition of the elders was considered the most sacred and binding of Jewish obligations, even ranking higher in their eyes than the word of God itself.

It must not be thought that there is any reference here to eating with dirty hands; it is not that, but neglect of a ceremonial procedure, which was resented by them.

**Verse 3**

The genius of Christ is that He always referred issues to their highest level. Not their tradition, but the word of God, that was the truly important

obligation; and Christ ignored their tradition and challenged them for their own disregard of God's commandments.

#### **Verse 4**

This verse and verse 6 prove that Christ considered God to be the author of the Old Testament, and of the Ten Commandments in particular. Also, in John 10:34-35, Christ referred to the Old Testament as, "Your law," "the Scriptures," and "the word of God," all in a single statement.

Note too that Christ approved, as God-given, this law that prescribed capital punishment; and some of the ancients justified such a penalty for blasphemy on the basis that cursing the heavenly Father is a greater crime than cursing father or mother. Christ also focused attention upon the word of God rather than upon the traditions of the Pharisees, indicating that His primary concern was the former.

#### **Verses 5-6**

The Pharisees were making a secondary duty the excuse for denying a primary one, a device observed continually in all ages. By dedicating his properties to the temple, the selfish man, by reserving a life estate in his possessions, could legally deny any aid or support of needy parents, thus thwarting completely God's will relative to honoring father and mother. The Pharisees had a name for this device. They called it Corban! It had no origin or permission of God's true word but was one of their sinful traditions.

What is wrong with tradition? Only one thing; it vitiates God's word. Any harm in it? Well, take the case presented here, relative to washing hands ceremonially which was the basis of the Pharisees' assault on Christ. That ceremony was harmless in a sense, perhaps even helpful as cleanliness or hygiene; but had been forced into the worship of God, solely by human authority, and eventually blinded the eyes of men so completely that they could not even see the Son of Righteousness!

God accepts only those things as worship which He Himself has authorized and commanded.

Mark's account of this place has the words, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition." (Mark 7:8-9) The scribes and Pharisees rejected Christ in order to keep their tradition.



The following is the life-cycle of a tradition.

- (1) First appears the innovation, something new, clothed with specious plausibility, riding the crest of some exceptional circumstance or emergency.
- (2) It is repeated and moves into a place of acceptance as something allowed.
- (3) It becomes appreciated as an “aid” to the worship, something helpful.
- (4) Eventually, it is stressed and emphasized to the detriment of what it is supposed, to “aid.”
- (5) It achieves, through long usage a status of equality with God’s word.
- (6) It is finally performed, occasionally, but later, always, instead of God’s Commandments.
- (7) Finally, it blooms as a presumptuous, rebellious contradiction of God’s word and is constantly honored in place of it.

In the light of Christ’s word, “In vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” one is compelled to view innovations in Christian worship as extremely sinful and hurtful.

#### **Verses 7-9**

This prophecy from Isaiah 29:13 contains in its last four words the key to failure in religion, the precepts of men.

”From heaven or from man . . . “ That is the most important and relevant question that can be confronted with regard to any doctrine or practice connected with religion. There are literally hundreds of things widely observed in Christian worship throughout Christendom which should be challenged and ejected in the light of His teaching.

#### **Verses 10-11**

Strangely, men are still trying to get to heaven on some kind of diet! Some won’t eat pork; some eat only fish on certain days; and some are actually vegetarians!

Novation (On Jewish Meats in *ibid.*, Vol. V. p. 648) said: “God is not worshiped by the belly nor by meats . . . He who worships the Lord by meats, is merely as one who has his belly for his Lord.” Here is also a bold emphasis on the defilement that comes out of a man. These are identified as murders,

fornication, thefts, and all crimes conceived in the heart and effected through the use of speech.

In the second century Clement of Alexandria (*Exhortations to the Heathens*, *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 250) said: “From filthy speaking, we ourselves must entirely abstain, and stop the mouths of those who practice it by stern looks and averting the face . . . “For what proceeds out of the mouth,” he says, “defiles a man”—shows him to be unclean, and heathenish, and untrained, and licentious.”

### **Verses 12-13**

There is a suspicion that the disciples themselves may have had some sympathy for the Jewish teaching on meats. Long afterward, Peter was able to say, “I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.” (Acts 10:14)

Christ’s magnificent reply showed that the Pharisees were not merely wrong, but totally so, that they would be plucked up, and that they were blind leaders of the blind, destined for the ditch.

Jesus’ reply concerning the plant which the heavenly Father had not planted has an immense amount of application. It is true of all evil, of every rebellious thought, and of every institution that rises in time and by time is destroyed. In its context, the “rooting up” applies to:

- (1) evil men, the Pharisees in this case.
- (2) It applies to doctrines, teachings, and practices founded in human precepts, rather than in the word of God.

### **Verse 14**

“Let them alone . . .” That is the admonition of Christ with reference to the worldly wise, socially prominent, sophisticated, unscrupulous, hypocritical religious leaders. The apostles would have been able to do the Pharisees no good, and there was a grave possibility the Pharisees would do the apostles harm by damaging their faith.

The child of God today should heed the same admonition with reference to the same kind of persons. Spiritual darkness and sin are set forth in this place under the figure of blindness, a symbol often so used in the Bible. (2 Peter 1:9)

### **Verse 15**

The illustration of the blind leading the blind is here called by Peter a parable, but it would probably be as well named a proverb, short indeed, but full of meaning. The overwhelmingly significant fact about the blind leading the blind is that both the leader and the led are blind, the success of blind leaders in every generation depends entirely upon the degree of blindness in their followers. Only the blind will follow the blind, every soul must bear its own responsibility to know the truth.

### **Verses 16-20**

Behold in this is a ray of light on transubstantiation. It being true, as Jesus said, that nothing entering the mouth defiles the man, it is equally true that nothing entering his mouth can sanctify and bless him. Jesus said, that what enters the mouth proceeds to the belly and hence to the draught; therefore, it cannot be anything literal in the bread or the fruit of the vine of the Lord's Supper that can either defile or bless him.

Thus, it is clear that the bread and the fruit of the vine are emblems or symbols of the Lord's blood and body. It cannot be the physical and material substance of those sacred tokens which either blesses or procures condemnation; but on the other hand, it is the act of obedience, the answer of a good conscience toward God, the spiritual perception of the saving truth certified and memorialized by those tokens—it is these that bless the man. Origen (Commentary on Matthew in *ibid.*, Vol X, Book 11, Sec. 14) stated it thus: "If this verse were so, it would sanctify him who eats unworthily of the bread of the Lord."

A slight problem occurs in that Peter inquired about one thing, the blind leading the blind; and Jesus answered with emphasis on another thing, the things that defile a man. This was often done by Christ as for example in Luke 13:23. In that case, the disciples asked, "Are there few that be saved?" But the following dissertation never touched that question but focused on the need for every man to "strive to enter the narrow door." In this case, Christ replied by giving Peter the information he needed, rather than by replying in the same vein as the question.

Jesus made a long, circuitous route, passing up the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, thence eastward through Decapolis, and cross-country to the sources of the Jordan River. Ancient opponents of the faith were sometimes critical of Christ for avoiding an open confrontation with Herod at this time. Celsus in 170 A.D. charged the Lord with cowardice.

Two reasons for the Lord's conduct attest its honorable nature. These are:

- (1) It was not yet time for Him to die. Too much work remained undone. The disciples were not fully grounded.
- (2) He was teaching the disciples by this action the necessity for prudence in avoiding always, if possible, unnecessary conflict with the state.

#### **Verse 22**

Even the remotest parts of ancient Palestine knew of the wondrous power of Jesus as witnessed by the prayer of this woman of a strange and distant city.

#### **Verse 23**

The true understanding of this entire difficult incident depends upon understanding the antecedent attitude of the apostles. They, not Jesus, were the ones who had no feeling for this woman of another race. They detested this foreigner and sharply requested Jesus to get rid of her. They knew of Jesus' great power and of the thousands He had healed, yet they did not want her to be healed.

The disciples requested the Lord not to heal her daughter but to get rid of her. "Send her away," they said in effect, "She is shouting out after us!" It is in the light of this attitude of the Twelve that this place must be understood. Christ answered not a word, perhaps hoping that the disciples might, through human love and kindness, say a word on her behalf. It was a vain hope.

#### **Verse 24**

This reply doubtless pleased the Twelve. The rabbis often called the Gentiles dogs; and Christ's word at that moment seemed to them to be grounded in the traditional attitude of the Jews of that era. The interview, however, was destined to take an unexpected turn.

### **Verse 25**

One cannot contemplate the thought of this poor, distraught woman, pleading for the life of her child, without a catch in the throat, even yet. How could the disciples have been so heartless as not to intercede in her behalf at that instant?

Jesus had not refused; He had only said He was sent to Israel. Could not Israel have allowed one gracious act to one of another race, especially one who at that moment was kneeling or prostrated before Him, worshiping Him, and crying for His assistance?

Not at all; the Twelve were unfeeling witnesses as they stood by, watching Jesus get rid of the woman, or at least so they thought. But He was not getting rid of her, but was about to get rid of an ugly attitude in them!

### **Verse 26**

Yes, Jesus really told her, in the bluntest manner possible, that she was a Gentile dog, unworthy of a crumb from the children's (Israel's) table. That surely will do it, must have been the thought of the Twelve; but then the earthquake happened!

### **Verse 27**

Christ, at that very moment, was a fugitive from His own race and nation; and the wondrous faith and humility of that foreign woman from Canaan thus brought into sharpest focus the contrast with the bigots in Jerusalem who, even then, were planning to murder the Lord. Here is a play on words in the woman's reply.

Christ used the word "dogs" but the woman came back with another word (also translated "dogs" but with a slightly different meaning). The word she used means "little dogs" or "puppies." It is as though she said, "Yes, Lord, I am indeed a dog, but not a very big one, only a tiny one; and since the little dogs stay under the Master's table and eat the crumbs the children drop, surely You must be able to help me. It is only a crumb that I ask."

It may be that the apostles, even that late, did not see the truth of what Jesus was doing; certainly, it took a miracle later on to convince Peter that the Gentiles should be admitted; but, when at last he knew, how his heart must have burned when he thought of this incident.

There is another remarkable discernment in the woman's reply, in that she held the table to be not the children's, but the Master's, showing that she was aware of the hostile attitude of the Twelve and was by-passing them in a direct appeal to the Lord, placing Christ above them!

#### **Verse 28**

This woman's faith was a pledge of an ultimate ingathering of Gentiles. The time would come when the great mission of the church would be to them that were held as dogs by the Pharisees.

As for the woman, what must have been her joy when returning home she inquired of her daughter and learned she had been healed in the very hour of Jesus' promise. Faith had triumphed over every difficulty, even the seeming indifference of the Master, and had claimed the prize.

Note that this woman presented herself to the Lord and clung to Him for hope in spite of the intolerable attitude of His disciples, even in spite of His seeming indifference.

#### **Verse 29**

Again, Jesus, in danger, departed to the mountains. From Mark it is learned that the place was near the northeastern corner of Lake Galilee. And sat there indicates an attitude of teaching, as in the Sermon on the Mount.

#### **Verse 30**

"Dumb" is better understood as "mute," and the words "many others" refer to many other types of illness. The mention of the maimed in this place shows that Jesus healed people who had suffered atrocities or accidents.

#### **Verse 31**

Reference to "the God of Israel" indicates that those multitudes were largely heathen, or Gentile, corresponding to the population of the area. Christ related His mighty works to the Father, gave Him the glory, the credit, and the honor, and in fact did them in the Father's name. He said, "I have come in My Father's Name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him." (John 5:43) Christ always emphasized the origin of His work as being with God. He was God's plenary (absolute or complete representative) on earth.

### **Verse 32**

The unusual circumstance was that for a period of three whole days and nights Jesus had engaged in one continuous healing service. The throngs would not leave as long as there was a chance of others being healed. Food could wait, and it did. This was a powerful testimony to the ability and extent of Jesus' work among the Gentiles on the fringes of Israel. Compassion and pity in the heart of Jesus was evident in all His works.

### **Verse 33**

The unbelief, or apparent unbelief, of the Twelve showed how little they truly understood the power of the Savior, although they were witnesses to it every day.

### **Verses 34-38**

There are so many similarities between this and the feeding of the five thousand. Both strongly suggested Christ as "that Prophet" like unto Moses, and as "the bread of life."

### **Verse 39**

Madagan, or Dalmanutha, as Mark has it, (8:10) is an unknown site. Eusebius, in the fourth century, placed Magadan on the east side of Galilee near Gerasa; but this does not appear correct for two reasons:

- (1) Christ was already on the east side of Lake Galilee, and a crossing to the western shore seems indicated by the text; although it is allowed that He could have gone by boat to a location farther south on the eastern shore; and
- (2) the immediate confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees, as soon as they came to land, showed He was then back in their territory, which was the western side.

## **CHAPTER 16**

### **THE PHARISEES ASK A SIGN FROM HEAVEN**

#### **THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES**

#### **PETER'S CONFESSION OF THE CHRIST**

#### **FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION**

##### **Verse 1**

This indicates that Christ was at that time back on the west side of Lake Galilee, which was Pharisaical territory. The enemies of Jesus ask for a sign from heaven which was intended to cast a reflection on the mighty miracles Christ had performed, which as interpreted by those hypocrites, were not from "heaven."

A sign in the skies or from above would have been no more convincing than raising the dead or walking on the sea. As a matter of fact, Satan's destruction of Job's sheep (Job 1:16) was explained by some as "The fire of God is fallen from heaven;" but it was no such thing, it was a lying miracle of Satan.

Thus, the basis of their request for a sign from heaven was a prior falsehood in the theology of the Pharisees, classifying signs as "from heaven" or from earth. They were wrong in both counts.

Origen (Commentary on Matthew in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. X, p. 45) wrote: "They erred in regard to both, in regard to signs upon earth as well as signs from heaven . . . not knowing how to distinguish between the spirits that are working, which kind are from God, and which have revolted from Him."

The long-standing enmity between the Pharisees and Sadducees was submerged and muted while they made common cause against the Lord of glory, a pattern often observed. Herod and Pilate became friends as a result of the common cause they made against Christ. (Luke 23:12)

##### **Verses 2-3**

What are "the signs of the times?"

- (1) The prophetic weeks of Daniel were about to expire.
- (2) The great herald of the new age, John the Baptist, had appeared according to prophecy, "in the spirit and power of Elijah."
- (3) The scepter had departed from Judah and the lawgiver from beneath his feet. (Genesis 49:10)



- (4) Even a “sign from heaven” had already been given at the baptism of Christ when God spoke out of heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17)
- (5) It had been revealed to Simeon that he should not die till he had seen the Lord’s Christ; and it must be presumed that Simeon, by that time, was long since dead and buried.
- (6) All the world was expecting the coming of some Great One.
- (7) The Christ Himself, “that profit like unto Moses,” had appeared upon the banks of the Jordan and had been identified by John the Baptist as “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!”

#### **Verse 4**

What is called the first announcement of the Lord’s passion and resurrection is recorded later in this chapter, but it must be admitted that Christ’s “sign of Jonah” is a statement of the same thing.

The relation between God and Israel had long been described as a marriage contract in which God was the husband and Israel the bride, hence a charge of adultery was a reflection upon Israel’s fidelity to God. That unequal marriage God would shortly dissolve through His own death, in the person of Jesus, upon the cross. (Romans 7:4) It is also doubtless true that that generation was “adulterous” in the ordinary sense as well.

The impact of the word “desired,” reveals that the Pharisees had urgently pleaded with Christ to give one final, decisive “sign from heaven” that He was the Christ. Jesus knew it would be useless, because He knew their hearts, and their request rose from a desire to tempt Him. The utter perversity of those blind, evil leaders in presuming that God would make them, in all their wickedness, the final arbiters and judges of the Messiahship of God’s only Son is amazing. Christ very properly refused to be placed upon examination by them.

Christ’s statement that no sign would be given, except that of Jonah, did not mean that light would be withheld from them or that they were without light; but it meant that more than sufficient light was already theirs. The one cosmic exception to the “no sign” policy would be the resurrection of Christ, which would more than meet even their specifications as a “sign from heaven.” To be sure, even that was of no avail because, instead of accepting, they bribed

witnesses to deny it! Christ fully knew the character of those evil men; and the sad words concluding verse 4 show the finality of Christ's judgment upon them. He never more worked any miracle or taught in that place again.

### Verses 5-6

Christ and the apostles crossed Lake Galilee to the vicinity of Bethabara-Julius, where, in temporary safety from the Pharisees, He could continue to instruct the Twelve. Christ's warning, concerning the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees," was necessary. They had formed a powerful, socially prominent, politically dominating alliance against Him and were advocating His rejection using every cunning and lying argument possible. They argued:

- (1) that Christ could not be the Messiah, because Elijah had not yet come;
- (2) that his signs were not "from heaven," but from earth;
- (3) that the demons He exorcized were, in truth, cast out by the power of the devil;
- (4) that He was a violator of sacred traditions;
- (5) that He profaned the Sabbath;
- (6) that the scriptures "proved" the Messiah could not come from Galilee, but from Bethlehem (John 7:41);
- (7) that none of the rulers of the people believed on Him (John 7:48);
- (8) that they knew Him to be a sinner (John 9:4);
- (9) that He was a glutton and a winebibber;
- (10) that He was a Samaritan;
- (11) that He was a friend of publicans and sinners; and
- (12) that He was a deceiver.

Considering who they were, one must allow that they had indeed mounted a formidable attack against the Christ, so strong in fact that Christ saw fit in this instance to warn even the apostles against it.

Here "leaven" stands for something evil, the usual meaning in Scriptures, although an exception exists (13:33). The Sadducees were materialists, denying any spiritual life, any possibility of a resurrection, and the existence of angels. (22:23) The Pharisees were hypocrites, dealing in falsehood.

Both were secular, dominated by earthly considerations exclusively. They were full of snobbery and pride and made every possible appeal to selfishness, prejudice, and bias. They even tortured the Scriptures to invent arguments against Him; and finally, they relied upon force to achieve their ends. Even at that moment, they were plotting to kill Christ.

### **Verses 7-8**

The apostles were far too literal in construing the words of Christ. Far from catching the significance of His words, at first they thought that they were being scolded for forgetting to buy bread.

### **Verses 9-10**

Christ's mention of both the miracles in which so many were fed is certain proof that there were in fact two miracles, however similar, and that these are not merely two accounts of the same wonder. Christ was amazed that after all the disciples had seen, they would still have considered their failure to provide bread a matter of sufficient importance that Christ would rebuked them for it, "O you of little faith!"

### **Verse 12**

Here is an extremely important example of how the word of Christ, or of the Scriptures, should be interpreted. Note that Christ did not change a syllable of what He had said, indicating that the misunderstanding of the Twelve did not arise from any fault in what Christ had said but in their application of it. Note that if He had meant "bread," He would have said "bread."

The word He used was "leaven," and His use of it in connection with the Pharisees and Sadducees showed that a literal meaning of the term was not indicated, since a man does not have literal "leaven" in him.

In outlining the qualifications of elders and deacons, the Scriptures speak of "believing children," to insist that that must invariably mean "baptized children" is to fall into the error of the apostles noted above. Does anyone suppose that the Holy Spirit did not know the term "baptized"? In all cases where the truth of God's word is sought, the strictest attention must be paid to the exact words that are used.

### **Verse 13**

Christ was about to reveal further insight into His glorious identity; and He began by taking the popular beliefs concerning Himself as the basis, or platform, from which to elevate their minds to the higher and nobler conception of the Christ as the Son of God.

### **Verse 14**

How amazing that none of the popular beliefs at that time identified Christ as the Messiah! The Pharisees had been in their evil campaign against Christ. Satan had sufficiently eroded the image of the Lord and that no popular opinion prevailed to the effect that He was the Christ.

That erosion and blurring of the truth that Christ was the Messiah had reached such proportions that Christ, as we have just seen, even warned the apostles to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

### **Verse 15**

“But who do you say I am?” Christ in that question came to the heart of His heavenly mission. Everything depends upon the answer to that question. Who is He? That was the question asked by Paul on the Damascus road when he said, “Who art thou, Lord?” (Acts 22:8) It is the question everyone must ask, and answer correctly, before any such thing as salvation can be had.

The progression from things general to things particular was a common procedure in Christ’s method of teaching. (5:10-11)

The same pattern is here. “Who do men say that the Son of man is,” followed by, “Who do you say I am?”

### **Verse 16**

“But who do you say that I am?” This is called the Great Confession. J. R. Dummelow (Ibid), aptly pointed this out saying: “Son of God, here, is no mere equivalent of “the Messiah.” . . . This is shown by the deep emotion with which the speaker makes and Jesus receives, the confession; and the fact that the confession is perfectly satisfactory to Jesus, and is forthwith made the dogmatic foundation of Christianity. (“Upon this rock, I will build My church.”)

The ancients noted the expression, “Son of the living God.” making those words the basis of Jesus’ blessing of Peter.

### **Verse 17**

Jesus' confession and blessing of Peter in this place is best understood in the light of a promise Jesus previously made to the effect that He would confess those who confessed Him. (10:32-33)

The real truth that Jesus is God's Son is not taught by human wisdom but in that wisdom which is from above.

### **Verse 18**

Some have made much of the fact that the word "Peter" means rock, and from this have affirmed that Christ built the church upon Peter. This text is inscribed in letters of gold four feet high inside the massive dome of Basilica of St. Peters; and it is feared they many have been deceived by this false claim.

The Greek text itself dispels any possibility of Peter having been the rock upon which Jesus built the church. In appealing to the Greek, this author does not defer to the opinions of learned men, nor, for that matter, confess any knowledge of Greek; but God's truth is not subject to the arcane and ambiguous dissertations of the learned. Even an ignorant man can see for himself that Christ did not build the church upon Peter.

What, then, is the rock upon which Christ proposed to build the church? It is the supreme fact of faith just confessed by Peter, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God.

A moment later Christ mentioned Peter, giving him (and later the others) the keys of the kingdom of heaven, thus making him, not the foundation, but the door-opener of the kingdom.

The gates of Hades, mentioned by Christ, is variously understood, as follows:

- (1) Some believe they refer to death and the fact that death would not prevent our Lord's carrying on the noble design announced on that occasion.
- (2) Others think they refer to the various sins by which men go to their spiritual doom.
- (3) Another thinks they refer to Satanic opposition to the church throughout history, and that, they contain a prophecy that Christ will triumph, not Satan.

The meaning and import of the passage are so profound that there is more than enough room for all of these views without violence to the word of God.

### **Verse 19**

The promise, emphatically delivered to Peter here, was also the property of the Twelve and not Peter's exclusively. (18:18) "Bind" and "loose" refer to the power of deciding what was lawful or unlawful to be done in the church or what was orthodox or unorthodox to be believed. That power was (and is) exercised by all the apostles and the New Testament is the instrument by which that binding and loosing are affected.

A certain preeminence did pertain to Peter.

- (1) He preached the first gospel sermon. (Acts 2:14ff)
- (2) He unlocked the secret of the Davidic kingdom. (Acts 2:31)
- (3) He unlocked the secret of how men enter the kingdom. (Acts 2:38)
- (4) He unlocked the door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 10:iff)
- (5) He unlocked the door of return for backsliders. (Acts 8:13, 22)
- (6) He unlocked the mystery of the new name. (1 Peter 4:16)
- (7) He expounded the mystery of the new birth. (1 Peter 3:21)
- (8) He revealed the ultimate fate of the earth. (2 Peter 3:11-13)

The distinctions noted here are far more than enough to fulfill Jesus' words without resort to the monstrous notion that Peter was to be made, in any sense, the head of the church, which by its very nature can have only one head, Christ.

### **Verse 20**

This admonition came because any indiscreet disclosure of Christ's true and total heavenly identity would have compromised Jesus' purpose, which was to accomplish His death in Jerusalem in such a manner that the true reason for that death could not be clouded or distorted by Satan.

The grand design of Christ's purpose called for Him to die, not as a seeker of the secular throne, but as the Son of the Living God.

Christ succeeded so well in achieving His purpose that when the Sanhedrin finally condemned Him, their charge of sedition, as alleged before Pilate, would not stand up; and they were compelled to admit at last that their real reason was not a suspicion of disloyalty to Caesar, but "because he made Himself the Son of God." (John 19:7)

## **DIVISION V**

### **SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST REPEATEDLY FORETOLD.**

#### **SCHOOLING OF THE DISCIPLES FOR THE PASSION**

**(Matthew 16:21—20:34)**

In division four, the Messiah's kingdom was accepted by some, rejected by others. He was accepted by the disciples (14:33), by the women of Canaan (15:22), by a great multitude (15:30), by Peter (16:16); he was rejected by the Nazarenes (13:57), and by the Pharisees and their sympathizers. (15:12, 16:4)

In division five, the sufferings and death of Christ make up the burden of the message; especially the prophecies of His passion. There are three of these: First announcement (16:21); second announcement (17:22); third announcement (20:17)

#### **FIRST CLEAR PREDICTION OF HIS PASSION AND RESURRECTION**

##### **Verse 21**

This marvelous prophecy of His death and resurrection is without parallel in human history.

It would be hard to imagine a more categorical prophecy of resurrection than that of Psalm 16:19, "For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither wilt Thou allow The Holy One to see the pit." Now pray tell, to whom could such a word apply, if not to Christ? And what is a resurrection unless it may be described as coming out of Sheol (the grave) before the body sees corruption?

Christ did not merely say, "I will rise from the dead." His graphic description of what would occur included these points:

- (1) His death would occur at Jerusalem.
- (2) The scribes, chief priests, and elders would have a part in it.
- (3) He would suffer "many things" at their hands.
- (4) He would not merely die, but "be killed," a far different thing.
- (5) He would rise from the dead.
- (6) The resurrection would occur "the third day."

Proof that this prophecy of Christ was known throughout Palestine before the events took place is manifest in the sealed tomb and posted watch to guard His body and prevent any rumors that such a glorious thing actually occurred.

### **Verse 22**

Peter's intention in this case was commendable; nevertheless, his ignorance made him a tool of the devil, whose double purpose regarding Christ was either to cause the Master to commit sin, or to make His death such a horrible and detestable thing that Christ would reject it; thus, by one means or the other, Satan would thwart God's purpose of redemption for men.

Peter's rejection of any thought of the death of the beloved Savior was perfectly in line with Satan's purpose. Note in this case Peter assumed a new role, he appeared no longer as a disciple but as one to rebuke and contradict what Christ had just said. How easily do men slip into unbecoming postures! Nor did Peter easily shake that temptation to get out of line; he did it again and again.

### **Verse 23**

There was kindness (and a reprieve) for Peter in the Lord's reply. Christ told Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan." Peter was commanded to forsake his role as instructor and resume that of a follower. Peter's place was behind Christ, as a devoted disciple, not in front of Christ, a position assumed when he objected to Christ's words about His approaching death and resurrection.

Peter was apparently thinking that, from the earthly viewpoint, Jesus surely did not deserve anything to happen to Him which the Lord had just mentioned. From the earthly view, Peter was right; and Christ correctly diagnosed his mistake by saying that Peter was thinking of the things of men rather than of the things of God. The things of God would be clear to Peter much later. (1 Peter 2:24)

One lesson of stark and overwhelming power that flows out of this strange rebuke of Peter is that temptation does not always come through one's enemies, but may also come through the most faithful and intimate of earthly companions. Peter's sad role in his incident of loved ones may become the instruments of evil, however unintentionally. The temptation, conveyed through Peter's words here, remained and was present in that bitter cup in the Garden of Gethsemane. (26:39)



#### **Verse 24**

Christ had just commanded Peter to get behind him; and immediately, Christ made the cross a necessary condition of discipleship.

Cross-bearing is widely misunderstood. It is not old age, poverty, taxes, illness, or bad weather, or any other discomfiture of life that comes unavoidably into the lives of men. It is the acceptance, for the sake of the will of God, of some burden or burdens, otherwise avoidable, but which are undertaken out of a pure desire to fulfill the Master's purpose.

The centrality of the cross in Christ's religion was here affirmed by Christ at the very moment when one of His most beloved apostles had spoken against it.

#### **Verse 25**

These words forcibly imply, even demand, an understanding that Christ is God. Only God could make good on such a promise. The total dedication of the total man to God's total purpose, though it might (and sometimes does) result in death, nevertheless leads to eternal life.

#### **Verse 26**

"And forfeits his soul . . ." Man possesses a body, but he is a soul. A soul is of more value than the whole world, as Jesus said. The truth of this appears through the application of any of the common criteria for determining value:

- (1) Cost: It cost the blood of Christ to redeem lone soul.
- (2) Permanence: A soul will exist till the worlds have passed away.
- (3) Affection: God loved the soul enough to reclaim it.
- (4) Uniqueness: No two souls are identical.

#### **Verse 27**

Christ stated that He would come in the glory of God with His angels. Could a mere man have said that? This can be nothing less than a prophecy of the general resurrection and judgment of the last day. The basis of that judgment shall include:

- (1) the word of Christ (John 12:48), and
- (2) the deeds done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10) No number of angels is indicated in this place, but "ten thousand" is the number given in Jude 14.

## **Verse 28**

Mark's account of this statement is, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." (Mark 9:1)

Matthew and Christ preached the kingdom is "at hand." The passage here supplemented that information by making it certain to appear during the lives of "some" of the apostles. Why not merely during their lives? That is, the lives of all of them? That was because both Judas and Christ would die before the kingdom came.

The kingdom would not be set up during the personal ministry of Christ, but afterwards. The kingdom did appear on the day of Pentecost, during the lives of "some" of them, just as Jesus had said.

Remember that the church and the kingdom are one.

This chapter brings us to the heart of Matthew's gospel. Christ's deity was recognized and confessed. Satan's effort to thwart the crucifixion was countermanded (even though suggested by Peter), and the cross of Jesus was made central in His holy religion.

This chapter has been called the hub of the gospel of Matthew.

## **CHAPTER 17**

### **THE TRANSFIGURATION**

### **THE COMING OF ELIJAH**

### **THE DISCIPLES' FAILURE WITH THE DEMON-POSSESSED BOY**

### **THE PASSION PROPHESED AGAIN**

### **JESUS PAYS TRIBUTE WITH MONEY IN FISH'S MOUTH**

#### **Verse 1**

Luke makes the time interval "eight days" (9:28); but there is no discrepancy from Mark and Matthew. Luke used the inclusive method of recording time, counting the portion of a day at either end of the period, whereas Mark and Matthew count only the complete days. Today we might say, "six or eight days."

Peter, James and John formed a kind of inner committee, or cade, within the Twelve, and were the exclusive witnesses of the transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the agony in Gethsemane. Peter would take the lead in

establishing the church; James would be the recognized leader of the church in Jerusalem; and John would receive the final revelation. The experience on the Mount of Transfiguration would better equip them for future duties and responsibilities.

The location of the wondrous unveiling of His glory is not given; but there are excellent and convincing reasons for placing it at Mount Hermon, or one of its supporting peaks.

### **Verse 2**

The glory of Christ was revealed. The effulgence of the Godhead made His face luminous and shone through His garments. The heavenly glory of Christ irradiated His face and clothing, demonstrating His eternal nature in a way to make the apostles who witnessed it absolutely certain that Christ was God in human form.

### **Verse 3**

How did the apostles recognize Moses and Elijah? The conversation seems to be the most logical source of that information. It may be concluded from this incident that the saints will know the redeemed of all ages in their glorified state in heaven.

Moses the great lawgiver and Elijah the great prophet were there summoned from the dead to resign their commissions and to lay their homage at His feet. Then the apostles knew that Christ was not merely some great Elijah or another notable, and they were certain beyond all doubt that He was the One.

Again Peter was wrong, not so completely wrong as when he rebuked the Lord, but still wrong. Luke added the words, "Not knowing what he said." (Luke 9:33) Peter was still thinking of Jesus and Moses, or of Jesus and Elijah, or of Jesus and both of them.

The suggested tabernacles were small booths used by the Jews for the Feast of Tabernacles. What Peter had in mind is not clear, but his error is glaring enough. He was proposing some kind of equality for Jesus to share with Moses and Elijah.

### **Verse 5**

Here is a manifestation of the Trinity almost as definite as that at the baptismal scene in Matthew 3:16. Christ was present, radiant in heavenly light;

the Father spoke out of heaven; and the cloud strongly suggests the Holy Spirit, although it is not identified. The frightened apostles fell on their faces in abject terror at that overwhelming display of divine power. The exact nature of the bright cloud is not known, but Peter called it “the excellent glory.” (2 Peter 1:17)

The words out of the cloud were the same as those at Jesus’ baptism, except that the words, “Hear Him,” were added.

### **Verses 6-7**

Christ’s touch was that like He used in healing and in raising the dead. It imparted power and strength. The message, “Do not be afraid” was the same which came to them over the storm-tossed waters of Galilee, dispelling their apprehensions and indicating the end of the experience.

### **Verse 8**

The big words in this whole passage are “Jesus Himself alone!” They might have seen no one after the cloud lifted. How unhappy would have been their lot if all the glory had departed, leaving no one. In such a case, no salvation, no hope would have been indicated. They might have seen Moses only. This would have indicated the Law as still supreme, and forgiveness would not yet have remained impossible. They might have seen Elijah only.

Jesus only! This is the message humanity needs. He is the only Savior, the only Mediator, the only Authority in heaven or upon earth. He is the only means of access to God (John 14:6), the only hope of the world, the only Judge of the world, and the only Atonement for man’s sin.

### **Verse 9**

Silence was commanded because nine of the apostles had not witnessed the transfiguration, and there was a possibility of jealously developing among them, as indeed it did a little later.

An extremely important supplement to Matthew’s account is in Luke who gave the subject matter of the conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah, “(they) were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:31)

This conversation was calculated to encourage and reassure the apostles who had been severely shocked and disheartened by the Savior’s revelation of His death and sufferings, to be followed by His resurrection.

The subject matter during the transfiguration showed that the death of Christ was a part of the Master Plan. It also revealed Christ as the Great Architect of the crucifixion. Evil men, dominated by Satan, would have their part in it, but only Christ would accomplish His death.

#### **Verse 10**

This question shows that the evil insinuations of the scribes had done their work even to the apostles' hearts. Their recognition of Elijah on the mountaintop probably caused them to think that Elijah would “restore all things” as was expected of him.

#### **Verses 11-12**

There are two fulfillments of the prophecy of Elijah's coming, the first being in the coming of John the Baptist, the other to come near the end of time when Elijah will appear (so goes the speculation) and “restores all things,” before the second advent of our Lord. Interesting as this speculation is, it is rejected on the simple words of the text to the effect that Christ was speaking of John the Baptist.

The utmost accuracy of our Lord's word must be allowed; but the possibility of just such a misunderstanding was anticipated and eliminated by the plain assertion, “He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.” Also, “Elijah had come already!”

#### **Verses 14-15**

The word “epileptic” as used in verse 15, would have been better translated, “lunatic.” In the case here, there is the additional complication of demon possession. The fact that there was a double affliction could have accounted for the difficulty the disciples had in healing the boy, failing, in fact, to do so.

#### **Verse 16**

The doubt planted in the apostle's hearts by the Pharisees must surely have played a part in the inability to heal the lunatic. Their faltering faith, coupled with the double difficulty at hand, made them powerless to effect a cure. These same disciples had once returned with joy over the fact that demons were subject to them in the name of Christ (Luke 10:17ff); but then they were powerless in the presence of that lunatic boy.

### **Verse 17**

This blanket indictment of all present, including the Twelve, especially the nine who had failed, gives an insight into the frustration which threatened the Master's heaven-born mission to men.

Instead of growing in faith, the apostles were obviously weakening under the withering climate induced by Pharisaical opposition to the Master and the waning popularity that resulted from the campaign of His foes in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, He did not lose patience with them but prepared to perform another mighty wonder before their eyes.

### **Verse 18**

Christ succeeded, of course, even though His apostles had failed; thus His Name and honor were vindicated. A strange sidelight on this cure is the obvious fact that not all demon-possessed persons were morally corrupt.

Just how Satan's servants are able to possess even innocents on some occasions is not revealed. The verse here is Matthew's first intimation that a demon was involved, but Jesus' words immediately afterwards left no doubt. Christ rebuked, not the disease, but the demon.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (Sermons, Vol. 2, p. 297) saw in the act of coming to Christ for salvation. He wrote: "Sinners, when they approach the Savior, are often thrown down by Satan and torn, so that they suffer exceedingly in their minds, and are ready to give up in despair."

Any gospel minister can recall instances of mighty oppositions to souls on the brink of decision for Christ.

### **Verse 19**

They discreetly waited till they were alone with Christ, avoiding embarrassment that might have resulted from asking Him publicly; and in view of the reasons Jesus gave, they were correct in the exercise of such prudence.

### **Verse 20**

The reasons for the apostle's failure were:

- (1) their lack of faith,
- (2) the double difficulty of their case at hand, and
- (3) their failure to exercise the privilege of prayer and fasting.

The disciples had *some* faith else they would not have tried to cast it out. The fact they had previously cast out demons but could not cast out that one shows that some demons are more malevolent and stubborn than others.

The necessity for prayer (certainly) and fasting (perhaps) was stressed. The child had long been possessed by the demons, and the usual pattern of demonic destruction was evident is the danger incurred from falls into the fire and into the water. Satan's purpose, wherever revealed in Scripture, invariably appears destructive.

"Nothing shall be impossible to you . . ." is a very strong statement by the Lord. One is tempted to make our Lord's remark about removing mountains mere hyperbole, but no such restriction seems justified from the text. To the true believer and especially to the apostles, all things were possible through faith. To the true child of God, all moral and material difficulties vanish. The tragedy is that most disciples, like the nine in the case here, are hindered by seeds of doubt and unbelief, and perhaps also by the lack of fervent and devoted prayer.

## **THE SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS PASSION**

### **Verses 22-23**

One additional and very significant detail is added by this recapitulation of the prophecy of His passion. That is, He would be "delivered up into the hands of men."

From Mark, it is known that Christ at that time had returned to Galilee and was in retirement there, using every possible means to instruct and prepare the apostles for the awful event looming so near in the future.

Looming nearer and nearer were the dark scenes of Calvary, blotting out their view of the oft-repeated promises of His resurrection. Never was there a better example of their weakness of the flesh (all flesh) than in the shocked and perplexed attitude of the Twelve. They had been given all the facts, but full realization would come afterwards.

The curtain rings down on the retirement in Galilee. We may suppose that Jesus stressed over and over the sad outlines of the Passion; and the apostles, unable to comprehend it, nevertheless remembered His words which would

spring up in their heart's unto eternal life as soon as the gloom of Calvary was drowned in the light of His resurrection.

#### **Verse 24**

This half-shekel was a Jewish poll tax levied annually for the support of the temple, a tax which Jesus perhaps had paid often in the past; but the appearance of the solicitors with an inquiry placed a different face on things. If Christ paid the tax, it would mean, in a sense, that He was laying claim to no special dignity but was accepting the status of an ordinary Jew, rabbis being exempt. Jesus might have claimed exemption as a Jewish rabbi or as a teacher; but to have claimed exemption as a Jewish rabbi, or teacher but to have done so would have compromised His higher claim to be the Messiah.

A refusal to pay it would have involved Him as a technical lawbreaker; and it is likely that the dilemma involved in these various facets of the problem was what prompted the inquiry in the first place. The poll tax was generally left to voluntary compliance; for centuries no enforcement structure existed and no penalties for default were prescribed or enforced.

#### **Verses 25-26**

Peter was probably completely unaware of the dilemma posed for Christ in the matter of payment, or non-payment, of the half-shekel; but, in his quick and ready impulsiveness, he accepted the obligation for Christ and himself also. Jesus' speaking to Peter first showed that He knew what had taken place without need of any report from Peter. Only God has such omniscience. Where did Christ learn the skilled Socratic method of teaching by asking questions, thus drawing from Peter's own mouth the essential truth He sought to convey? His wisdom was from above, and He needed not that anyone teach Him.

Peter had already confessed Jesus as God's Son, making Him a Son of the King, in the highest and truest sense of those words. The well-known fact that the children of king's palaces were exempt from taxation was thus elicited from Peter that he might see that Jesus was exempt from the half-shekel tax.

The tax was for God, the true King; Jesus was His Son, therefore Jesus was exempt. The half-shekel was in the nature of a ransom or atonement; and how could He who came to give Himself a ransom for all be required to pay this trifling temple tax as ransom for Himself?



Though Christ had perhaps paid this tax in the past (based upon Peter's ready acceptance of the obligation), he was now the declared Messiah. To pay it then would involve some inconsistency, hence the necessity for Jesus to be absolutely sure that Peter recognized His true status of exemption.

In spite of all this, and to avoid focusing on a insignificant detail, Christ paid it anyway, although in such a manner that He could never be charged with having done so in any sense of renunciation of His high office as the world's only Redeemer.

### **Verse 27**

In paying that temple tax, Jesus did so out of charity and good will, not out of obligation. Christ's submission to this tax reminds one of His request for baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. There, He might likewise have claimed an exemption. It was His perfect observance of all obligations in order to do that which was becoming, thus leaving no cause for offense that enabled Him to say that He had come to "fulfill" the law and the prophets.

The miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth does not appear to be one of outright creation, but rather one of absolute and perfect control over all things in nature. The existence of a fish with a coin in its mouth, which it had swallowed and was too large to go down, is not hard to understand.

There have been many examples similar to this. The miracle is seen in the absolute power and knowledge of the Master who directed the fish to Peter's hook and at the precise moment required. Note also that Christ never touched the money. There is no evidence that He ever did. On the occasion of the question about the tribute money, He said, "Show Me the tribute money!" Money was apparently something that others touched, but not the Savior.

**CHAPTER 18**  
**QUESTIONS OF RANK**  
**REGARDING STUMBLING-BLOCKS**  
**PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP**  
**DUTY TOWARD OFFENDERS**  
**PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT**

**Verse 1**

The term “greatest” is actually “greater” in the Greek, but the meaning is the same. The apostles had been disputing among themselves concerning preeminence and places of honor in the approaching kingdom.

A great proportion of earth’s sorrows flow directly from the vain ambitions of men for preferment and advantage. Even the apostles were infected with the “I deserve to be first” virus.

**Verse 2**

That little child possibly was Peter’s, since the Lord was a guest in Peter’s house. All innocent young children manifest the same wonderful qualities, and the identity of the child is irrelevant.

**Verse 3**

“Unless you are converted . . .” Note: Acts 3:19 and Acts 28:27 use the words “turn” and “turn again” in place of the word “converted.” The three texts represent instruction directed to three different classes of persons, depending upon their spiritual development. These are:

- (1) believes who needed to repent (Matthew 18:3),
- (2) unbelievers (Acts 28:27), and
- (3) believers whose repentance was anticipated. (Acts 3:19)

From these three texts it is clear that biblical conversion has three phases, faith, repentance, and something additional (baptism), these three separate phases being accomplished by obedience to the gospel and involving three distinct changes in the individual.

The three changes are:

- (1) a change of mind,
- (2) a change of will, and
- (3) a change of state or status.

Thus faith was appointed to change the mind, repentance to change the will, and baptism to change the status. Faith changes the present, repentance changes the future, and baptism changes the past.

In the case here, need for repentance by the believing apostles sprang from their sin of worldly pride and ambition, as attested by their striving for position and preeminence in the approaching kingdom.

#### **Verses 4-6**

The particular qualities of little children commended by Jesus are humility, freedom from prejudice, teachable, lovable, truthfulness, faith, freedom from anxiety, and innocence. Receiving a little child in Jesus' name refers to complete acceptance of a child-like believer because of his innocence and unrestrained trust in the Lord.

The warning in this passage applies specifically to one who causes the loss of a human soul. Such a sinner shall suffer a fate worse than death. "The great millstone" in this place means literally "a millstone turned by a donkey," and contrasts with the smaller milestones turned by hand. Why is the fate of such an offender worse than death by drowning? Because eternal death will be his reward.

#### **Verse 7**

The divine plan calls for man to be tried, tested, and tempted. Satan and the forbidden tree were in Eden before sin entered. God desires the love of His children; and true love requires that there be freedom of the will and opportunity to make a choice. The opportunity for temptation does not reduce the guilt of sinners, nor does the necessity for temptation mitigate the guilt of those through whom temptation comes.

The expression "it is inevitable" or as some versions read, "must needs be," speaks of a heavenly compulsion upon all things. The great issue of time and eternity proceed from God, and no appeal (or escape) from His total authority is possible. That heavenly compulsion was laid upon Christ while He was in the form of man. He must be about the Father's business (Luke 2:49), must preach the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43), must put new wine in new flasks (Mark 2:22), must work the works of God (John 9:4), must suffer death (Mark 8:31), and must reign till all enemies are put under foot. (1 Corinthians 15:25)

There must be heresies (1 Corinthians 11:19), must be wars (Mark 13:7, must be tribulations (Acts 14:21-22), must be offenses (above), must be separation from the visible presence of Christ (Acts 3:21), and Satan must be loosed for a little season (Revelation 20:3).

This sovereign “*must*” over shadows the Bible. The scriptures *must* be fulfilled (Luke 22:37), and they *must* be preached (Mark 13:10). The apostles found this heavenly “*must*” written against them also (Acts 1:21-22); elders *must* be blameless (1 Timothy 3:8); preachers *must* forbear striving (2 Timothy 2:24-26); all worshipers *must* worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) all who desire salvation *must* believe (Hebrews 11:60), *must* be saved in the name of Christ (Acts 4:12, *must* repent (Luke 13:3), and *must* be baptized (John 3:7).

In death, there is an exception. Not all *must* die (1 Corinthians 15:51), but all *must* put on immortality and all *must* stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is quite different from the old proverb about nothing’s being certain except death and taxes, death being one of the few things not certain!

### **Verse 8**

Most commentators, ancient and modern, make Christ’s words here a metaphor applicable to the individual who should give up the most cherished friendship, indulgence, or habit, if such hinders the spiritual life. It is also applied to the church itself which should put away evil members, even of the highest positions, lest the whole body of the church be contaminated. Removal of a mortally infected member is required for the preservation of life.

### **Verse 9**

The lesson is identical in these cases and is repeated for emphasis. Special attention is directed to the Savior’s teaching on eternal punishment. (See the notes on Matthew 25:41 and Matthew 5:29-30.)

### **Verse 10**

Seeking for prominence and chief seats always leads to despising the poor, the lowly, and the humble; but Christ made it emphatically clear that in His kingdom such persons, described as, “One of these little ones,” are of the most transcending importance, and that the highest ranking angels in glory are

charged with watching on their behalf. (Note: See more on angels under Matthew 1:20.)

## **PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP**

### **Verse 11**

This verse was omitted in the Revised Version Bible, but it certainly bears some relevance in this context: "For the Son of man came to save that which was lost."

Analogies:

- (1) The man with a hundred sheep is God.
- (2) The ninety-nine are the faithful.
- (3) The one that went astray is the backslider.
- (4) The seeking for the lost is God's search for the unsaved.
- (5) The rejoicing represents God's pleasure over those who repent.
- (6) The fold (not mentioned, implied) is the church, or fellowship with God.
- (7) The mountains stand for the dangers to backsliders.

### **Verses 12-14**

Christ spoke this parable twice, evidently for a different purpose on each occasion. In this instance, it stands for the infinite love and solicitude the Lord has for the very least of His human children; but in Luke's account of it, it appears to have been spoken as an argument against the Pharisees who would go to a lot of trouble for a lost animal but had no regard for a lost man.

In the Scriptures, goats are used to represent sinners, and sheep represent Christians. The lost sheep, therefore, represents a child of God who has become a backslider, who is separated from the fold, and from the Shepherd.

Here are some facts about a lost sheep:

- (1) It is absolutely defenseless, having no weapon of any kind, no gift of speed in flight, no cunning, no means of deception, its very cries being only a signal for the enemy to close in for the kill. Let every backslider behold here his helplessness apart from Christ.

- (2) The sheep has no means of direction. A carrier pigeon would surely be able to return to its nest; a dog might find its way home, but a sheep never!
- (3) A lost sheep is surrounded by enemies, even the elemental forces of nature being hostile and often fatal to him when separated from the fold.

The parable suggests the earthly mission of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who left the joys of heaven to wander amid the bleak scenes of earth to recover lost and sinful men. It also has an application to the church or flock of God, in that the true place for every sheep is in the fold. There is no safety for the sheep separated from the Shepherd and the fold.

The rejoicing of the Shepherd is stressed in this case, but in Luke's account, the rejoicing in heaven is emphasized.

#### **Verse 15**

It is God, not men that should be obeyed. James Macknight (A Harmony of the Four Gospels, Vol. II, p. 177) wrote: "Such are the rules which our Lord would have us observe in matters of private offense." J. W. McGarvey (New Testament Commentary, Vol. I, p. 159) stated that: "This rule of procedure is given only for cases of personal offense, where one individual has sinned against another."

"Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may fear." (1 Timothy 5:20) But where is the authority in that for omitting the first and second admonitions? That the first and second admonitions do actually apply to "public" sins as well as private sins appears from Paul's words to Titus, "A factious man, after a first and second admonition refuse." (Titus 3:10) A factious man is a leader or promoter of a faction, an offense which, by its very nature, has to be public!

Another passage sometimes cited as a release of our Lord's instruction is that of Paul's public rebuke of Elymas. (Acts 13:9-10) It simply cannot be that the conduct of that inspired, Spirit-moved apostle is license for some preacher to sound off in public about the sins of any person of his acquaintance or in his congregation.

Paul acted under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, under the immediate authority and commission of God Himself, that he sustained absolutely no

danger of being mistaken, and that he was not in either case dealing with an ordinary brother. Peter was a fellow apostle; Elymas was a notorious child of the devil, enjoying the status of a prime minister.

The view advocated here does not in any sense exclude the necessity of ultimately exposing wrong-doers before the whole church publicly, but we believe it is our duty to affirm that this can be done Scripturally, only after the first and second admonitions.

Too often the first effort to correct some alleged sin or error has been an ugly blast from a pulpit or in some religious paper, always justified, of course, on the basis that the alleged wrong-doing was a “public “ matter, and therefore requiring no private confrontation with the “wrong-doer.”

A careful study of Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1 will prove that there are no exceptions to Christ’s injunction requiring spiritual persons to go to the offender first alone.

When Christ’s plan is tried, the usual result is gaining the offending brother; but when Christ’s plan is thwarted, when public condemnations have been sounded abroad, it is then often too late to redeem the offending brother. His pride, feelings, and reputation, already compromised, make it exceedingly more difficult to effect an humble admission of his wrong and a penitent return to the truth.

#### **Verse 16**

These words were spoken before Pentecost, but they are nevertheless binding upon the church and Christians of all ages. They were uttered specifically for the purpose of outlining procedures for discipline in “the church.”

#### **Verse 17**

The mention of “the church,” or “the congregation” as it is in the Greek, shows that this rule was propounded by Christ for observance on the part of His followers in all ages. And how is the rule usually observed? By its gross and unfeeling violation!

Telling the elders, the deacons, or the preacher, or anyone else, of the evil detected in another is wrong (till after the first admonition); and even after the

first admonition, the greatest number to be acquainted with it is two others (see verse 16). Go to the offender first! That is God's commandment!

### **Verse 18**

Its mention in this context appears to make the action of a church in the rejection of an offending member a matter of the utmost consequences, now and eternally.

### **Verse 19**

It cannot be understood how prayers of two persons may be more efficacious with God than the prayers of only one, but the fact is affirmed by Christ.

### **Verse 20**

This is one of God's most precious promises. The smallness of the church or its relative insignificance in the community is not a determining factor in God's concern for its peace and welfare. Two or three faithful disciples are enough to claim the Father's blessing. There is, however, one supremely overriding condition: that they be truly gathered together in the name of Christ. All gatherings are not covered, but only those where the full purpose is undertaken, as Jesus said, "in My name." Christ's presence is not restricted to some vague, "up there," but He is in His body the church.

### **Verse 21**

This indicates that Peter had indeed made excellent progress but that he had not yet arrived at true spiritual discernment. His suggestion of forgiving seven times went considerably beyond the maxims of the rabbis who admonished forgiveness three times but not four times, basing their position upon the word of God to Amos, "For three transgressions of Gaza and for four, I will not revoke its punishment." (Amos 1:6)

Even Peter's relatively magnanimous forgiveness until seven times, however, fell far short of Jesus' requirement of unlimited forgiveness.

### **Verse 22**

This simply means that a Christian must have the spiritual resources to keep on forgiving. Forgiveness of others was made a constant precondition of man's forgiveness by the Father, not only in these words of Jesus here, but upon other occasions as well. The business of forgiveness is so important that Christ



immediately introduced one of His longest parables in order to reinforce the teaching and repeat the absolute necessity of forgiveness at the conclusion of it.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT**

There are a number of remarkable analogies in this heart-moving parable. The conduct of the unmerciful servant is so wicked as to be almost incredible.

Analogies:

#### **Verses 23-34**

- (1) God is represented by the king in this parable.
- (2) All men are servants of the king.
- (3) The servant with the enormous debt stands for every unredeemed sinner on earth whose debt is so large that it is impossible for him to pay it.
- (4) The king's forgiveness, without any merit on the part of the unmerciful servant, indicates God's grace.
- (5) The unfeeling conduct of the unmerciful servant shows how God looks upon the refusal of His children to forgive others.
- (6) The king's forgiveness "because you sought me" shows that sinners need only to apply (in the proper way) in order to be forgiven. They need not "pay" anything.
- (7) The ultimate punishment of the unmerciful servant shows that all forgiveness is contingent upon the continuing faithfulness of the redeemed. Jesus certainly taught in this that one may fall from grace.
- (8) Those who have received mercy must give mercy, or else have the mercy they have already received revoked.

The size of the debt is significant. If, as it seems likely, the Hebrew denarii or gold talent is meant, the figure becomes truly astronomical.

The sale of the wife and children, as a proposed partial payment, rested upon the general assumption that they were his property. The utter lack of anything with which to pay shows, as Richard C. Trench (Notes on the Parables, p. 155) said: "The utter bankruptcy of every child of Adam as he stands in the presence of a just God, and is tried by the strictness of the holy law."

The unmerciful servant “worshiped” his lord (who stands for God in the parable), whereas his fellow-servant only “fell down and besought” his creditor. Note: The King in this place stands for God; the unmerciful servant did not; hence, his debtor does not appear worshiping him.

The fault of the unmerciful servant was his failure to realize the enormity and absolute hopelessness of his debt. A note of self-righteousness appears in his entreaty that if only a little time would be allowed he could repay it all!. So many sinners fall into the same fault; their case, so they think, is not really so bad after all; they can make amends; their debt is nothing they cannot handle if allowed a little freedom; they can get along all right if merely let alone! Oh, how utterly beyond self-redemption is the plight of sinful men. Let all unsaved persons behold in this parable the plight of every sinner. And let the saved take care to forgive others if they would not incur the whole debt again!

It is not repayment which God demands, seeing that it is impossible in the first place, but the true and righteous beholding one’s self in the true light of his own worthless and bankrupt condition, that makes one an eligible claimant upon the divine mercy. The Roman doctrine of purgatory finds no support here. The forgiveness the king extended to the unmerciful sinner was total, complete, and uncluttered with any penalties whatsoever.

The spectacle of his fellow-servant falling down before him in supplication for mercy was a very similar thing to what he himself had done only a little while before. How strange it is that he felt no mercy, no little touch of pity, no forgiveness for one whose plight must surely have reminded him of his own. He could have alleviated the distress of his fellow-servant with such trifling cost to himself that one can only wonder at a heart so calloused.

Even the worst of offenses committed by men against Christians are as nothing compared to the offenses all have committed against God.

The sorrow of the lesser debtor and the sorrow of all the fellow servants at what was done shows that it is not merely in heaven that sorrow flows from a knowledge of man’s sin, but on earth too.

When recipients of God’s mercy become themselves bitter, vindictive, and unforgiving, all who behold it, in heaven or upon earth, are shamed and grieved

by it. A Christian simply does not have the right, in any case, to withhold forgiveness from others.

The unmerciful servant's sin was not that, while needing mercy, he refused it to another; but that while having obtained mercy, he refused it to another. Those who have been forgiven must forgive.

The great problem in the parable is in the fact that after the unmerciful servant was forgiven he yet landed in the hands of tormentors till he should pay it all. Note a little farther with reference to the doctrine of purgatory. Roman commentators make much of the fact that the unmerciful servant was delivered to tormentors till he should have paid all the debt. As a matter of fact, the word "till" does have two meanings, and only the context may finally determine which is intended. In the case above, the debt is hopeless, and the expression "till he should pay all" does not envision any time, however remote, at which he should be able to work out a debt so large as this, even in purgatory!

### **Verse 35**

The sine qua non, without which no man can be saved, is a forgiving heart. The above teachings of the Master on forgiveness are the most pointedly illustrated the most elaborately portrayed and the most urgently repeated of any of His teachings.

Even if one has been forgiven (as was the unmerciful servant) even if someone does wrong him (as done to the unmerciful servant by the one who owned him a hundred shillings--no matter what the temptation to do otherwise, the law of the Lord is: Forgive, until, seventy times seven times!

## **CHAPTER 19**

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT DIVORCE**

### **JESUS RECEIVING LITTLE CHILDREN**

### **THE RICH YOUNG RULER**

### **TEACHING CONCERNING RICHES**

#### **Verses 1-2**

This verse marks the end of the Galilean ministry and the beginning of the Peraean.

"Ministry" According to A. T. Robertson, A Harmony of the Four Gospels, p. 141, footnote): "He placed the time interval between these two chapters at about six months." This would place these events in the later Peraean ministry. Immense crowds continued to follow Christ, and countless healings took place.

### **Verse 3**

The Pharisees were not asking for information but were hoping to open a conflict between the teachings of Moses and those of Christ. This is actually an unconscious admission on their part of the weakness in Moses' position of divorce because, if Christ had agreed with Moses, they would have had no case. The proof of weakness in Moses' position is that they instinctively knew Christ would not agree with it! Why? They knew in their hearts that Moses was wrong (or at least partially so); and, intuitively, those evil men recognized in Christ a higher purity and knowledge than existed in Moses and decided to take advantage of it if they could.

### **Verse 4**

As always, Christ referred the issue to higher ground, not to what Moses said, but to what God had said. Bypassing Moses altogether, He rested His case upon the word of God, appealing to Genesis 1:27 and 5:2.

### **Verses 5-6**

Jesus' answer was plain, even blunt. God does not allow divorce. There's really no problem at all about knowing God's will. To be sure, problems and difficulties occur, but from what sinful men do, not from any ambiguity regarding what God commanded! "What therefore God has joined together let no man separate."

Divorce is man's will, not God's. How shocking this truth must have been to the Pharisees who not only allowed, but practiced, divorce on a colossal scale. How shocking it is for many today! Men have no trouble knowing the truth on this question, but they do have quite a problem trying to make what they do bear the light of this truth!

### **Verse 7**

Convicted as they were by Jesus' words, they nevertheless strove to place Christ in conflict with Moses. They should have known from the Sermon on the Mount that Christ claimed greater authority than Moses, but what they were

seeking in this instance was a cause to celebrate and to aid their campaign against Jesus' popularity with the people.

### **Verse 8**

There was, in the case before them, no conflict with Moses. Christ set the record straight, correcting their false statement that Moses had "commanded" divorce. On the contrary, He only permitted it, or "suffered it," as an unwelcome choice between two evils. This is still the only possible justification of divorce, there being cases in which it must appear as the lesser of two evils but still wrong. Permitted and yet not in harmony with the Father's perfect will.

### **Verse 9**

Christ's exception does no violence to God's word. "Divorce is still an evil; but, in the case of adultery of one of the partners, it is a lesser evil than living with an unfaithful spouse. Permitted in such a case." Yes, but the dissolution of marriage is contrary to God's law. Paul's exception in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is not an addition to the one given by Christ in this place but should be viewed as presumptive evidence of the condition named in Jesus' exception. Desertion by one of the marriage partners affords the strongest presumptive of adultery also.

The law of God is easy to understand. Problems arise only from the complications that set in when men sin, giving rise to all kinds of fantastic situations.

Vast numbers of situations exist today for which no proper or truly adequate solution is possible. Human laws, the opinions of ecclesiastics, the canon law of churches, the judgments of preachers, bishops, or popes, are all valueless in this area where only God has the right to legislate.

### **Verse 10**

The Pharisees were not the only ones shaken up by the Lord's teaching. The disciples too were surprised and even intimidated at the sanctity and inviolate nature of the marriage tie as expounded by Christ.

### **Verses 11-12**

Eunuchs in ancient times were considered unworthy of being received in the work of God, but Christ opened the kingdom to eunuchs also, and allowed in this place, but did not command, celibacy. This was in answer to the disciple's suggestion that it was not expedient to marry. Christ sanctified and blessed the

marriage covenant by being present and performing His first wonder at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. This passage shows that eunuchs were also to be admitted to the kingdom of heaven.

### **Verse 13**

Christ's love of little children was spontaneously abundant and overflowing. Mark notes that he took them in His arms and blessed them. (Mark 10:16) The conduct of the disciples in this instance of rebuking the people who wanted to bring their children to Christ may be explained by their desire to shield the Master from what they considered to be a waste of His time or unnecessary tax on His strength. Jesus had already made little children the models of faith, trust, humility, teachable, freedom from malice; and in this case He declared that to such as these belongs the kingdom of God.

### **Verses 14-15**

Does this verse teach infant baptism and membership in God's church? Certainly, this is the allegation of those who hold those views; but it is significant here that Christ did not say that little children were "in the kingdom." But that "to such belongs the kingdom!" There is a world of difference. The emphasis is upon child-like behavior and character.

There are no recorded cases of infant baptism in the New Testament. The "household" baptisms are nowhere said to have contained any infants among the number baptized; and any argument from "household" baptisms must be classified as an argument from the silence of the Scriptures.

The basic outline of the new covenant in Jeremiah is identified with the current dispensation in Hebrews 10:16, makes infant membership in the kingdom impossible. Jeremiah taught that no untaught person shall be in God's kingdom. It will not be necessary (in the days of the new covenant) for men to say "know the Lord," for all know Him already. Why? Because they must know Him before they can enter that new relationship. Infants cannot and do not know the Lord in the manner required of all who truly accept Christ.

The baptism of infants is neither commanded nor allowed in the New Testament, a truth which was remarkably emphasized by the events in the Anglican church in 1964, and published in the New York Times (December 16, 1964, p. 16) where it was reported that many distinguished vicars of that faith

would no longer baptize infants, affirming that to do so was contrary to Scripture. The report quoted the clergymen as saying, “We are denying adults the right of baptism” by baptizing infants. Of course, they were correct in that allegation. To baptize infants does “deny” baptism to adults. Peter commanded men to repent and “have yourselves baptized,” and men cannot do this if the church recognizes a ceremony practiced upon them in infancy, contrary to their will, or at least without their consent, and makes that imposition the true baptism.

If an infant is saved by baptism (so-called) in infancy, such a person is saved without repentance, without confession, without knowledge of the Lord, without consciousness of sin, and without any intention of living right. This is contrary to the Lord’s statement that a man “must be born again” before he can see the kingdom of heaven. (John 3:3-5) The baptism and acceptance of infants into the church constitutes the open gate through which all manner of evil and unrepentant people are associated with the church as members. It is precisely this that has destroyed, in large degree, the very character of the church.

## **THE RICH YOUNG RULER**

### **Verses 16-17**

The model character of this rich young man, his high social position, the love which he inspired in the Master, and the supremely important question upon his lips, all arouse special interest in this incident. Mark’s account of Jesus’ words sheds light upon their true meaning. He asked, “Why do you call me good? No one is good, except God alone.” (Mark 10:18)

This to be sure, is one of the passages seized upon by Arians in an effort to show that Christ did not claim to be God in the flesh. Their argument, however, is false. “The Good” was one of the many Judaic titles of God.

Christ’s declaration, “If you would enter into life, keep the commandments,” shows that salvation is conditional upon respect and obedience of God’s word.

### **Verses 18-19**

The omission of certain commands of the Ten Commandments in this summary by Christ may be significant. Certainly the words, “You shall not covet,” touched an area where the young man might not have been so sure of

himself. It appears that Christ may have mentioned his strong points with a view to encouraging him to make the full sacrifice the Lord was about to propose.

**Verse 20**

No wonder Jesus loved him. (Mark 10:21) He was a model of moral excellence and integrity. If human righteousness could have saved anyone, this young man was already saved. Like Cornelius (Acts 10:1-6), he manifested virtue in a dissolute age, faith in an age of infidelity, and deep spirituality in an age of materialism. Most important of all, he recognized the void in his soul, that he was yet unsaved, saying, “All these things I have kept, what am I still lacking?”

Note: Many in all ages, having the possessions of this young man, would have felt that they needed nothing. It is a credit to his perception that he recognized the deep and vital lack within his heart and brought the problem to the Master.

**Verse 21**

For all his youth and beauty, a cancer was eating away at his heart; and Christ made a move to eradicate it. “Go and sell your possessions.” How shocking is that command! What did it mean? What it meant for him we know; but what does it mean for us? Are Christians now commanded to sell all they have and give it to the poor? For many, these are hard questions. Nevertheless, in the New Testament it is abundantly clear that selling all one’s possessions was never made a universal condition of discipleship.

The Lord’s teaching in the parable of the pounds, the parable of talents, and many other passages suggest and even demand that ownership of property was not condemned by Jesus nor forbidden to members of His kingdom.

Why, then, did Jesus thus command the subject of this interview? Two possible reasons appear:

- (1) Covetousness had reached such a degree in the young man’s heart that only by divesting himself of his wealth could he truly turn to Christ.
- (2) Christ, in all probability, was calling him to a place in the apostleship, an office that did require forsaking all that one had, just



as Peter and the others among the Twelve had forsaken all that they had to follow Jesus.

**Verse 22**

This is an unhappy ending of a very interesting and exciting story, especially if it is supposed that the young man continued in his rejection of the Christ. The sorrowful countenance indicated the struggle going on in his heart; his going away from the Lord shows what his final decision was. Projecting the life of this young man, as it probably developed, into the historical period following his interview with Jesus, reveals some intriguing possibilities. If he continued in covetous rejection of Jesus, and if he lived to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the soldiers of Titus and Vespasian, there is every possibility that his wealth and all his posterity perished in that awful siege.

Whether such was true or not, it would have been far better for that young man to have sold all, given it to the poor, and followed Jesus. Christ knew literally what was best for him. It will be recalled that no Christian lost his life in the siege.

**Verse 23**

Why, then, do we all strive to be rich? Is it that we desire to impede our soul's entry into the kingdom of God? Do men really wish to do it the hard way? Then let them get rich. That will provide an acid test that most men cannot pass. The rich are not hopeless. Christ did not say they cannot be saved, only that it is "hard" for them to enter.

**Verse 24**

All attempts to make such a thing possible must appear ridiculous in the light of Christ's statement, a moment later, that such is "impossible" for men. Only the power of God can bring a man of wealth to leave off trusting in his riches and to place his hope in God through Christ, or to possess his possessions instead of being possessed by them.

**Verse 25**

It is amazing even yet, that all personal excellence cannot avail anything unless there is a total surrender to the will of Jesus. The truth is clear, that Christ will be all or nothing in men's lives.

### **Verse 26**

The difficulty, not the impossibility, of salvation for the rich is what Jesus taught. These strict words of Christ must have appeared as “hard sayings,” even to the Twelve.

### **Verse 27**

William P. Barker (*As Matthew Saw the Master*, p. 96) suggested that Peter was here suggesting preferential treatment of himself and others of the Twelve who had “left all” to follow Christ; and, in view seems tenable. He said, “Peter self-righteously reminded Jesus of the sacrifices the disciples had made, then hinted for preferential treatment, asking, ‘What then shall we have?’”

Whatever element of self-righteousness may have been in Peter’s question, it was a valid one; and Jesus answered it in the most emphatic manner possible.

### **Verse 28**

This was not a reference to literal thrones but to spiritual thrones of eminence and authority in Christ’s kingdom from which they should exercise influence, not over fleshly Israel but over the spiritual Israel which is the church. (Romans 9:6; Galatians 3:29)

Note that no preference was given Peter. There was not to be one throne occupied by Peter and his successors, but twelve thrones, implying the equality of the Twelve.

The word of the apostles, that is, the New Testament, is the instrument through which they exercise the authority that Jesus granted them in this promise.

Times of the regeneration refers to the times of the new birth namely, the time of the present dispensation when men are hearing the gospel, obeying it, and being born again.

The reign will continue till all enemies have been put under foot. (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) When death, the last enemy, is destroyed, Christ will not initiate a reign but will end it, delivering up the kingdom to the Father.

### **Verse 29**

What a promise of blessing for God’s children is this! Two things, yea three are promised here:

- (1) First, there is the multiplication, on a vast scale, of the wealth that men may forsake to follow Christ.
- (2) Second, there is the multiplication, on the same vast scale, of loved ones, however near and dear, who may be forsaken for His name's sake.
- (3) Third, there is the promise of eternal life.

But, looking beyond this magnificent triple promise, who is He that made it, and how shall He fulfill it? The answer is God, and God is able to do all things. Here then is another passage that must be placed in the category of teaching that Christ is God.

Words like these must be counted sheer nonsense if spoken by a mere man; but, when spoken by Christ, they warm the hearts of men in all generations.

### **Verse 30**

The application of these words to Peter's question is thus: God does not allow any system of seniority to determine ultimate rewards in His kingdom. The seeming implication of Peter's words to the effect that some preferential treatment might be in order for the earliest disciples who had given up so much to follow Christ finds its emphatic answer in this, that is not how long, but how faithfully, men have served that determines destiny.

William P. Barker (*Ibid.*, p. 96) wrote: "How often do we think that because we are "old timers" in a congregation we have proprietary rights over the program and property! Everyone has met the super churchman who lets it be known that... "I've been coming to this church for . . . years." Meaning that he has been promoted to Senior Vice-President of God, Inc!

Judas, of course, was one of the first; and, as regards the lives of the apostles, Paul was one of the last.

**CHAPTER 20**  
**PARABLE OF THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD**  
**THIRD PROPHETIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PASSION**  
**REQUEST OF ZEBEDEE'S SONS**  
**AND TWO BLIND MEN AT JERICHO**

**Verse 1**

Analogies:

- (1) The householder is God.
- (2) The chief steward is Jesus Christ to whom the Father has committed judgment.
- (3) The vineyard is the church.
- (4) The laborers who are hired to work in the vineyard are Christians.
- (5) The penny payment stands for the eternal reward in heaven.
- (6) The evening is the end of life, and, in a sense, the judgment.
- (7) The ones first hired represent the legalist and his "contract" with God.
- (8) The ones hired last, without any agreement, are those who rely on God's grace.
- (9) The generosity of the householder represents the goodness of God.
- (10) The complainers represent the self-righteousness of those who consider themselves worth more than others.
- (11) The time-sequence in hiring represents acceptance of the gospel call at early and later times in the life-cycle of Christians.
- (12) The work represents service Christians are expected to give God in His church.

Let it be noted that God expects workers, not shirkers, in His kingdom. He hired laborers, not drones. The initiative, as always, rests with God and not with men. From that remote day when God went seeking Adam in Paradise, the Father still seeks men to worship and love Him in order to redeem them. (John 4:23) It is obvious also that God expects men to work in His farm, or vineyard; that is, in His church! The laborers were hired into His vineyard.

The place to serve God is in the true church established by Jesus Christ. No one can suppose that the householder (God) in this parable would have rewarded the workers or labor in any field but His own.

Many commentators refuse to hazard an opinion as to what the “early morning” means; and some, of course would remand it to secondary status in the parable, viewing it as incidental or inert matter.

Following the view that the “evening” represents the end of life, this writer would refer the time-sequence events go various ages of converts; thus, a young person accepts the call early in the morning, others later; and old persons, nearly at the end of life, are said to come in at the eleventh hour.

### **Verse 2**

A denarius is eighteen cents in silver (equivalent to a day’s wage). Inconsistency may appear in the fact that it is not always the young who take an attitude of “bargaining” with the Lord, so much work for so much pay.

The temptation to bargain is greater on the part of one who contemplates giving his whole life to God and who brings relative innocence and purity of youth to the vineyard. Conversely, the temptation is diminished in those who come later in life, scarred and broken by sin, and realizing their plight of unworthiness and hopelessness far more keenly than any young person could possibly realize it.

### **Verses 3-5**

God’s invitation to men is constant and not confined to any age or condition of life. Morning, noon, evening and twilight, the Master calls men to work in His vineyard. Notice too, the Master’s evaluation of the work men do outside the church. Those not working in the vineyard are simply standing around “idle.” All is lost except what is done for Christ and at His direction.

### **Verses 6-7**

One of the mysteries is why these men were not hired earlier. If, as the householder suggested, they had been standing round all day, why had they not been hired already? The householder was then on his fifth trip to the market place; laborers were urgently needed; and it may not be supposed that the householder had deliberately passed them by without an invitation; and yet they

alleged that the reason for their unemployment was their lack of opportunity to work, or lack of an employer.

God is calling men all the time; but, through the influence of Satan, some do not hear, or hearing they do not believe, or believing yield to various seductive deterrents.

We reject the view that those eleventh-hour workers were justified in their day-long idleness on the grounds that they had no chance to work. True, that is what they said the reason was; but we appeal to the words of the householder as a complete refutation of their flimsy alibi.

Would the wise and generous householder (standing here for God Himself) have charged those men with idleness unless he in fact had seen them on his repeated trips to the market place? It is a commentary on the love, fairness, and goodness of God, that the householder accepted them anyway.

### **Verse 8**

The chief steward in this analogy is Christ our Lord to whom the Father has committed judgment; He is the head of the church and shall preside at the judgment of the Great Day. Christ shall mete out to the wicked and to the righteous their just dues.

“When evening had come . . .” indicates the end of earthly life; and, due to the association of judgment with life’s end, it has a dual significance, applying not only to the end of life in the earthly phase of the kingdom but having an application to the eternal judgment also. In any case, no pay until evening. That is the big message here. Men may never abandon their labors in the church on the assumption that they have done enough.

Payment will come at the end of the day; and it may be dogmatically assumed that any who abandoned work earlier received nothing at all for their labors.

### **Verse 9**

The representation of eternal life by so small a consideration as a day’s wages raises a question and certainly stands opposite from the usual analogies employed by the Lord, such as the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the banquet in the king’s house.

The great wealth of the rich young ruler and his inability to give it up to follow Christ, and the subsequent fixation of the apostle's attention on the problem of rewards and sacrifices, and the Savior's elaboration of the believers' great reward (see on Matthew 19:29)—all these things had contrived to throw the whole problem out of perspective. This parable is a reduction of the whole economy of redemption to such a minute scale that those apostles, accustomed to dealing with small things, would have no difficulty at all grasping the truth. Eternal life, together with all spiritual blessings, is made to correspond to so simple and as ordinary a thing as a denarius, a day's pay; and all the sacrifices, labors, and exertions of men to attain eternal life are made to appear as a day's work, or even a very small fraction of a day's work.

Whatever men do, however long or short their service to God, whatever of sacrifice, blood, or tears, however soon or late they began to serve Him, the reward is so fantastically great that the conditions for obtaining it, whether more or less in certain cases, must forever appear utterly and completely insignificant.

The denarius appears in the parable as the symbol of those rewards simply because that was the usual day's pay in that age.

#### **Verse 10**

The expectation of those men was groundless because they had firmly agreed with the householder for a shilling a day. Their expectation of more resulted from the comparison they made between themselves and the ones who came to work later. It was that very thing, the envy, jealousy, and petty attention to little differences—it was all that Jesus was trying to remove from the apostles' hearts. The perverse and sinful judgments and rankings of themselves among themselves, with the consequent jockeying and maneuvering for position and advantage—these things constitute one of man's most shameful and hurtful patterns of behavior. Paul paid his respects to that vice in these words. (2 Corinthians 10:12)

The workers first employed fell into that same foolish trap. As a result, they developed a conceit that turned to outrage when the householder made them equal to the latecomers.

### **Verses 11-12**

Why were they angry? The householder had interfered with and upset their petty schedule of ranks and values.

Every minister of the gospel has heard this same murmuring in the church when someone says, "Why should he be a deacon; I've been in his congregation twenty years!" "Why should that man be an elder or on the building committee? My uncle Charlie started this church in a schoolhouse; we've all been members here since it started!" This is exactly what Christ was fighting in this parable.

"You have made them equal to us . . ." There is the bull's eye of the trouble. We are the people. We've done the work, shouldered the load, borne the heat, and carried the mail. Those latecomers ought to be away down on the scale compared to us!

Every church on earth has the "us" problem. It existed among the sacred numbers of the twelve apostles. But wherever the problem exists, nothing solves it like getting things in the proper perspective. That is what Jesus sought to do with this parable.

The first ones became last by their very bitterness and pettiness and their self-righteous preferment of themselves above others; and those last became first by their loving trust of the householder. This is the principal point Christ Himself drew from the parable.

### **Verse 13**

The cause of the trouble in that ancient vineyard was not the generous and loving householder but the spiteful jealousy of the laborers hired that morning. Jesus' use of the word "Friend" here does not carry the same connotation that the word has for many in our day. Note: Jesus addressed Judas as, "Friend" who came to betray Him. (Matthew 26:50)

### **Verse 14**

"Take what is yours . . ." Could it be that some of those disgruntled workers had even thrown their pay on the ground at the chief steward's feet? The words certainly do suggest that.

What a wreckage of human personality comes of envy and jealousy! Envy, pride, self-righteousness, and egotism had so embittered those men that they



repudiated a fair and honorable bargain, turned on their benevolent employer, murmured against him, and threw their wages on the ground!

Ancient and modern expositors alike seem to stumble on the problem, “How can people like that be represented as redeemed?” The complainers in the parable certainly appear as having their wages thrust upon them after having thrown their pay on the ground.

This is another example of the Father’s goodness, just like that represented by the father of the prodigal son who received him, and later went and entreated the elder brother also.

God will save people like that if they give Him half a chance to do so. If we disallow such a possibility, we fall into the same error as the “firsters” in supposing that the meek and gentle one’s trusting in God’s grace are better than they and that the good householder would in some way injure us if He saved sinners like them! In any case, the solemn warning in the next verse is squarely directed at all the “Us’s” in either category.

#### **Verse 15**

All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. This parable shows that men way forget this in two ways:

- (1) They may forget it like the ones who worked all day and supposed that they were better than the ones who came later; or
  - (2) They may forget it like the eleventh hour workers would have forgotten it if they had objected to the householder’s payment of the “firster” on the grounds that the “firsters” had the wrong attitude!
- Let no man object to God’s saving men on any grounds whatsoever,
- (1) whether from the allegation that some have not worked like “us,” or
  - (2) from the allegation that their attitude makes them inferior to “us,” or from whatever premise, real or imaginary, true or false. It is altogether righteous and lawful for God to do what He wills.

#### **Verse 16**

The grand lesson is that men do not deserve or merit salvation. In the case of the laborers, those who worked all day did not deserve their pay after having thrown it on the ground. That act forfeited their further right to it. In spite of their lack of merit, the good householder required them to pick it up, thus

giving it to them in spite of their forfeiture. The ones who labored only an hour did not deserve their pay either. They had certainly done nothing to merit a day's wages. Their reward was as much of grace as was that of the bitter "firsters!"

Some of the people of our own day who fancy that their sweet and pious attitude in some way entitles them to God's favor should take note of this. The householder had every right to have cut them off with a trifle instead of a whole day's wage.

Men simply do not and cannot merit salvation. Men do not merit salvation either by works or by attitudes of trust. The meek and trustful spirit is to be desired; so also is the worker; but neither class of men, nor yet another class combining the virtues of both, can in any degree merit salvation.

### **THE THIRD PROPHETIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PASSION**

#### **Verses 17-19**

In the two previous prophetic announcements of His impending Passion. In 16:21 and 17:22-23, Christ had revealed the following details of His approaching death and resurrection:

- (1) Death would be accomplished in Jerusalem.
- (2) Scribes would have a part in it.
- (3) Chief priests would be involved.
- (4) The elders of the people would also be instruments of His death.
- (5) He would suffer many things of them.
- (6) He would not merely die, but be killed, a far different thing.
- (7) He would rise from the dead.
- (8) His resurrection would occur on the third day.
- (9) He would fall into their hands by being, "delivered up," that is, betrayed.

In the place before us, Christ added the following supplement details:

- (1) He would be condemned to death, indicating trials by tribunals.
- (2) The Gentiles would have a part in it.
- (3) Gentiles would mock Him.
- (4) Gentiles would scourge Him.

(5) Gentiles would crucify Him.

It is plain that every circumstance of those awful events was fully known by the Lord before it occurred.

There were numbers of occasions when Christ withdrew from the hustle and bustle of daily work to engage in prayer, meditation, contemplation, and quietness. It was in such an hour that He gathered strength to approach the cross. Disciples in all ages should not neglect the ministry of the quiet hour in which the soul may make its soundings, the true perspective be ascertained, and in which the resources of the spirit may be replenished at the fountain of prayer and meditation.

#### **Verse 20**

Christ had not yet succeeded in eliminating the “me first” virus from the hearts of the Twelve. James and John, aided by their mother, pressed Him for a decision that would leave out Peter and the others.

Repeated announcements of Christ’s impending death (and resurrection which they continued to ignore) only kindled greater enthusiasm of their part for solving the problem of “head man” in the church after Jesus’ death. The wife of Zebedee did a noble thing in worshiping Jesus; but her request was founded in ignorance of what His kingdom would be.

#### **Verse 21**

The request of the wife of Zebedee meant that she wanted James and John to be the first and second ministers in the coming kingdom, envisioning such offices, no doubt, as those of Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer! Some have found a mystical fulfillment of her request in the fact that James was the first apostle to die and John was the last.

#### **Verse 22**

The word “cup” as used in this verse refers to the bitterness of Jesus’ sufferings. He prayed in Gethsemane that “this cup” might pass from Him. The ready response of James and John showed how little they understood the implications of what the Master had just said.

#### **Verse 23**

Christ did not reveal who would have such honors. All such things had been prepared and predetermined by the Father in the foreknowledge of God’s

eternal purpose; and the important places in His kingdom were in no sense up for grabs under the press of human ambitions. The prophecy that James and John would indeed drink of the Savior's cup was fulfilled when James was martyred under the sword of Herod (Acts 12), and, in all probability, John suffered at a much later date.

Christ did far more than merely deny the request of that ambitious woman on behalf of her sons. He went much farther and explained that the usual concept of some men ruling over others would not be allowed in the kingdom of God under any circumstances.

#### **Verse 24**

Why this indignation against James and John? Was it not their mother who had made the request? Yes. But without doubt James and John had also desired top honors and had enlisted the good offices of their mother to help procure the coveted positions.

#### **Verses 25-27**

This statement of Christ does not merely repeat a well-known fact for emphasis. This is not a case of poetry in which the true meaning of the first clause is exactly duplicated in the second.

The full meaning appears when the pyramidal quality of Gentile government is observed.

- (1) Their Great Ones
- (2) The Rulers of the Gentiles
- (3) The Gentiles

Christ denied any such pyramidal system of government any place whatsoever in His kingdom. "You are all brothers." (23:8) True greatness in Chris's kingdom lies not in office but in service. Jesus very wisely identified such pyramided governments as "Gentile," thus indicating their rejection in His kingdom of love and service, rather than of strutting power. The Gentile forms of power that existed in so-called Christian religions today does not, nor cannot make it right.

#### **Verse 28**

It is strange that the disciples did not see that quality in Jesus, or seeing it, seemed incapable of imitating it. His humility, meekness, and utter disregard of

worldly ambition did not evoke any similar attitude on the part of the Twelve. The reason appears to be in this very text. They were still under sin. The great ransom for man's salvation had not yet been paid.

A ransom for many! "Who gave Himself a ransom for all." (1 Timothy 2:6) "God sent . . . His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 2:1-2) "You were redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ." (1 Peter 1:19) "For you were bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:20) Ah, how wonderful is the thought that Christ ransoms from sin! In the terrible night of this world's darkness and despair, how grandly do these glorious words go marching in the gloom of human wretchedness and sin—ransomed, redeemed, propitiated, bought with a price.

## **THE BLIND MEN OF JERICHO**

### **Verse 29**

This miracle is recorded by all three of the synoptics, and their various accounts present a nice little package of so-called "discrepancies" which are to the peculiar delight of skeptics and agnostics.

The problem of the time or place of this miracle, whether as Christ was leaving or entering Jericho, disappears in the light of what is certainly known about the locality. A. T. Robertson (A Harmony of the Four Gospels, p. 149, footnote) said: "The discrepancy as to place, "as He went out from Jericho," or "as He drew nigh to Jericho," is best explained by the recent suggestion that the healing occurred after He left old Jericho, and as He was approaching the new Jericho which Herod the Great had built at some distance away."

As always, alleged contradictions flow out of men's ignorance of all the facts not out of any real errors by the sacred writers. Add to Robertson's observation the obvious and undeniable fact that, with two cities of Jericho being close together, any blind beggar would naturally choose a site between them! Both and all three gospels are correct, He was entering one Jericho, leaving the other.

### **Verse 30**

The difficulty mentioned above, whether there was one healed or two, is resolved in the truth that there were actually two, as stated by Matthew; and that Luke and Mark, following a pattern often observed in the New Testament,

mentioned only one, the most important (to them). Mark's account shows that he was personally acquainted with Bartimaeus and His father. Thus, the healing of one known personally to Mark as a respected friend would naturally overshadow the other healings that occurred at the same time.

Those unfortunate men heard that Jesus was passing by, and they began to cry out for mercy, calling Him the Son David, a popular Jewish name for the Messiah.

### **Verse 31**

The multitude might have acted out of consideration for the Master in thus trying to restrain the cries of those blind men; but it appears far more probable that Christ's old enemies, the Pharisees or their spies, were also present (though not mentioned), and that their efforts sprang from an evil desire to silence those loud proclamations of Christ as the Messiah.

On no other occasion is it recorded that the multitude tried to silence a cry for help. The repeated cries, "Thou Son of David," echoing up and down the wayside were just such an affront to the Pharisees as to provoke their interference with it if, as might be supposed, they were present. Be that as it may, whether done by the multitude with or without Pharisaical inducement, Satan must have been the prime instigator.

Just imagine the spiritually blind Pharisees trying to "shush" the cries of those blind beggars who were screaming to high heaven in the presence of a great multitude that here indeed was the Messiah, a fact perfectly clear to everyone except his evil lordship, the Pharisee!

### **Verse 32**

Love stands still at the cry for help. How noble was our Lord's conduct on that occasion! He was never heedless of the cries of the poor, the suffering, the sick, or the blind, or the unfortunate. Multitudes may be in a hurry, but Christ is not in a hurry.

### **Verse 33**

Mark adds that Bartimaeus cast off his garment that he might better run to Christ. Thus, naked, or nearly so, this poor beggar, blind, despised, and suffering the most abject shame and poverty, appeared as an object of the utmost pity as he stood trembling before the Lord of Life and heard the blessed

words, “What will you that I should do for you?” There was no aching hope in a blind man’s heart that could surpass the desire to see.

Verse 34

Christ’s wonderful compassion set Him apart from others. How few there are who have the grace to see and the compassion to pity the sufferings of others. It is far easier to ascribe their woeful condition to their own sins or misdeeds and to go blindly and heedlessly onward without regard to those of our fellow mortals who make up the company of earth’s wretched sufferers. How glorious it is that Jesus saw the man, and all the human tragedy, and the bleeding human heart that beat beneath the beggar’s tattered shirt.

**DIVISION VI  
GLORIFICATION OF THE MESSIAH THROUGH SUFFERINGS  
DEATH AND RESURRECTION  
“GO MAKE DISCIPLES, ETC.”  
(Chapters 21 through 28)**

**CHAPTER 21  
TRIUMPHAL ENTRY  
CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE  
THE WITHERED FIG TREE  
PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS  
PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMAN**

**THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY  
(Verses 1-11)**

Verse 1

The tremendous events of the final days of our Lord’s earthly ministry were then to begin. In Matthew 20:18 are recorded Jesus’ words, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem.”

Jesus would begin to do those wonderful and awesome things of which He had so often spoken to the Twelve. Their period of schooling was over. The dramatic accomplishment of man’s salvation would begin at once.

### **Verse 2**

Many of the prophecies concerning Christ were fulfilled by His enemies; some were fulfilled by His friends; and still others, like one here, were fulfilled by the direct intervention of Christ Himself to bring it to pass

### **Verse 3**

If the owner of those animals was a disciple of Jesus, the Lord's request would be a command; if the owner was not a disciple, he was providentially prompted to grant the request.

### **Verses 4-5**

By identifying Himself in such a manner, Christ definitely laid claim to the office of Messiah, setting the stage for His public proclamation as the true King.

### **Verses 6-7**

The reason for the use of two animals is not clear, unless it was Jesus' strict attention to the prophecy which mentioned both the donkey and its foal. He gave the proud Pharisees no excuse for not recognizing the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. The use of the disciple's garments was practical as well as symbolical.

### **Verse 8**

Many historical examples of triumphal entries could be cited; but no triumph ever known at any time or place could be compared with that staged by the world's True Light on that last Sunday preceding His resurrection, a day called from the earliest Christian times "Palm Sunday," the name derived from the branches cut from trees and spread in the way.

### **Verse 9**

The multitude recognized the true King of Israel and greeted Him accordingly. They knew Him for the Messiah.

### **Verses 10-11**

The question, "Who is this?" is of the utmost importance and the eternal destiny of every man born on earth shall finally be determined by his personal response to that question. How strange it is that Jerusalem welcomed Him with Hosannas on Sunday but reversed themselves and crucified Him before the week ended.



The multitudes hailed Jesus as a prophet from Nazareth but apparently did not fully comprehend that Jesus could be none other than the world's only Savior.

The evil influence of the Pharisees may be detected in the stress which the people laid on Christ's connection with Nazareth. True, the people hailed Him as "the Son of David," but they were still partially blind as to His complete identity. Christ was from Bethlehem, having been born there, but it suited the evil purposes of the religious leaders to stress Jesus' residence in Nazareth. Even those who called Him "Son of David" were not well grounded in their conviction.

## **CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE**

**(Verses 12-17)**

### **Verse 12**

The high priest Annas, as a young man, had put a person to death contrary to Roman law, and had been removed from office; but he was still recognized by the orthodox as the true high priest. Four or five of Annas' sons and sons-in-law successively held the title and performed the functions of the office during Annas' long lifetime, growing immensely rich in the gross commercialism with which they burdened the temple services. Only certain "authorized" sacrifices could be offered; and those had to be bought from the temple keepers and paid for with temple money, giving the concessionaires a double profit on all transactions.

The action of Christ in upsetting this evil business could not have failed to meet with strong popular approval and at the same time to stir up the most vicious and vehement opposition on the part of those whose shameful traffic was thus jeopardized.

### **Verse 13**

Christ here quoted Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. This was the second time He cleansed the temple, John's record of the other occasion (John 2:13) as supplementary to this one mentioned by the synoptics. This type of activity by Christ was fully in harmony with what was expected of the Messiah from

Malachi 3:1-3. Comparison of the two cleansings shows an interval of two years between them.

#### **Verses 14-15**

The miracles wrought by Jesus on that occasion were powerful witnesses of His authority and power, and were more than sufficient to convince all right-minded persons of the truth and divinity of His holy mission.

The divine Messenger had indeed suddenly come to His temple, as Malachi had prophesied. (Malachi 3:1-3) This strong assertion of Christ's power and authority and its obvious acceptance by many only infuriated the Pharisees, who lost no time, but objected at once.

#### **Verses 16-17**

Again Jesus appealed to the Scriptures, (see Psalm 8:2). The praise of the children Jesus did not reject. It was indeed fulfillment of prophecy and should have been recognized by the Pharisees as additional proof of the identity of the Holy One among them. Since those who should have praised Him refused to do so, the very children took up the cry; and the temple rang with the praises of its true Head and authority. God's will be done!

Bethany, the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, became Christ's base of operation for the crucial events of the Mount of Olives and was about two miles distant from Jerusalem on the road to Jericho.

### **WITHERING OF THE FIG TREE**

#### **Verse 18**

He might have remained all night in prayer at some remote recess in the vicinity of Bethany, which was in fact nestled into a tiny depression on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Christ continued all night in prayer before naming the Twelve, and the awful events at hand were every whit as important and urgent as the former.

#### **Verse 19**

Of all of Jesus' miracles, only this one was a curse. It was absolutely necessary that Christ's miracles should attest the ultimate judgment of God upon evil works. Otherwise, it could have left an impression that divine power would be used only to heal, help, and bless man. The lesson of the fig tree,

however, proves that God will eventually judge mankind and punish wickedness.

Jesus' curse of that fig tree was an act of mercy, not of wrath, for the warning absolutely necessary to be given fell upon an inanimate object rather than upon a person. Who could be critical if Christ had struck the entire Sanhedrin blind or dead? That He did not do so cannot mean they did not deserve such a fate, because they did, and yet, as a warning to them of the wrath that would surely come, He chose instead to wither the fig tree.

Note some of the Pharisees objections:

- (1) It is affirmed that Christ had no right to expect fruit of that tree because, "it was not the time of figs. (Mark 11:13)

Richard Trench (Notes on the Parables, p. 479-480) said: "This objection disappears in the light of the fact that, of the variety of tree indicated here, the fruit always appeared before the leaves; and that, in view of the leaves, Christ had every reason to expect fruit also."

- (2) A second objection is that Christ pretended to look for fruit when He knew there was none.

That too is false, because Christ, seeing the tree decked out in full foliage, recognized it instantly as a perfect example of the Jewish religious economy, which, though it was not the time of fruit (the Savior having not yet made the sacrifice), nevertheless professed true righteousness. Christ promptly used it to teach the profound lessons applicable to the Jewish nation.

- (3) The objection that Christ vented anger on a tree overlooks the fact that the incident was a warning of the true anger that would eventually fall upon the disobedient.

Men who make this objection are actually of the opinion that God should never be really angry with the wicked. But the overwhelming truth of the Bible is that the full measure of the wrath of Almighty God shall eventually fall upon every wicked man and that every wicked nation shall be brought into judgment. Christ's cursing of the barren fig tree was a powerful warning of the eventual overflow of the wrath of God; and, far from being a reprehensible action on the part of Christ. It is an example of how even His warning was accomplished without any inconvenience or suffering on the part of sinful men.

In connection with this, let it be noted that the fig tree was not cursed for barrenness. The fig orchards were full of barren trees He did not curse. This one was cursed for its barrenness while professing by its leaves to be fruitful! That was exactly the case with Israel. They were barren spiritually; yet by their elaborate pretensions to righteousness, they advertised a true religion, they simply did not possess.

Moreover, they were at that very moment in the process of rejecting the very Head of all true religion.

The curse of the fig tree was a true prophecy of God's rejection of Israel (until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in). Not long after the apostles began to preach the kingdom of heaven following the resurrection, the main-stream of Christianity by-passed Israel altogether. Furthermore, it appears that a warning is in this incident for all of every age who may be more pleased with an empty profession of true religion than with a proper exhibition of the genuine fruits thereof. God could not be pleased with empty professions now than He was then.

Note: The chronology of this event is as follows: The tree was cursed on Monday morning as Christ was on the way to the cleansing of the temple. Matthew indicates that it withered immediately; but the following morning Peter observed that it was withered completely from its roots upward and totally dried up. It was probably not noticed by them on Monday evening as they returned to Bethany, due to its being twilight or dark. (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21)

#### **Verse 20**

Outdoorsmen like the apostles could not fail to be impressed with such a wonder. That a tree should be abundant foliage one day and dead the next is simply contrary to nature. The one fig tree in all the orchards and by all the waysides of earth which pretended to righteousness was that one chosen by Jesus to represent Judaism. None of the other nations made any pretense of righteousness. Both Jews and Gentiles were equally barren.

Judaism constitutes a signal fulfillment of this prophecy of withering away. Before Christ, the Jews made numerous proselytes all over the world; but today they are practically powerless, in any effective way, to make proselytes. "No longer shall there be any fruit from you." (v. 19)

### **Verses 21-22**

This is a repetition of the remarkable promise Christ made the disciples in Matthew 17:20. Such a promise staggers the imagination; and the very least that it can mean is that all moral and spiritual difficulties will disappear for those who pray in faith for their removal. However, we do not dare limit this promise. Note also the two great hindrances to effective prayer. Men do not have their prayers answered because they do not ask, or asking, do not believe. What a challenge to prayer is this!

### **Verse 23**

This question must rank as one of the most important ever asked. This question should be addressed to all; preachers and teachers of every religion; and every church should also answer it. If the authority is from men, the actions and teachings are worthless; if from God, they are valid and should be accepted.

### **Verses 24-25**

The proposition Christ made was fair and sincere. If those complainers would answer a simple question He had for them, Christ agreed to answer theirs. Furthermore, Jesus well knew they were unable to answer the simple question He asked.

Then came the question regarding the baptism of John. It was devastating for those hypocrites, because they, contrary to popular belief, had rejected John as a true prophet and had refused to acknowledge his witness of Christ as being the true "Lamb of God."

They were quick to see that not Christ but they themselves were trapped by the question; and after a conference, they elected to lie about it pretending not to know the answer.

Of course, Christ rejected their question, not only because they knew the answer already, but because they were completely prejudiced against the truth. It would have been casting pearls before swine if He had answered them. Yet even when confronted by their hatred and falsehood, the Lord uttered a beautiful parable setting their conduct in such a frame of reference as to show even at that late hour, His hope of recovering some of them from their blindness and sins.

## THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

### Verses 28-31

Analogies:

- (1) The man who had two sons is God.
- (2) The first son represents the publicans and harlots.
- (3) The second son represents the self-righteous Pharisees.
- (4) The vineyard stands for God's true religion.
- (5) The man's equal treatment of both sons suggests God's impartial dealings with all men.

The two sons are also typical of two types of persons in all ages. It is noteworthy that God recognizes only two classes of persons, shamefully delinquent in one way or another, thus attesting the universal sin and wickedness of man. There is a sense in which this parable stands for the Jews and Gentiles as represented by the two sons; but the immediate and primary application of it was made by Christ Himself who referred it to the publicans and harlots on one hand and the Pharisees on the other.

There are two destinies revealed for the two classes of men, heaven and hell (Matthew 25:34, 41); and the two classes are set forth under a number of figures in the New Testament, such as: the wheat and the chaff (3:12), the wheat and the tares (13:25), the rejects and the keepers (13:48-49), the sheep and the goats (25:32), builders on rock, or on sand (7:24-26), etc. The two sons of this parable represent the grand moral cleavage in humanity, which in God's sight forms two and only two classes, the good and the bad.

The Father's invitation. "Son, go work today in the vineyard," is a marvel of tenderness and reasonableness. It is impartial, being addressed to both alike; it is loving and tender, being addressed to both alike. It is loving and tender, being prefaced by a term of endearment, "Son." It is reasonable, since nothing could be more proper than for a son to work in the vineyard he himself may inherit; it is specific, not any vineyard, but the vineyard being indicated; it is urgent, work being required not tomorrow, but today; it is necessary, because without work which was commanded, the vineyard would perish. All of these

characteristics of the father's command have an application today in God's command, or invitation, for men to work in His vineyard, the church.

The first son's response. "I will not." This is typical of the response of publicans and harlots whom Jesus made the heroes of this parable. Theirs was an open, frank, rude rejection of the Father's command.

He refused to accept any responsibility to honor and obey the one who had given him life, nourished him in infancy, supported him in weakness, and who was entitled to his respect and obedience. All who refuse to serve God in His church are guilty of the same thing.

The first son's response did not cancel or remove any of his duties or obligations. Some in the church do not see this. They "won't promise anything," "will not make a pledge," etc., as if such refusal would cancel or diminish any duty. However, all of man's duties in the church derive their authority, not from man's voluntarily accepting them, but from God who has the right to command His creation.

The second son's response. The second son said, "I go, sir," but went not! Such a response was proper and correct as far as it went. The fact that he was a smooth hypocrite who did not follow his profession with valid obedience cannot negate the correct nature of his verbal response. He said exactly what he should have said. His later failure cannot change the righteous character of his words. Those who profess to serve God are right in such a profession, and it ought to serve as a stimulus to perform deeds consistent with it. In the parable, the second son's response represents that of the Pharisees and their crowd who professed a holiness they would not exhibit.

### **Verse 31**

Christ's application of the parable to the Pharisees and to the class of sinners they most desired is in some ways rather shocking. It must have appeared positively outrageous to the hardened hypocrites who first heard it. It does not appear, of course, that Christ condoned or endorsed gross sin in any such manner. He was only stating an incomprehensible fact, witnessed in all generations, that many who have the finest inheritance, the best upbringing, the most sacred privileges, and the maximum exposure to truth and righteousness, far from taking the lead in true religion, actually despise it, and who definitely

must be classed as secondary to far grosser persons who, though scarred and burned by sin, nevertheless reject evil ways and turn humbly to the Lord for forgiveness! Every congregation has its examples of both classes.

Why did the publicans and the harlots enter into the kingdom of God before the Pharisees, or, as was generally the case, without them? The reasons are plainly given in the word of God.

- (1) The class composed of publicans and harlots were conscious of sins, whereas the Pharisees were not, as shown by Luke's account of the Pharisee and the publican (18:9ff), indicating that no sin is greater than being conscious of none.
- (2) The publicans and sinners heard Him (Luke 15:1), but the Pharisaical class refused to hear.
- (3) They believed Him (Matthew 21:32).
- (4) They repented.
- (5) They were baptized (Luke 3:12; 7:29-30).

If the Pharisees had been willing to do this, they too might have entered into the kingdom. In the very next words, Christ shows how they failed.

### **Verse 32**

The prior entry of publicans and harlots was not due to any divine preference for their kind of sins, but was the result of their response, their hearing, believing, repenting, and their being baptized. All the vaunted righteousness of the Pharisees could not save them while they were in rebellion against God's commands, nor can all the moral excellence of upright men today avail anything for them apart from faith and obedience of the Lord's commandments. By the same premise, all the sins of the publicans and harlots did not take away their hope as long as they heard and obeyed the Lord. Christ Himself put it like this, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved, but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." (Mark 16:16)



## THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

### Verse 33

Analogies:

- (1) The householder is God.
- (2) The vineyard represents the privilege of the Jewish nation.
- (3) The planting of the vineyard refers to God's establishment of Israel as a favored nation.
- (4) The hedge, winepress, tower, etc., represent the Law of Moses.
- (5) The husbandmen represent the religious leaders.
- (6) The servants who came to receive the fruits are the prophets whom God sent to Israel.
- (7) The maltreatment of the servants shows Israel's maltreatment of the prophets of God.
- (8) The husbandman desiring the fruits shows God's earnest desire for true religion in Israel, especially God's desire for a consciousness in Israel of their need of redemption.
- (9) The son in the parable stands for God's Son, Jesus Christ.
- (10) The killing of the son is the crucifixion of Christ.
- (11) The son's being sent last of all shows that Christ is God's last word to man.
- (12) Their casting the son out of the vineyard prefigures the suffering of Christ outside the camp.
- (13) The taking of the vineyard away from the wicked husbandmen and giving it to others represents the displacement of Israel by the Gentiles in the church of Christ.

The householder's going into another country represents God's leaving Israel to their own devices for a long period prior to the coming of Christ.

### Verse 34

There were numerous prophets who came again and again, to arouse in Israel the truly spiritual response which the Father desired and which it was impossible for the Law to produce. The Law brought forth fruit of a kind, such as outward observances of ceremonial duties and avoidance of some of the

grosser sins; but the inner desire and soul-longing for redemptive forgiveness was a fruit God sought in vain in Israel.

“When the harvest time approached . . .” likely refers, at least in part, to the approach of the time of the Messiah, in which case John the Baptist would surely be among the most honorable servants who came to receive God’s fruits from Israel, but who, like the others, was rejected.

### **Verse 35**

Such maltreatment of God’s messengers, the prophets, is detailed in Hebrews 11:37-38; Jeremiah 37:15; and other passages which stress the abuse which was heaped upon God’s servants, the prophets.

### **Verse 36**

This verse only emphasizes the long-continued and aggravated misconduct of Israel with reference to God’s prophets. Their long-standing procedure was to kill them in one generation and memorialize them in the next.

### **Verses 37-38**

“But afterward He sent His Son . . .” Certainly, there is a sense of finality that is definitely intended in the sending of the Son. There is to be no other after Christ. The rejection of Christ by the human race is not to be followed by other offers of reconciliation. This is surely one of the big revelations from this parable. “Last of all, the Son.”

If verses 37-38, give a true and accurate picture of the inner thoughts and intentions of the Jewish religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, it is crystal clear that they recognized Him as the Messiah, decided to destroy Him, and intended to replace Him with their own system and with their own personnel in charge. How could they possibly have done such a thing?

*First*, having no consciousness of sin, and supposing that they were the custodians of salvation from God through the Law, they preferred the type of religion (thinking of course that it would give eternal life) to the humility, self-denial, sobriety, purity, and meekness of the religion Christ taught. Knowing from the very first who He was, they carefully observed His teaching, but they had decided to reject it in favor of what they already had, or supposed they had. There was one fatal flaw in their thinking. They did not recognize Christ as God in human form, to whom the Father hath committed judgment, whose words

must be obeyed upon pain of eternal remorse for those who reject them, and who is the only sacrifice for sins ever conceived in the entire universe that was of sufficient merit actually to accomplish forgiveness. Christ warned, but they did not seem to get the point. He said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.” (John 12:48)

Their awful crimes against Jesus were not merely sins against God in the sense that all sins are against God; but their sins against Christ were actually sins against the very person of God in Christ, multiplying the condemnation which they merited by their shameful actions.

In the parable, it is seen that Christ appears as the heir of all things. However, Christ as God, was not the heir of all things, for, as God, He is the Creator of all things. Thus, the Arian heresy finds no support in this parable.

Returning to the incomprehensible truth that the Pharisees deliberately decided to kill Christ in spite of the fact that they knew He was the Messiah, this may seem to be at variance with 1 Corinthians 2:8, “Which none of the rulers of this age has understood, for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

Careful reading of Paul’s words shows that what the rulers did not know was the “mystery” of God in Christ! The Pharisees thought He was only the Messiah but did not know that the Messiah was God robing Himself in human flesh. That was the mortal error on their part. Even though they did not comprehend His eternal power and Godhead, however, they did recognize Him as the true heir of the temple, “A teacher come from God,” as Nicodemus confessed (John 3:2), and as a holy and righteous person without any sin whatever. Yet they would kill even one like that rather than give up their lucrative exploitation of the temple which had become, in their eyes, their private domain to be maintained at the cost of any crime, however great, even at the cost of murdering the Messiah whose actions in twice cleansing the temple had demonstrated His teaching would not allow the continuation of those perversions on which their profits depended. Here then, without any doubt, is the commercially motivated reason why they took such diabolical action against the Christ. It is impossible to gloss over their conduct or to find any extenuation

of their frightful guilt. They knew He was Christ, but alas, they did not know the He was God in Christ! Thus, their crucifixion of Christ was a crime against God Himself.

### **Verse 39**

This adds another graphic detail to the prophetic delineation of the crucifixion of Christ. The casting out of the vineyard corresponds to the suffering of Christ, of which it is written, “Let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” (Hebrews 13:13) Jesus, of course, suffered without the camp, that is, outside the gates of the city. “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” (Hebrews 13:12)

### **Verse 40**

Jesus was about to extract from their own lips the sentence of doom which their conduct deserved. Just as Nathan the prophet extracted a self-pronounced sentence of death upon King David, and just as a disguised prophet drew a sentence of condemnation from the lips of another wicked king who uttered his own condemnation (1 Kings 20:41), in the same manner Christ drew from the lips of those proud adversaries their self-pronounced doom.

### **Verse 41**

That was precisely what God would do, and did do, to them. Israel was removed from being the special custodian of God’s spiritual planting, and the Gentiles were brought in. Christ next moved to clear up one part of the parable that might not have been clear otherwise. True, the son in the parable represented Himself; but their killing Him would in no sense mean that they were rid of Him permanently. God had committed judgment to the Son. Christ would rise the third day, ascend to heaven, and sit down upon the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The rejected stone would yet be made the head of the corner.

### **Verses 42-43**

Christ quoted Psalm 118:22ff. The example of a rejected stone becoming the chief cornerstone was founded on historical fact. Christ as the cornerstone suggests that:

- (1) law and grace,
- (2) God and man,
- (3) time and eternity,
- (4) B.C. and A.D.,
- (5) the Mosaic dispensation and the Christian dispensation,
- (6) the letter and the spirit, and
- (7) judgment and mercy, both begin and end, thus forming, in a metaphor, a true corner in Him!

#### **Verse 44**

The apostle Peter, referring to this metaphor, quoted Isaiah 28:16 and added, “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; for they stumble at the word, being disobedient.” (1 Peter 2:7-8) Thus, our Lord’s reference to the Pharisees’ falling on that stone (Himself) is a reference to their stumbling at His word.

This intriguing statement of our Lord (v. 44), suggests another remark He made, “The scriptures cannot be broken.” (John 10:35) Men who think they break the Scriptures only break themselves; those who stumble or fall upon Christ and His word do not break Him but are themselves broken. In time, men may receive or reject Him; but in eternity (the judgment), the stone will fall upon the disobedient with devastating and total punishment for their sinful and obdurate hearts.

#### **Verse 45**

With the two parables recorded in this chapter, Christ finally got through to the Pharisaical intelligence! Before that time, it appears that they regarded His parables as too homely and simple to be worthy of their lordly attention. Apparently they discounted them as having no pertinent application to things they were interested in. But at last, under the hammer blows of logical truth, their crust of indifference was shattered. With a genius surpassing that of any mortal, Christ wove eternal truth in the fabric of the parables. He held the completed picture up before His enemies, as one might hold up a mirror; and at last, confronted with a likeness of themselves as plain as any photograph—they got the point.

Their fury was unbounded. No longer would they seek any accommodation with Him. They probably would have rushed upon Him to kill Him then and

there, but the Master had too carefully laid the plan for that to happen. The popular support of Christ was so great that they simply dared not touch Him before the people. Two courses were open to them. They could secretly assassinate Him, or they could contrive His legal condemnation and death.

#### **Verse 46**

The die was then cast. Before that week ended, those evil men would by falsehood: suborn lying witness, political pressure, intimidation, and mob violence, accomplish His crucifixion—(under Christ’s permissive will), and with themselves and others as the instruments of Satan. They would seek and find a traitor among the Twelve. They would disperse the vast concourse of people who loved Jesus and hailed Him as the Son of David. They would use their wealth, official prerogatives, social position, and political power to intimidate and frighten into silence all who disagreed with them. They would recruit and surround themselves with whatever scum and riffraff were available from the dark alleys of the vast city, and they would form those into a rabble to stand in for “the people” and cry, “Crucify Him!” at the propitious moment. They would even stoop to take the part of loathed and hated Caesar in order to strengthen their presentation before the governor. They would perform like skilled actors upon a stage of far greater dimensions than any of them could have imagined. Their every word and action would appear in full view and understanding of millions and millions for all ages, who, in a sense, would have box seats to see the most classical case of legal lynching ever seen on earth! The dark drama would soon move to its shocking culmination.

## **CHAPTER 22**

### **PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON**

#### **TRIBUTE TO CAESAR**

#### **IN HEAVEN, WHOSE WIFE SHALL SHE BE**

#### **THE GREAT COMMANDMENT**

#### **HOW THEN DOES DAVID IN THE SPIRIT CALL HIM LORD?**

#### **PARABLE OF THE KING'S SON**

##### **Verses 1-2**

This is the third of a series of three parables Jesus directly addressed to the Pharisees. There is a definite connection in all three, revealing a progressive intensity in the sins of the Pharisees, and setting forth stronger and stronger punishments to be incurred by them.

##### **Analogies:**

- (1) The king represents God.
- (2) The king's son is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- (3) The marriage supper stands for the privileges of the true faith.
- (4) The messengers are the evangelists of all ages who preach the truth.
- (5) The mistreatment of the messengers refers to the hostility of the Pharisees against the apostles, first, and to other preachers later.
- (6) The rejection of the invitation is the rejection of Christ's message by the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders.
- (7) The destruction of their city is the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian in 70 A. D.
- (8) The sending of the messengers into the byways prefigures the call of the Gentiles.
- (9) The man without a wedding garment represents all who despise the privilege of true faith, and while professing it, prove themselves unworthy of it.
- (10) The coming in of the king to see the guests is the arraignment of all men at the final judgment.
- (11) The binding of the offender and casting him out shows the punishment of the wicked in hell.

- (12) The speechlessness of the offender shows that evil men at last shall concur in their own punishment, being able to make no defense of their own conduct.

### **Verse 3**

Israel had long known of the approaching appointment to receive and honor the King's Son when He should appear in their midst. Their whole nation had been protected and nurtured through long history for the specific purpose of equipping them to recognize and hail their Messiah when He came. The first of those servants sent to announce that the great feast was at hand was John the Baptist. They rejected him. They also rejected the apostles, mistreating them and bluntly rejecting the invitation, offering no excuse, but simply refusing to come to the marriage feast.

### **Verse 4**

These other servants and their invitation represent the evangelistic program of the church following the resurrection of Christ. Richard C. Trench (Notes on the Parables, p. 227) wrote: "This second summons I take to represent the invitation to the Jewish people, as it was renewed to them at the second epoch of the kingdom, that is, after the resurrection and ascension."

Two things support Trench's view. God was willing to overlook the first blunt rejection of Christ (even His crucifixion), attributing it to ignorance. (Acts 3:17) Also, the Jews continued to have a priority in hearing the gospel for a long while after Pentecost, as indicated by Paul's motto, "To the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16) The marvelous solicitation and tenderness of the apostolic preaching, even after the resurrection, shows the forbearance and mercy of God as He yet pleaded with those evil men to acknowledge and receive their true King.

### **Verse 5**

That was the crowning insult, not merely rejecting it, but belittling it and making light of it. Matthew Henry (Commentary, Vol. 5, p. 313) wrote: "I saw in the two classes mentioned here examples of rural and urban mankind, thus including practically all men." It has also been suggested that the two great classifications of all human activity, involving production and distribution are also indicated.



### **Verses 6-7**

The shameful treatment and murder of the servants were fulfilled by the imprisonment of the apostles by the Pharisees and Sadducees, and their stoning of Stephen. This passage also shows that the destruction of Jerusalem was a direct action of heavenly vengeance upon the Jewish nation for their rejection of Christ.

The type of historical visitation upon cities and nations that disobey God, like that which fell upon Jerusalem has not disappeared but may still be seen. France rejected the Bible, tied it to the tail of the donkey, dragged it through the city, and burned it on the city dump, elevating at the same time the low goddess of Reason; but since that time, the government of France has fallen 35 times. Hitler burned the Bibles at Nuremburg in 1933, but it was that same generation that saw God's armies split open the ugly heart of Nazism and spill its filth upon the ground.

God grant that our own beloved America, now on a collision course with most of God's teachings, receives an awareness of this truth before it is too late.

### **Verse 8-9**

God's purpose is never defeated by sinful men. There will be guests at the wedding feast, even if those first bidden despise it. We have already noted that Christ was praised with Hosannas in the temple (21:16), even though the Pharisees would not honor Him. Children took up the song they should have sung, and the temple rang with His praises anyway.

The Jewish nation rejected Christ (although not all of them), but the city responsible for it was utterly destroyed, because it was no longer the King's city, but in the words of the parable, "their city." When men reject God's will, even the sacred institutions they had formerly received from God become no longer His, but theirs.

The Gentiles would be called to the feast which the Jews, for the greater part, rejected.

### **Verse 10**

The wedding was a success. So also will the true religion of God prevail at last. His will shall be done. No man or group of men, no nation or group of nations, can prevent the accomplishment of the eternal design of God. The fact

that the ultimate guests were “both bad and good” emphasizes the probationary nature of the church in this dispensation. Christ was always at pains to make that clear.

The kingdom, under the figure of a draw-net, also was represented as having “both bad and good,” or “fishes of very kind.” (13:47-48)

How can any man feel that God, in any sense, “owes” him eternal life? Surely it must be glaringly plain that *GRACE* is what enables any to stand justified in the sight of God.

#### **Verse 11**

This stands for the final inspection of all men in the judgment. It is the judgment of the great day when the King shall suddenly appear and review the credentials of those who have accepted His invitation. Judgment shall indeed begin at the house of God. (1 Peter 4:17)

#### **Verse 12**

That man’s apparel was an insult to the occasion, indicating that immoral and shameful conduct on the part of Christians is an insult to God that will at last be punished.

Note that the man himself was speechless. It was totally his fault, and he could not think of any word to utter in defense of what he had done. We do not appeal to traditions handed down, nor to customs of monarchs who always provided royal garments for their guests, not to anything else except the speechlessness of that intruder who thus marred the happy festivities by entering without a wedding garment. He could not defend himself or offer any excuses. This simply means that, at last, every condemned sinner will have to agree in his very heart that he deserves condemnation, and that it is no one’s fault but his own!

#### **Verse 13**

The exposure and punishment of that offender occurred at the arraignment before the king, not before. The servants in this verse therefore cannot be the apostles or ministers of the word, but the angels of God. The punishment refers to hell. (Matthew 25:46)

## **Verse 14**

Sitting down at the marriage feast was not alone sufficient to insure the favor of the king. Membership in the church, and acceptance of its privileges, are not enough to assure eternal life. Every diligence to appear before God, not naked, but clad in the garments of righteousness, should be exerted by all who hope to enter eternal fellowship with God. (Revelation 3:18)

### **STUDY OF THE THREE PARABLES**

- (1) The Parable of Two Sons;
- (2) of the Wicked Husbandmen; and
- (3) the Marriage of the King's Son

There is a remarkable progression in this series of three parables.

- (1) There is a progression in the obligations violated.  
it is the respect and honor due a father; it is the legal and binding requirement of a commercial contract; and it is the honor, loyalty, and submission due to a great and noble king on the part of his servants.
- (2) There is a progressive aggravation of the guilt incurred.
  - (a) it is the rejection of a loving father's request.
  - (b) it is murder to escape a legal debt.
  - (c) it is a hateful and insulting degradation of the king himself, in the person of his messengers, not to escape an obligation.

To deliver an insult against all reason, against the highest government of the land, and upon an occasion when the king, far from exacting a tax or requiring a benefit, was in the gracious attitude of bestowing honor and privilege upon them. Moreover, their guilt reached such a climax of wickedness that it appeared on the occasion of the royal wedding and in such a way as to dishonor the most important and sacred event possible, the marriage of the king's son!

- (3) There is a progression in the penalties exacted.
  - (a) the father disapproves.
  - (b) the wicked husbandmen are destroyed, their contract ended, and the vineyard let out to others.

- (c) the offenders are not only destroyed but their city is razed and burned, and great armies of the king move upon them for swift and total vengeance.
- (4) There is a progression in the duration of the offenses.
  - (a) the conduct of the sons, while serious enough, is a matter of only one day's disobedience.
  - (b) the wicked husbandmen rejected their duty over an extended period of time.
  - (c) the hatred of the king had become a permanent part of the lives of the offenders.

### **Verse 15**

Far from becoming humbled and reproved by those wonderful parables in which the Lord had held up, as in a mirror, the truth concerning themselves that they might see it and repent, the Pharisees were all the more ready to destroy Him. Their first maneuver was to confront Christ with some questions from which, if they could, they would obtain words from the Master which they would twist or misquote, thus giving them some pretext for condemning Him to death.

### **Verse 16**

How could the Pharisees have said such a thing? Did they in conscience know, as they said, that Jesus taught the way of God in truth? From the parable of the wicked husbandmen, it appears that they did. It will be recalled that they said, "This is the heir; let us kill Him." (21:38)

It is as though they said, "We do not care who knows He is the Christ. We intend to destroy Him anyway!" In their mouths even the truth underwent a metamorphosis, becoming vile, deceitful, and repulsive to Christ. How completely they misjudged Him is seen in their thinking to deceive and ensnare Him with such flattery.

### **Verse 17**

The design of the question is plain from the Herodians having been made a part of the group asking this question. The Herodians ardently advocated Caesar's cause and favored a complete submission of Israel to Caesar's government. If the Christ made it unlawful to give tribute to Caesar, they

would, of course, have hauled Him into court on a charge of sedition, punishable by death. On the other hand if Jesus had made it right to pay the tribute, they would have advertised it in order to diminish His popularity with the people who groaned under Caesar's yoke and longed to throw it off. They thought they had Him impaled upon the horns of a dilemma.

#### **Verses 18-20**

In view of their true character, the Lord's designation of those men as "hypocrites" is mild enough. They were far more. They were cowardly, crooked murderers, intent on committing the crime of the ages.

Only God can know men's thoughts; therefore, this passage is another which carries the necessary inference that Christ is God in the flesh.

The coin used to pay the poll-tax was a denarius, worth about 17 cents, and bore an engraving making him the ruler of the land.

The inquirers must have felt that they had Jesus going their way. They reacted accordingly and promptly answered His question regarding the coin.

#### **Verse 21**

Nearly two thousand years have not diminished the wisdom and truth of that sensational answer. It gave the truth about the tribute question, namely, that it should be paid with Caesar's own money, a plain fact attested by his picture and title on the coins! Christ then went far beyond their question and commanded the tax be paid, but in such a manner that no breach in the popular esteem of Jesus would result. Christ directed their attention to the higher ground of God's authority rather than to Caesar's, pointing out that man also is, in a sense, a coin, bearing the image and superscription of his maker, God, and commanding that men should not merely pay taxes to those entitled to receive them but also render to God His just dues also.

#### **Verse 22**

The trap they had devised for Jesus was sprung upon them. The occasion had produced a remarkably bold admission by the Pharisees that they knew Jesus taught the way of God in truth, yet without producing the slightest thing that they could use against Him.

### **Verse 23**

The Sadducees were the sophisticated materialists of their day, relatively few in number, but holding most of the important offices of the Jewish system.

They despised spiritual things, especially bordering on the supernatural, and were thoroughly detested and hated by the Pharisees who made common cause with them only in opposition to Christ. They too had a question for Jesus.

### **Verses 24-28**

First, note the question on its merits, or demerits. Matthew Henry (op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 321) said: "The seventh who ventured last to marry the widow (many a one would say) was a bold man!" The possibility of such a thing happening must be set down as remote.

Yet Christ allowed the question to stand, at least for the moment, because it could have happened. In the reply that followed at once, Christ as always, resolved the issue, not on the basis of what Moses said, but upon what God said, affirming, in effect, that it was not Moses but God whom they were quoting.

### **Verse 29**

Certainly, the Scriptures teach the resurrection. Many passages plainly indicate the resurrection. The Sadducees' disbelief was due to their ignorance of the Scriptures. As for their objection that a resurrection would, be impossible because of the absurdities it would create, Christ disposed of that by attributing it to the ignorance of the power of God. They were practical atheists and made light of such things as the resurrection. Christ went further and disposed of their vulgar ideas of what a resurrection must be in the enlightening teaching He gave a moment later.

### **Verse 30**

The Sadducees' ideas were founded on ignorance and a common and vulgar view of all spiritual things, including the resurrection. Christ unveiled some of the glories of the future state. Men shall not marry. They will have no such need or desire. All earthly ties and relationships shall have been outgrown, their purpose ended, and no longer needed or desirable. Like the holy angels, men shall have an existence in God apart from all limitations and necessities of the flesh. They shall hunger no more, nor thirst. Weeping and crying shall not exist. How strange that such thoughts had not occurred to the Sadducees!

Mention of angels was a further comment on the ignorance of the Sadducees, for they did not believe in angels either. Christ answered far more than His questioners intended.

### **Verses 31-33**

The Sadducees had spoken of what “Moses said,” but Christ quoted from the same source and declared the message to have been spoken “by God!” The endorsement of the Bible as God’s word is plainly intended.

Christ went further in His effort to correct the ignorance of the Sadducees, and dealt with their fundamental trouble, namely, a failure to believe the Old Testament as God’s word. Christ, then, in the presence of the multitude, made an argument for immortality of the soul, basing it absolutely upon what “God said” in Exodus 3:6. The argument is bold, plain, and easily understood. Since God used the present tense in that Old Testament passage, saying, “I am” instead of I was,” etc., it means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living. Christ made an argument on such an important subject as the resurrection to turn upon a single word in the Old Testament.

How strongly Jesus relied upon the Scriptures which the Sadducees despised through their ignorance of them. If the Son of God could afford to put such trust in a single word in the holy Scriptures, His disciples need not hesitate to trust every word of it without doubt or reservation.

The Sadducees, like the Pharisees before them, withdrew from the scene, vanquished and shamed in the presence of all.

### **Verse 34**

Of course the Pharisees had already been routed too, but since they had maneuvered the Herodians into fronting for them, they decided to have a try at it in their own name. Their old enemies had been put to silence by Christ.

How happy they should have been that their old enemies had the intellectual rug pulled out from under them, and that at the hands of Jesus, who, they denominated as ignorant! The joy of such a victory over their foes by Jesus, however, was lost in their hatred of the Lord.

### **Verses 35-36**

One of them means one of the Pharisees. The “first team” would now take up the challenge, and the Pharisees themselves would confront Him with a

question in a field wherein they imaged they had a vast superiority. Their strategy was to ensnare Christ in some technical fault regarding countless questions of the law.

Like the Sadducees, the Pharisees were also ignorant of the Scriptures, in the sense that they lacked any true perception of them. Their pre-assumption in asking such a question was founded on the false opinion that there are relative ranks among God's commandments, some being more and others less important. God said. "All thy commandments are righteousness." (Psalm 119:151) Yet, in a sense not intended by them, Christ singles out the "great commandment."

#### **Verses 37-40**

Jesus' answer is far more than a clever summary of all the commandments. Above everything else, God desires and commands His human children to love Him totally and completely. That is why Christ came. That is the purpose God had in saving man, that the Father might be loved for His own blessed sake. Such a plea for love was lost upon people like the Pharisees.

In a technical sense, all the law and prophets do hang on the twin injunctions Christ named before the Pharisees. The first five commandments of the Ten Commandments deal with man's relationship to God, and the second five have to do with man's relationship to man. The fifth commandment might go in either group. A profoundly significant deduction required by Christ's words on that occasion is that man's heaven-ward duties are more important, ranking higher, than his man-ward duties. The first commandment is to love the Lord; the second is to love thy neighbor.

#### **Verses 41-45**

Christ in that question pinpointed the precise truth the Pharisees had missed concerning Him, that He was (and is) God in man. What think you of Christ? Is the most important question ever asked. All depends on the answer. No man can be saved who fails this test. To recognize and hail Christ as God come in the flesh, this is the beginning of eternal life. Without that perception, man must forever remain guilt-ridden, soul-blinded, and condemned forever. Christ, even at that late hour, was trying to relieve the sad condition of those evil men.



The reason the Pharisees did not recognize Christ (though some did) was that not all the Messianic prophecies were received by them. In the very nature of God's revelation to humanity of the coming of that Holy One who is both God and man at once, there were necessarily seeming contradictions.

Thus, Isaiah hailed the coming one as "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace," while at the same time portraying Him as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, with no form nor comeliness, a root out of dry ground, bruised, chastised, and suffering death. That was too much for the unspiritual Pharisee to understand.

The Old Testament passage Christ stressed in this confrontation of the Pharisees is Psalm 110:1. Of course they had access to that information and could have known that Christ was both David's son and David's Lord; but they could not explain it, thus being liable as were the Sadducees, to a charge of ignorance. Their ignorance, however, was not so much their sin as was their pride and egoism that prevented their learning from Him who alone is "the Truth!"

#### **Verse 46**

The Pharisees were ignorant of the riddle Jesus propounded, but they would not accept the truth from Him. Their day of grace was almost over. The plot was laid. Before the week expired they would kill Him. Never again would they ask Him any questions. They confessed themselves unable to stand before His searching words. Intellectually, morally, and spiritually, they were vanquished by the Lord; and, like a wounded serpent that sinks its fangs again and again into its own flesh, those unfortunate men would kill their own Head and Redeemer, involving themselves and their whole nation in irreparable ruin.

Matthew's emphasis on their conduct was necessary; and, as God always chooses His instruments, Matthew was ideally suited to the task of presenting those enemies of Jesus in their true light.

Reasons for the need to expose those men rise from the fact that, as the official representatives of Judaism, their failure to recognize and accept their Messiah would ever afterwards be used by Satan as an argument against the validity of Christ's claim upon all mankind as the true Messiah. If there had been, therefore, the least vestige of anything honorable or upright in the Pharisees, there could have continued through history some suspicion that since

”good men,” as they were supposed to be, rejected the Messiah, there must have been some reason for their doing it. Matthew successfully broke that crutch of infidelity.

His analytical, yet fair and generous, treatment of those bigots in their hatred of Christ forever removes any suspicion or even the outside possibility of any doubt that their actions were otherwise motivated than through blind fanatical and selfish hatred of the truth. Their every argument, invented through despair, maliciously urged and distorted to appear plausible; their every connivance with even their worst enemies to find some pretext against Him. Their reliance at last upon suborned and lying witnesses, perversion of sacred Scriptures, malevolent torture of truth itself, and, withal, their prejudice against Him, not desiring to accommodate with Him but only striving for a means of His murder—all these things are so faithfully detailed in Matthew’s gospel that, two thousand years after the facts, any fair-minded person can easily understand why such men rejected the Christ.

## **CHAPTER 23**

### **PHARISAISM EXPOSED AND DENOUNCED BY JESUS**

#### **THE SEVEN WOES**

#### **JUDGMENT UPON JERUSALEM**

#### **THE TEMPLE**

#### **Verses 1-3**

The Pharisees did not practice what they taught, but their failure was no excuse for disobedience by those who knew God’s will. The authority of God’s word does not derive from the righteous life of the teacher but from the prior authority of God Himself; although, of course the righteous life of the teacher is always a strong encouragement to obedience.

The vile and inconsistent life of the scribes and Pharisees was a strong deterrent to the acceptance of God’s will in that day; and similar evil on the part of Christian teachers in all ages has the same hindering results.

#### **Verse 4**

The Pharisees always took the strictest and most legalistic view of every religious duty and always applied the law in such a way as to make it as onerous

as possible—that is, for others! They themselves? Ah, that was something else again. They did not observe their own strict rules, and their personal laxity was an open scandal. Why? Christ immediately gave the answer in the most vituperative and scathing language ever to fall from His blessed lips.

### **Verse 5**

John A. Broadus (American Commentary on the New Testament, p. 465), quoting Rabbinical writers described the phylactery as follows: “They took four passages and writing them on strips of parchment, encased the folded strips in minute leather boxes. These four boxes were set on edge and fastened upon one leather base, which was placed in the middle of the forehead, and held there by a string tied round the head with peculiar knots which had a mystical meaning.”

The bigger the phylactery the more attention the device would get for its wearer. Borders of the garments were considered sacred by the Jews, and the enlargement of the border was another device for ostentation and gratification of the pride of its wearer.

### **Verse 6**

It is an eloquent warning against pride, even of the variety held harmless by many, to observe that the rejection of Christ by the Pharisees was directly the fruit of their social and religious pride. When Christ finally denounced them and pronounced judgment upon them, as in this chapter, He made their pride to be their principal sin. The vainglory of greetings extended to them in market places, the deference shown them in social gatherings, and the presumption of piety which they received and invited by ostentation use of wide borders, phylacteries, etc.. These may appear to be small things, but they were the root of the Pharisees’ trouble; and those same encouragements to pride have been in every age a stumbling block to faith.

### **Verses 7-9**

They were little men, puffed up with their supposed learning, parading like peacocks before the admiring eyes of their followers, and inwardly gloating over titles of honor and deference.

Christ assuredly condemned the employment of religious titles denoting any kind of authority.

“Being called by men Rabbi . . . Do not call anyone on earth your father. . .” In the teaching here, Christ struck at one of the great failings of mankind, the reliance upon human authorities for the settlement of religious truth. In apostolic times, the living teachers were called “rabbis” and the ones formerly lived were called “fathers.” But Christ taught there is just one authority in religion, namely, God, and that which God has revealed in Christ through the apostles.

The sense of Christ’s teaching recorded in this place is always violated when men are willing to accept the authority of “Doctor So and So” instead of the teachings of the word of God.

“Do not call anyone on earth your father . . .” At least the Jews are consistent who, rejecting Christ, reject also what He said about “rabbi;” but it appears unbelievable that so large a part of Christendom should be so blind to Christ’s commandment as to flaunt the title “father” as the just inheritance of all their priests and to bestow upon their sovereign the near-blasphemous title, “Most Holy Father!”

Wherever the title “father” is received and allowed, there is also a sinful implication of the authority of such persons and of the deference due their opinions regarding religious questions. Positively no Father, Rabbi, Reverend, Doctor, or other religious title-holder has any authority at all to legislate, absolve, bind, loose, require, or demand, in any religious sense, anything whatsoever, upon anyone whomsoever!

As for the titles themselves, they are forbidden to all who honor the word of Christ. Note: One may refer to his earthly parent as his father without violating the prohibition taught by Christ; but if the very same title or any other should be applied in a religious sense and in order to confer dignity and authority upon the conferee, then Christ’s law is violated.

The word “reverend” may be used of a man if it should be used in the sense that one is revered, respected, or God-fearing, and if not at the same time intended as a title of religious authority or distinction. Psalm 111:9 reads, “Holy and reverend is His name.” The words holy and reverend are applied to God in that passage, or rather to God’s name.

The word holy, as applied to men, even by the apostles (Hebrews 3:1; 1 Peter 3:5); and it would be hard to find authority for any dogma to the effect that there are no reverent men. But both those words (holy and reverend) violate Christ's plain word the moment one is made a title or symbol of religious authority to which other men are expected to give obedience, allegiance, submission, or deference. All titles that seek to elevate one man above another in the solemn business of the faith in Christ are wrong.

Christ condemned religious titles and preferment and authority because all of them are founded upon a false premise: that one man, more than another, has the right to interpret God's word.

This writer has no delusion that these words on this subject will be much noted or long remembered; but to the devout, who believe in Jesus, we dare to suggest that they are true. It is prayerfully hoped that Christ's warning against the virus of seats (the chief ones of course) will be heeded by those who truly desire to follow Him.

#### **Verse 10**

Christ paid His respects to three titles in the passage before us, namely, Rabbi, Father, and Master; but the principle certainly applies to all titles that might be used in such a manner, that is, to elicit religious respect and acceptance.

Even the use of "Brother" as the exclusive property of the preacher serves to take it away from others equally entitled to it; and therefore it should be used for all and not parlayed into a title which, for all practical purposes, takes the place of "Reverend!"

#### **Verses 11-12**

Christ climaxed His teaching on the basic moral failure of the Pharisees. It was their love of preference, desire for social or worldly acclaim, delight in popularity, affinity for pompous titles, and their constant jostling each other for positions of eminence—these were the outward symptoms of their deadly pride within, which blinded their eyes to the Lord of glory and shut the gates of light against themselves.

Lack of humility is at the bottom of practically all the trouble that ever came into the church. Proud, arrogant men, striving against each other for some type

of advantage, stand squarely in the center of every division that ever occurred among the followers of Christ. Through pride, Satan fell. Through pride, he holds countless souls in captivity to do the will of the devil! Having thus laid bare before all the true source of guile and wickedness in the Pharisees and scribes, namely pride, Christ then proceeded to pronounce a number of “woes” upon them.

## **FIRST WOE**

### **Verse 13**

The Pharisees should have accepted Christ and set an example for all to follow by receiving and honoring Him; but instead they rejected Him, hated Him, and tried to turn the popular mind away from Him, thus in a figure, standing in the gate and virtually shutting it in the face of all who were trying to do God’s will. Those who enter God’s kingdom will cause others to do the same thing; and those who refuse to enter will also prevent others from being saved. Thus, every man is either for Christ or against Him.

## **SECOND WOE**

### **Verse 14**

This verse is in complete harmony with all else that Christ said of the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus said to them, “Woe to you,” since you devour widows’ homes while making long prayers, you shall receive greater condemnation.

### **Verse 15**

This verse does not condemn the making of proselytes, far from it. It condemns the making of a proselyte to human opinion rather than to God’s word. This was the guilt of the scribes and Pharisees. Had they made converts to the true Jewish faith, that would have been all right; but, instead, they made converts to their party.

There were two classes of proselytes:

- (1) Proselytes of the gate, who were not circumcised, and who accepted only portions of Judaism, and
- (2) Proselytes of righteousness, who became true converts.

Proselytes, however, often become a problem, sometimes coming to represent all that is worst, both in their old religion and in their new one. This is nearly always the case where one is proselyted to a “system” rather than to Christ and Him crucified.

“A son of hell . . . “ as Christ used it, refers to a “son of the devil.”

### **THIRD WOE**

#### **Verses 16-22**

The Pharisees’ preoccupation with trifles appears in all its ridiculous pettiness in this passage. What was so wrong with the practices Christ pointed out? Alfred Plummer (op. cit., p. 318) hit the nail on the head when he said: “It is grievous enough that men should be encouraged to think that there are two kinds of truth, one of which is important, and the other not; viz., that which is sworn to, and that which is stated without an oath. That leads men to think that unless they take an oath, they may tell lies with little or no blame. But to tell men that, even when they have sworn, they are not bound to tell the truth or abide by the promise, unless their oath is taken in a certain way, is far worse, and far more destructive of men’s sense of honor and love of truthfulness.”

The big point in the whole passage is that the whole is greater than any of its parts, and that the whole is equal to the sum of its parts. In spite of truth so plain as to be considered axiomatic, the scribes and Pharisees had become champions of small distinctions such as those regarding oaths. Their thinking on such matters was foolish.

Theology today is just as foolish, for example, in allowing that a man may tell a lie if he is doing it (or thinks he is) for the good of the person deceived.

### **FOURTH WOE**

#### **Verses 23-24**

In the fourth woe also, the Pharisee was presented as a specialist in trifles. To be sure, there was nothing wrong with tithing mint, dill, and cummin, (similar to caraway seeds). Christ admitted that such was a duty, “These are the things you should have done!” The trouble was that such petty little deeds of scrupulosity were the principal concern of the scribes and Pharisees. They could murder the Son of God but would not think of neglecting to tithe a sprig of dill

on the back doorstep. It was precisely in such a tradition that they finally appeared before Pilate to extort a death sentence for the Master, while refusing at the same time to enter the governor's court lest they be defiled!

Without wishing to appear as a judge of others, we may nevertheless urge upon all brethren everywhere that fact that such questions as "how" orphans should be cared for, whether from the church treasury or by individuals, is just such a proposition as some of those so dear to the Pharisees and so repulsive to Jesus. The "weightier matter" as far as orphans are concerned, and as far as Christ is concerned, is that they shall be properly and affectionately cared for, and not "how" it is done.

"Blind guides . . . the gnat . . . the camel . . ." In Christ's day, any small impurity in a glass of milk or water would have been filtered out. Jesus contrasted this straining of such a thing as a gnat out of a glass of water with swallowing a camel! This is a perfect picture of the unbalanced thinking of those unfortunate men. For example, they literally stoned Stephen to death with their own hands, but scrupulously avoided stepping on an old grave, neglecting to tithe a spring of dill, or putting foot inside a Gentile's house.

## **FIFTH WOE**

### **Verses 25-26**

In this woe also, another remarkable imbalance in the thinking of the Pharisees was pinpointed by Jesus. All of the dishes they used were subjected to the ceremonial washing to avoid legal defilement; but Christ made it clear that cleanliness of another kind had been neglected. It was far more important that food be "clean" in the sense of its not having been obtained through extortion, and that gluttony or excess could occur in spite of all ceremonial cleanliness.

Of course, extortion and excess were two of the Pharisees' commonest sins. They robbed widows and orphans, dealt deceitfully, defrauded in money-changing, and violated wholesale the great moral precepts of the Law. In a genuine moral sense, therefore, their food was contaminated with extortion and excess. That was the real uncleanness which should have concerned them but did not.



On the other hand, they never forgot the ceremonial washings. Christ did not condemn outward cleanliness, nor even the washing of cups and platters, but made such things secondary. And how did Christ teach that the inside of the cup and platter should be cleansed? That was to be done through no outward ceremonial but was to be accomplished by honesty, industry, thrift, temperance, truthfulness, fairness, regard for the needs of others, and, in short, by living righteous lives.

## **SIXTH WOE**

### **Verses 27-28**

Here is another figure drawn from the customs of the day and the practice of the scribes and Pharisees, who customarily whitewashed graves in order to make them more easily visible and to prevent one's stepping on one of them accidentally and unknowingly. Such graves were a fair figure of the Pharisees, who were outwardly clean and beautiful, but inwardly were full of wickedness.

The Pharisees, with all their pomp and glamour, earthly glory and prestige, outward beauty and ostentation, were, for all that, actually dead in the eyes of Jesus. They were dead spiritually and morally dead.

## **SEVENTH WOE**

### **Verse 29**

In this seventh woe, Christ began to pronounce sentence upon those religious leaders and the nation they had so basely led and betrayed. In this seventh woe, Christ suddenly revealed Himself as the Judge of those evil people and dramatically assumed the prerogatives of judgment and gave sentence against those who had the vanity to suppose they were judging Him!

The time of pleading, persuading, and reasoning with them had passed. Without hesitation, in the clearest and most powerful language, in the presence of His disciples and all the people, Christ uttered the judgment of God upon the flower of Israel's religious hierarchy, condemning, along with the nation which, alas, had blindly followed them, and consigning them to the judgment and punishment of hell.

The seventh woe, as all the others, dealt with hypocrisy, the sin reiterated over and over. In the seventh case, they were making it a fine to do over the tombs of the prophets, building beautiful sepulchers, and decorating their graves, and at the same time declaiming their superiority over their ancestors who had slain the prophets. In this woe, Christ exposed the Pharisees as true sons of their evil fathers.

### **Verse 30**

Loud professions of moral rectitude on the part of the Pharisees did not conceal their moral leprosy from Jesus. At the very moment, they were plotting to kill Him; and, before the week ended, they would commit a crime against the Lord of Life in a manner so revolting and hateful that all succeeding generations would hold it to be the crime of the ages. Whereas others had slain God's messengers, they would slay His Son!

### **Verses 31-33**

Not merely were those men the physical descendants of those who persecuted and slew the prophets, they were also their moral and spiritual sons as well, full of fraud and deceit, fit architects for fashioning a cross for the Beloved.

"Fill up then the measure of their guilt . . ." This is irony. They had passed the point of no return; and like Balaam of old, they could not have gone back if they had tried to at this point, although there was no possibility of their even trying. As the angel said to Balaam, "Go with the men!" so Jesus here commanded them to do the thing they purposed to do, and from which there was now no longer any possibility of drawing back. Evil hearts had already committed the foul murder which their eternal actions would only confirm before the week ended.

There is a sharp contrast between the wickedness of the men who slew Christ and that of Balaam. (Numbers 22:34)

In every evil curse, there is a point where the sinful soul becomes apprehensive and would draw back but cannot. There is a threshold which, when crossed, admits of no complete spiritual returning. What a terrible moment for the sinful that must be! It is an evil hour, fraught with the pangs of conscience and the fear of hell, but void of any place for repentance even though

sought bitterly with tears, as in the case of Esau. Yet such an awareness of the horrors of evil seems never to have come to the Pharisees. They were already dead spiritually. The very Christ of God stood before them in an amazing drama of outraged innocence and thundered the sentence: “Fill up the measure of the guilt of your fathers.” There was no evidence that they heard Him. Spiritual “rigor mortis” had already set in!

“You serpents . . . “ Much of Jesus’ language was metaphorical, but this was one of the strongest ever used. Herod was called a fox; the opponents of the gospel were called “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” but the Pharisees were compared to the most detestable of all creatures, serpents, and poisonous ones at that, vipers! The judgment of hell was a reference to the final overthrow of the wicked in the lake of fire.

The question, how shall you escape . . . is actually an affirmation that they shall not escape.

#### **Verse 34**

“Behold I am sending . . . “ These words surely imply Christ’s identity with the Father, God Himself. It is Christ who would send forth the apostles, prophets, and wise men; but it was God who sent the prophets of the Old Covenant, but the two are one. Those words fell from the lips of Jesus naturally. Such an out flashing of His Godhead was lost on the Pharisees, but the disciples of all ages would note and remember it and ever cease to marvel at it.

#### **Verse 35**

Commentators profess to find difficulty with this verse. Why should there be a difficulty? It is obvious that Christ here referred to some secret murder perpetrated, not by the ancestors of those men, but by them. Whom you slew!

This could not be an indictment of their ancestors but plainly refers to a murder those wicked men had committed themselves. Christ tried with that one last lightning stroke of truth to get through to them, but even that failed. That no such murder was recorded is either the Old or New Testaments, and that there was no general knowledge of it in the days of Christ, and that no traditions were developed with reference to it—these things present no difficulty at all, but point squarely at the Pharisees and show their effectiveness in covering up their evil deeds and hiding them from popular view. (It was

precisely this ability they relied upon when they decided to make away with Jesus secretly.) (Matthew 26:1-4)

It is further evidence of their depravity that none of them ever confessed it, even after He who knew their thoughts revealed it publicly! Their guilty secret went to the grave with them, except for this ray of light from the lips of Christ who made it known on the occasion of their being sentenced to hell for their wickedness. This is a revealing glance at the judgment to come, when the secrets of men's hearts shall be revealed.

One of the very significant things from that judgment of the Pharisees and Israel is that nations, no less than individuals, are accountable to God. The Pharisees were made the terminal heirs of the total Jewish history of rebellion against God.

### **Verse 36**

The Jewish nation itself was laid under sentence by those words. Before that generation expired, the armies of Vespasian and Titus moved against the stricken city with ruthless destruction. God's patience, exhausted at last, became God's wrath.

### **Verse 37**

This lament over the doomed city occurred at a most appropriate time; upon the occasion of the Lord's sentencing her to destruction.

"When sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." (James 1:15) Sin for Jerusalem was finished by the rejection of Christ, and it brought forth death. A cry of pity and of sorrow went up from the Savior, but not even that could spare Jerusalem. "

You were unwilling . . ." Man's freedom of the will makes it possible for him to reject even his God; but when he does so, he cannot avoid the consequences.

The reference to a hen and chickens is one of the most tender, common, and appealing figures Jesus ever used.

### **Verse 38**

"Behold, your house is being left to you desolate . . ." This was a seven-word summary of the seven woes just pronounced by the Lord. No longer would the city be disturbed by the teaching of the Savior. His last public discourse was

ended. The Holy City was then left to those vain captains of their sinking ship, unaware of their doom, even when the last lifeboat had departed and no means of escape remained.

### **Verse 39**

This verse is, in fact, a challenge to all men. None shall see the King until they are willing to forsake worldly pride, fall upon their knees in repentance and say, “blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.”

## **CHAPTER 24**

### **CHRIST FORETELLS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE**

#### **SIGNS OF HIS COMING**

#### **THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE**

#### **FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL SERVANTS**

### **Verses 1-2**

“Jesus came out from the temple . . .” The significance of these words is revealed in the prediction Christ immediately made of the final overthrow of the temple. When Christ goes “out from” any society, individual, or institution, its overthrow is certain, and the consequence is always destruction.

Christ’s prophecy of the overthrow of the temple was so remarkably fulfilled that the actual site of the once-glorious ancient edifice is now uncertain. Josephus recorded the thorough demolition and destruction of the proud walls which appeared so beautiful to the disciples; but, even if no history remained of how it was done, the present uncertainty as to the site and the utter absence of any significant remains of the ancient glory are proof enough that Jesus’ words were totally fulfilled.

Nor was the destruction of the temple intended by Titus who had charge of the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. He even gave a commandment against its demolition intending to preserve it as “a monument to the empire.” But the decrees of kings and emperors and generals were of no avail against the will of Him who had sentenced it to destruction. Just as Pilate’s order to break the legs of Christ was countermanded by the Lord, centuries before it was given, so Titus’ order to spare the temple was not heeded. God’s will, not Titus’ order, prevailed.

In view of the size of the stones used in building the temple, it must have appeared highly improbable that every one of them would be thrown down, and yet that is exactly the way it happened. The fire which the cedar beams and furnishings within melted the gold with which much of the temple was overlaid. It ran down into the crevices of the mighty stones, and the soldiers literally left no stone unturned as they sought to recover as loot the yellow metal that had adorned Herod's temple.

### **Verse 3**

J. W. McGarvey (Commentary on Matthew and Mark, (Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1875 p. 204) wrote: "The question had been propounded by the four fishermen, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, (Mark 13:3) Only these four were present to hear the remarkable discourse which begins with the fourth verse of this chapter."

Note that there are three questions raised by the disciples:

- (1) When shall these things be?
- (2) What shall be the sign of Your coming?
- (3) What shall be the sign of the end of the world?

Jesus answered all three questions, giving the sign of His coming, outlining the salient features of the destruction of Jerusalem and the final judgment and destruction of the whole world, making the first a type of the latter, and choosing a number of details that apply to both.

### **Verse 4**

This admonition was especially appropriate in view of the amazing answer Christ was about to give to a complex question, the complexity of which was unknown to the apostles and would not be revealed to them except through their experiences of unfolding future events.

### **Verses 5-8**

The "signs" that Jesus mentioned in these verses are essentially ordinary; and thus it may be inferred that the usual run of human conflicts and misfortunes, as well as the claims of false teachers, are not the things which shall reveal the nearness of events prophesied.

All of the phenomena above did occur in profusion before the destruction of Jerusalem. Grotius was quoted by James Macknight (op. cit., p. 417) concerning:

“earthquakes in at least eight parts of the Mediterranean world.” Such things as famines, wars, and earthquakes seem to have been multiplied during that period, but hardly any period of world history failed to exhibit the same things.

More imposing signs of God’s judgment would be super imposed. Such signs were not signs of the end. Note the repeated warning, ”but the end is not yet!” Such catastrophes were to be viewed only as the “beginning of the travail.” And the true signs of the events foretold were to be sought, not in them, but rather in what happened to the disciples.

#### **Verses 9-12**

Conditions outlined in these verses were fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem; and, without doubt, the same conditions will prevail before the second coming. The rising persecutions within the body of His disciples were to mark the onset of both events. That called for a strong and special admonition from the Lord for His true disciples to remain faithful no matter what happened.

#### **Verse 13**

Faithfulness on the part of Christ’s followers is required, regardless of the state of prosperity or adversity in the church, and without respect to hardships, doubts, and difficulties that may appear.

#### **Verse 14**

The success of God’s design is certain in spite of fears within or foes without. The gospel shall be preached in the whole world. The first fulfillment occurred in the proclamation of the gospel to the “whole world” of that period; and the ultimate fulfillment will be the proclamation of the truth to all nations on the planet earth!

Paul declared that “The gospel that you heard which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I Paul was made a minister.” (Colossians 1:23)

The same phenomenon will also occur before the second event—the end of the world. The end of the age is mentioned in the Great Commission (28:20) and vividly described by the apostle Peter in II Peter 3:1-8.

In retrospect, how bold was the prophecy of Christ! That the gospel of a man who had absolutely none of the worldly advantages of power and prestige, who never wrote a book, who owned no property, who was rejected by the

powerful leaders of His nation, who never traveled far from home, whose chosen followers were humble and obscure men, who was born in a stable, and at last humiliated and crucified between two thieves—that the gospel of that MAN should last thirty years must have seemed an impossibility to those who set Him at naught. Not only did it happen, it is still happening, and in the whole world nearly two thousand years after the prophecy was made. There is no human explanation of such a fact.

#### **Verses 15-17**

Christ again used an expression which was customary for Him when quoting the prophets. He did not declare that “Daniel said” those things but that it was spoken “through Daniel,” thus referring the message of God as the giver rather than to Daniel who conveyed it. This continues a strong witness for the authenticity of the book of Daniel.

The “end” spoken of by Daniel was not to take place for a long, long time after the abomination of desolation was set up. (Daniel 12:11) This proves that the Savior’s words apply to that far-off and final end of the world, no less than to the end of the Jewish economy.

The abomination of desolation is usually held to mean the encirclement of the Holy City by the Roman armies prior to its desolation. That the Christians might have the opportunity to flee after such a deployment as that might have appeared impossible, due to the encircling armies; but the army of Titus commanded by Cestius Gallus, for some inexplicable reason, lifted the siege, providing Christians a chance to escape.

#### **Verses 18-20**

Our savior’s concern for the sorrows and misfortunes of man, is apparent in these tender words. He was especially grieved for mothers and their children. His Admonition to “pray” regarding the precise time of the flight proves that even in times of calamity the child of God, through prayer, may alleviate suffering and misfortune, and soften the harsh winds of adversity. That those prayers were answered appears in the actual date of the fall of the city, which occurred in the Jewish month Ab (July-August), following a five-month siege in the spring and summer of A.D. 70.



### **Verse 21**

That such a calamity did befall Jerusalem is a matter of historical record. Josephus gave the tally lists of the thousands slain in various cities and villages and places, the number slaughtered at the fantastic total of eleven hundred thousand! This was more than four times the loss of life when the nuclear device destroyed Hiroshima.

Particularly pathetic was the wretched plight of 39,000 young Hebrew men crucified upon the walls and in the vicinity of Jerusalem. So many, according to Josephus, that all the green trees in the area were cut down to make crosses, and all the lumber stores exhausted. The cry, "His blood be upon us and our children," received an awful retribution in kind and a terrible fulfillment in such a demonic atrocity.

### **Verse 22**

This was fulfilled in the relatively short duration of the siege which lasted five months. Some degree of mercy was granted "for the elect's sake" lends New Testament emphasis to the principle taught in the Old Testament to the effect that ten righteous persons would have prevented the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain.

### **Verses 23-26**

Although the disciples saw Christ ascend, the very fact that they expected Him to return made them vulnerable to the claims of false Christ's, pretending to be the Messiah. Christ warned that His second coming would be world-wide, glorious, sudden, and open for all the world to behold, thus contrasting sharply with the secretive pretensions of false Christs in secret chambers, remote wildernesses, or deserts.

The mark of secrecy, as of something hidden, known only to the "insiders," was an unflinching characteristic of false Christs and false teachers; but not even the first advent of Christ was distinguished by any such concealment.

Those marvelous things of the true Christ "were not done in a corner." (Acts 26:26) The very heavens burst into praise the night He was born. His great wonders were performed before vast multitudes, and His credentials as the true King were presented before the highest tribunals of the people, both Jews and Gentiles.

### **Verses 27-28**

It has been pointed out that Vespasian and Titus were returning from a campaign in the east against Rome's perennial foes, the Parthians, when they decided, on the way back to Rome, to make an end of rebellious Jerusalem. Thus the destroying power came from the east to the west, although it is said that Titus actually launched his attack from the western side of the city. (Encyclopaedia Britannica (1962 ed., Vol. 13, p. 7)

Regarding the carcass and the gathering of the eagles, dogmatism may be out of place, but it seems clear enough that the Jewish state was the carcass. Having rejected Christ and planning at that very moment to accomplish His murder, and standing ready to persecute to death His disciples, Israel no longer possessed any right to exist as a separate and chosen people. It had been forfeited. Judaism was morally dead, corrupted and reprobate at the very center and head of their polity. She was not only morally dead but judicially dead also, Christ having pronounced her doom and sentenced her to destruction. A carcass was an appropriate symbol. The eagles? Strangely enough, eagles were the invariable decorations of the Roman standards, under which the veteran legions of Titus gathered to press the siege of the city.

Extending the figure to its ultimate fulfillment at the end of the age, when the world itself will have become morally dead and when her day of grace has ended, God will also overwhelm it with destruction.

### **Verse 29**

The words of this verse should be understood as a reference to the end of time and the final judgment, of which things the destruction of Jerusalem was only a type. The words about the carcass and the eagles have a prime application to the judgment of the world, morally dead, ravaged by the birds of prey, and undergoing countless sorrows and tribulations as a result.

Their reference to the fate of Jerusalem is not vitiated by this view, because Jesus deliberately described both events with one set of symbols. Proof that Christ knew the two events is seen in Luke 21:24, "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

A very long period of time, called by Jesus, “The times of the Gentiles,” was to follow the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews among all nations.

Reference to the sun, moon, and stars represent a problem. Language such as this is perhaps hyperbole, and was sometimes used concerning the removal of illustrious princes and rulers from their estates. Hebrews 12:26-29 identifies “those things which are shaken” as our material world, both the heavens and the earth!

If it should be objected that the sun, moon, and stars cannot actually fall, it may be replied that if our planet were “shaken” (as the Scriptures affirm it will be) and removed out of its orbit, the sun, moon, and stars would surely appear to fall, bringing about a literal fulfillment of Christ’s prophecy.

Alfred Plummer (op. cit., p. 398) wrote: “That judgment is expressed in symbolic language, but it is no mere image to terrify children; it represents something very real and very awful, and all who hear of it must take account of it in shaping their lives.”

### **Verse 30**

The sign of Jesus’ coming is thus His actual appearance on the clouds of heaven in great glory. The second coming will be a personal and glorious return of Christ in the skies. Christ plainly taught that His second coming would be bad news indeed for the great majority of mankind.

When the second coming will occur is not and cannot be known, except to the “Father.” (Verse 36) When evil men, at last caught up in the catastrophe of the final judgment, shall know then, when it is too late, that Jesus is indeed God come in the flesh and that the Father has committed judgment unto the Son because He is the Son of man. No imagination can be strong enough to picture the wretched sorrow of myriads of the wicked thus summoned to the judgment on that great day.

### **Verse 31**

These words show the strong grounds for referring this portion of the discourses to the final judgment. The parables of the tares and of the fishnet mention the angels that shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just.

The sound of the trumpet is also invariably associated with the judgment and the resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16) Also, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 stresses the appearance of angels with Christ in His second coming for judgment.

### **Verses 32-33**

There is a season for spiritual things and for moral development, no less than for summers and fig trees. A discerning person can sense the onset of summer by the behavior of natural creation around him; and a spiritually perceptive person can also ascertain the approaching judgment of God, whether upon an apostate city like Jerusalem or upon an evil and reprobate world.

The ability to predict the visitation of God's wrath extended to the destruction of Jerusalem, but not to the coming of the final judgment. The disciples predicted with great accuracy the fall of Jerusalem, and most of them fled to Pella during the siege and were spared, but no such ability pertains to the knowledge of the end of the world and the second coming.

### **Verse 34**

This verse is the grounds for construing the whole discourse as a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and referring it exclusively to that event; but careful attention to the exact words Christ used removes the problem.

Jesus used "these things," to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and "that day" to designate the judgment. Thus, this verse cannot apply to the second coming and final judgment but to the destruction of the Holy City, for He said, "That generation would not pass away till all 'these things' be accomplished." Furthermore, "this generation" has a much broader meaning than the lifetime of those who heard Him. If Christ had intended that kind of meaning, He would have used words similar to those of Mark 9:1. Therefore, we look for some special meaning of the term generation. As regarded the destruction of Jerusalem, "generations" had a limitation to the lives of persons then living; but, as regards the final judgment, "generation" referred to the descendants of Abraham, meaning the race of the Jews and that they would not cease as a separate people until the end of time.

### **Verse 35**

This verse affirms two propositions:

- (1) that heaven and earth shall pass away, and
- (2) that Christ's words shall not pass away.

The reference to the first of these grew out of the fact that He had just described the passing away of the heavens and the earth, and He made His word to be more permanent and abiding than any material substance. Christ's word shall judge men at the last day. (John 12:48)

### **Verse 36**

Note again the contrast between "that day" of this place and "these things" spoken earlier, indicating that Christ clearly differentiated between the immediate and remote fulfillment of this great prophecy.

There were many things Christ did not choose to know during the days of His fleshly limitation. The precise day and hour of the judgment and the destruction of the ungodly is unknown and unknowable by Ken. However, God does know the day and the hour. Why?" Because God has appointed it. (Acts 17:31)

### **Verses 37-41**

A number of similarities between conditions prior to the flood and those before the final judgment may be noted. The vast majority will have rejected God's word. There shall be no awareness of impending disaster. The normal pursuits of mankind will continue, as always. Ignorance of God and His designs for mankind will continue up to the very hour of judgment; and the righteous shall continue to live in close proximity to the wicked till the very last. No thought of judgment or of reckoning shall disturb men's minds; and then it will occur suddenly, universally, in a single day, and at a time when men shall least expect it.

### **Verses 42-44**

The most urgent conclusion from the preceding discourse was presented in a single word by Jesus, "Watch!" Since it is impossible to know the day or the hour, the true disciples must be ready always. The second coming will occur at a time when men do not expect it, and that should set at rest the speculations of those who have thought to discover it.

## **Verses 45-51**

This parable changed the figure from a householder guarding against a thief to that of servants waiting for their lord's return, having, in the meantime, full control of their lord's household, his goods, and all his property.

Privilege carries its own responsibility, and the false teacher is certain to be judged and condemned in due season. The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" are expressions used by Jesus to convey some idea of the anguish and despair of the condemned who shall be cast into the outer darkness.

## **CHAPTER 25**

### **THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS**

### **THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**

### **SCENES FROM THE FINAL JUDGMENT**

## **PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS**

### **Verses 1-13**

This is plainly a parable of the second coming and of the judgment, thus emphasizing the presence of that theme in Chapter 24.

#### **Analogies:**

- |      |                          |   |                             |
|------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| (1)  | The kingdom of heaven    | = | the church                  |
| (2)  | The bridegroom           | = | Christ                      |
| (3)  | The midnight arrival     | = | the second advent           |
| (4)  | The virgins              | = | church members              |
| (5)  | The wise virgins         | = | the prepared                |
| (6)  | The foolish virgins      | = | the unprepared              |
| (7)  | The lamps                | = | (a) faith or (b) works      |
| (8)  | The oil                  | = | (a) works or (b) the Spirit |
| (9)  | The sleep of the virgins | = | the sleep of death          |
| (10) | Tarrying of bridegroom   | = | delay of second coming      |
| (11) | The midnight cry         | = | the call to judgment        |
| (12) | Refusal to give oil      | = | merit not transferrable     |
| (13) | Exclusion of the foolish | = | rejection of unprepared     |

(14) The shut door = impossibility of last-minute preparation

This parable pertains to members of the body of Christ and their kingdom duties. It is the bridesmaids who appear in this analogy as Christians, and their going forth to meet the bridegroom represents the going forth of Christians to meet the Lord eternally.

The parable is the tragic story of the ready and the unready. It applies to all present-day Christians. The kingdom of heaven is the church, aptly set forth in the analogy as a company of precious bridesmaids. The great shock, therefore, is to realize that some, even of these, shall be summarily excluded from association with the bridegroom. The parable is designed to shock men into realization that a host of good, clean, moral, and respectable members of the church will be lost. Through sheer negligence, many of the redeemed shall fail to enter in. The foolish virgins are the Lord's own example of saved persons who at last failed to make the port of everlasting life.

This warns against idleness and neglect, but it should not discourage. Those foolish virgins did not provide oil, but they could have done so. What was required of them was nothing extraordinary or especially difficult, but it required concern and attention which they failed to give.

"Five of them were foolish . . ." A favorite term in Scripture for the unsaved is precisely "foolish." It is the "fool" who says in his heart there is no God. (Psalm 14:1)

The man who built on sand is described not as vicious but as "foolish." (Matthew 7:26) The rich man who mistook his body for his soul was denominated by the Lord, "Thou fool!" (Luke 12:20) Those unfortunate bridesmaids of this parable were in no sense reprobate or immoral, but "foolish." They had no oil in their lamps. They were spiritually bankrupt.

"Got drowsy and began to sleep . . ." The sleep in this parable must be identified with the sleep of death, because:

- (1) it ended only when the midnight cry heralded the second advent, symbolized by the coming of the bridegroom, and
- (2) because both the ready and the unready, except, of course, for those relatively few who shall remain alive at the coming of the Lord.

“While the bridegroom was delaying . . . “ This referred to the long delay prior to the second coming of Christ. It has been vigorously alleged that the early Christians thought the coming of the Lord would surely take place within their life span. The teachings of Christ afford abundant proof that Jesus taught otherwise.

“The prudent took oil in flasks long with their lamps . . .” There appears to be no relative evaluation of lamps vs. oil, or oil vs. lamps, intended in this parable. Both oil and lamps were vital and necessary. There is not the slightest suggestion that if the foolish virgins had brought plenty of oil and no lamps, they would have been admitted.

Therefore, to take a position with reference to the superiority of either oil or lamps would be only to obscure the fact that both are required. For this reason, it makes no difference whether the lamps are viewed as faith without works, or works without the Spirit of God, or whether the oil is made to be the Holy Spirit without which a person is “none of His” (Romans 8:9), or that living faith without which it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)

The overwhelming message of the parable turns on preparation or the lack of it. The oil happened to be the necessity which the foolish virgins failed to supply; but their failure would have been no less fatal to their purpose if they had failed to supply lamps.

The Romish doctrine of the works of supererogation or the effect that the good deeds done by saints in excess of their requirements of divine law, provide a bank of merit or stored-up credit. Heaven will be a prepared place for a prepared people and failure to prepare will mean failure to enter.

“The door was shut . . .” This is warning to the good, morally upright, the respectable, and the cultured church member, a warning thundered from the gates of heaven, “There must be oil in your lamp,” Do not be deceived by the cliché of Satan to the effect that “works cannot save.” Preparation can save, and works are invariably involved in preparation. One shudders to think of some who may be trusting to be saved by “faith alone,” as outlined in many of the current creeds, or expecting the stored-up merit of some ancient “saint” to save them.



Equally futile are the hopes of those who may rely upon the goodness of their parents, the merits of their families, or the works of their religious group to save them. Is there enough oil in your lamp? Arouse, you sleepers, and provide oil for your lamps before life's little day is spent. Oil you must have, not merely enough to light, but enough to burn and last.

An apostle said, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12) The unwise virgins simply did not do it, and millions today are in the same condition. They are members of the company called to meet the Bridegroom; they even have lamps, and a little oil, but not enough. Not enough! What awful words are those!

This parable is a trumpet call and war cry for men to bestir themselves. "Go and buy for yourselves!" This is the only proper advice; do it now. The foolish virgins waited, waited till the sun declined, and twilight came and darkness fell, till their eyes were closed in the sleep of death; and in that wretched state of unpreparedness, the midnight cry overtook them. Then it was too late; may it not be so for us!

"Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour . . ." This was Jesus' own conclusion from the parable; it should also be ours. The meaning of "watch" is not restricted to saying awake but includes thoroughness of preparation, and alertness that takes account of unseen contingencies, and a conscious readiness at all times to respond to the divine summons.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**

The following analogies will readily be seen in this parable:

- |     |                                    |   |                          |
|-----|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| (1) | The man going into another country | = | Christ the Lord          |
| (2) | The other country                  | = | heaven where Christ is   |
| (3) | The servants                       | = | Christ's disciples       |
| (4) | Distribution of talents            | = | endowment of gifts       |
| (5) | The return of the man              | = | second advent            |
| (6) | The accounting required            | = | the judgment             |
| (7) | Profit reported                    | = | improvement of gifts     |
| (8) | The buried talent                  | = | sloth, and an evil heart |

- |      |                        |   |                       |
|------|------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| (9)  | The joy of the Lord    | = | felicity in heaven    |
| (10) | The outer darkness     | = | punishment of wicked  |
| (11) | Faithful servants      | = | faithful Christians   |
| (12) | The unfaithful servant | = | unfaithful Christians |

**Verse 14**

Christ has entered into that upper and better country, but He has delivered unto each one of His disciples certain talents and abilities, along with responsibility for the due exercise of hem. The proper ownership of all things is the Lord's, since both the servants and the goods they received were His.

**Verse 15**

The true standard for distribution of wealth is not as expressed by the Marxist view, "to each according to his need," but rather to each "according to his ability." The reason lies in the fact that without ability, even that which a man receives lies wasted, neglected, or diminished, and in the law of economic progress there can never be, in the final analysis, any substitute for ability.

How lavish are God's gifts. None came empty-handed from Him. God places in every man's hands the necessary instruments for God's service and endows him with abundant means of service to his Creator. The diversity of gifts is meaningful. No two are alike. Every individual is the handiwork of the Eternal with gifts unlike those of any other. One may have less, one more, another least, and another most; but every person made in the image of God is the possessor of a unique endorsement.

The distribution was fair and equitable and was made upon the basis of the varying abilities of the recipient. Five talents would have been an intolerable burden to the man with one-talent ability, and the five-talent man would not have been challenged by gift of only one.

One may rest assured that God's mercy and wisdom provided with each man's distribution of gifts that personal endowment with which he may be most likely, and with least danger, to enter into life eternal. We hold this to be true of him of one talent no less than we may conclude that the man of one talent would have been inclined more to sloth had he been given five than was the case with one.

### **Verses 16-19**

A remarkable difference in this and the parable of the virgin is seen in the fact that, whereas they waited for the Lord' appearing, these servants were employed until His return. In the first case, the inner spiritual life of a Christian is represented, and in this their outward activity. There is, to be sure, an element of both in the life of every child of God.

The case of the servant with the buried talent is understood when it is remembered that he was a bondservant, under full obligation to seek and improve his lord's interest.

In verse 19, is another strong hint of the delay of the Lord's coming. The word "reckoning" is written over against every thought, word, and deed indulged by the Lord's disciples. It should be noted that this parable is primarily one regarding the Lord's servants, and not of all men; although, of course, this does not exclude the accounting that shall at last be given by non-servants as well.

### **Verses 20-21**

It is of vast significance that the "reckoning" with the servants was upon an individual basis and that no group appraisal of their efforts was allowed. This is a strong variance with the habits of men who love to judge themselves and assess their success or failure on the basis of group achievements.

It appears that men will not be judged on the basis of general success of some group or congregation of which they may be a part, but upon the basis of their individual fidelity.

The five-talented man was applauded and approved, not because he had gained five other talents but upon the basis of his faithfulness. Significantly, the two-talent man received the identical commendation that is vital, but the quality of it.

In the faith of Christ, it is true that:

*When the one great Scorer comes  
To write against your name,  
He writes not if you won or lost.  
But how you played the game.*

—Anon.

J. W. McGarvey (Commentary, p. 218) wrote: "In this part of the parable, there is a transition to the language of the Lord from heaven when bestowing the eternal benediction: for the words, "Enter into the joy of your Master," are not those of an earthly master when rewarding his servants."

### **Verses 22-23**

What are the "many things" over which the Lord will set His faithful ones at the second coming? We cannot know. Paul said: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

### **Verses 24-25**

The failure of the one-talent man is the burden of the parable. It should not be supposed, however, that failure is invariably associated with one-talent individuals. His failure was not in the size of his gift but in his failure to use it. History records many tragic failures of the gifted; and failure is always sad when it comes to the high and mighty, and just as sad when it comes to the poor and lowly.

The reception of but a single talent was no license for failure. No man will be excused merely on the basis that he does not have much ability, or that his gifts are less than the gifts of others.

Since man's failure is the great point of the parable, we shall particularly note the ingredients of it and mark the antecedent attitudes that caused it.

First, he failed in his attitude toward God. All around us are men who have a low opinion of God. That in itself is damnation. H. Leo Boles (Commentary on Matthew, p. 483) wrote: We attribute to others what we find in ourselves. Very few people excuse their own sin without blaming God or someone else for it. He (the one-talent man) gave back all that he had received; he had done no harm, but he had done no good with that which was entrusted to him. He had been in possession of his Master's money for a long time; if he had been a free man, he would have owed interest on it; but he had been too slothful to use the talent to any gain for his master. His master had really lost by the indolence of his servant." The low opinion the one-talent servant had of his Lord was a vital factor in his failure.

Another cause was his sloth. Plain indolence and laziness are at the bottom of widespread neglect of Christian duty. How many are absent, and how frequently, from the worship of God, only because a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, robs them of the energy to serve God. Whatever the unfaithful servant said about his failure, the Lord put the finger of analytical truth on the seat of the problem when he said, “Thou wicked and slothful servant!”

Note that his failure did not consist of theft, rebellion, or arson. G. Campbell Morgan (*An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 421) wrote: “When Christ comes, the slothful and unprofitable will be cast out, not because they did not believe, or because they had rebelled, but because they had neglected the opportunities which He had committed to them.”

#### **Verses 26-27**

If it could be true that God should prove to be hard, uncompromising, unyielding and relentless, men should redouble their efforts to please Him, FOR GOD IS GOD.

Richard C. Trench (*op. cit.*, p. 288) wrote: “A comparison of the causes which led to this servant’s exclusion and those which led to that of the foolish virgins is full of warning and instruction to all. Those virgins erred through a vain over confidence. This servant through an under confidence that was equally vain and sinful. They were over bold; he was not bold enough. Thus two wrong aspects under which we may be tempted to regard God’s service, two rocks upon opposite sides on which faith is in danger of being shipwrecked are laid down for us, as in a chart, that we may avoid them both. Those virgins counted it too easy a thing to serve the Lord; this servant counted it too hard.”

#### **Verse 28**

This is no high-handed case of robbing the poor to enrich the rich. This action on the part of the Lord calls for no indignation. It is God’s law that neglected gifts perish while improved gifts multiply, and that law is as inviolate as the law of gravity. The slothful servant invited the loss of his gifts when he buried it. None may flout this law with impunity; and, in order for more men to know what the law is, Christ immediately stated it.

### **Verses 29-30**

J. R. Dummelow (One Volume Commentary, p. 707) noted: "It is a law of the natural as well as the spiritual world, that the disuse of a faculty finally leads to its complete loss, whereas the due use of it leads to its development and increase."

A much more severe fate for this unprofitable servant is recorded than the mere exclusion of the foolish virgins from the bridal supper; but in that case, their exclusion stands for the total fate of the wicked, no less than the punishment of the unprofitable servant stands for the same thing. The nature of the two parables required a different statement of the penalty in each case. On the whole problem of the eternal fate of the wicked, Jesus was about to be much more specific in the solemn account of the scene which immediately followed these two parables.

### **THE JUDGMENT SCENE**

The scene immediately presented by Christ is peculiar to Matthew and is one of the most awesome revelations brought to mankind by the Savior. All who hope to avoid the fate of the unrighteous and aspire to enter the home of the redeemed should take deeply to heart the words of Christ who said the following:

#### **Verse 31**

This place does not teach that Christ will sit upon the throne of His glory only upon the occasion of His second coming nor that He will only then begin to do so. He had already revealed to His disciples that, "He would sit on His glorious throne" in the times of the regeneration." (Matthew 19:28) That is, in the times of the new birth, namely, now, in this present era, during which period the twelve apostles are also reigning with Him on twelve thrones, ruling over the twelve tribes of spiritual Israel, which is the church.

The expression, "then" shall He sit, etc., refers to a special sitting for the great assize, the judgment of the great day. He is already upon the throne of His glory; but then He will be visibly so, and every eye shall see Him, and they shall look upon Him whom they pierced. His angels even now are diligent in the service of them that shall be the heirs of everlasting life. (Hebrews 1:14)

Now Christ, from His glory throne, intercedes for His own but then He shall appear in Judgment. (Thessalonians 1:8)

### **Verse 32**

The cataclysmic and simultaneous judgment of all nations depicted here should not be understood as some special kind of selection regarding earth's governments. The "all nations" here is the same as that of the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:18-20) and, from the parallel account in Mark, it is learned that it means "every creature," that is, "every man born into the world." Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10)

The designation of all mankind under two figures, the sheep and the goats, is in keeping with the dual classification stressed throughout the Scriptures, such as the "wheat" and the "chaff," the "wise" and the foolish," etc.

### **Verses 33-34**

The significance of the right and the left is the same in all nations and from the most ancient times. The kingdom which God has allotted to the righteous was designed before the human race was created, "which God predestined before the ages to our glory." (1 Corinthians 2:7) The disaster in Eden did not thwart, nor will it even delay, the ultimate achievement of God's eternal purpose.

### **Verses 35-36**

This makes one's relationship to Christ the all-important consideration; and as He pointed out a moment later, that relationship turns altogether upon the treatment of His disciples. Just as in the case of Saul of Tarsus his persecution of the church amounted to his persecution of Christ (Acts 22:7); so, in all ages, the treatment of the Lord's followers shall be the basis of determining one's relationship to their Head, which is Christ. What is done to Christ's followers is done to Him. What is done to His church is done to Him.

It is not the treatment of all the wretched and unfortunate of earth that shall make up the burden of the Christian's duty (though that must be allowed as desirable), but the treatment of "these My brethren," as Christ expressed it, that determines destiny. (see verse 40)

### **Verses 37-39**

The surprise of the righteous is itself surprising. The element of surprise applies to both the saved and the unsaved, but the principle is stated with crystal clarity. "What we do to His, we do to Him." What an awful warning this contains for those who set at naught the Lord's true followers, those who persecute, harass, mistreat, deny, or neglect them! Their needs, their rights, and their requirements are the Lord's. To deny them is to deny Him. In view of this, the principal part of every church's budget should be on command for the alleviation, not of the wicked world's abounding woes, but for the legitimate needs and requirements of God's people. That it is not usually so is a shame of modern Christianity.

### **Verse 40**

No thoughtful person can conclude that Jesus equated salvation with benevolence in the usual sense. It is not mere charity, but help of Christ's followers that is highlighted here. If this principle were more widely understood and accepted, it would revolutionize men's attitude toward the church.

In the final essence, what men do to His church is to do the same to Christ who is the head of the church. On the other hand, those who support and provide for the church and extend their concern and constant aid upon behalf of her poor and needy, do the same for Christ whose body is the church.

### **Verse 41**

We approach the study of this passage with an overwhelming sense of melancholy and the deepest feelings of sorrow for the awful fate of the wicked. Alas, the doctrine of hell is a prominent teaching of the Son of God.

A little reflection will suggest the most logical reasons why such teaching as hell is not only just and reasonable but also actually necessary. No industrial concern ever operated without some means of waste disposal, and no well-managed kitchen ever existed without a garbage pail or its equivalent. How then, in all reason, could God Almighty be expected to operate a complex as large and diverse as the universe without some means of destroying those portions of it which, if permitted, would circumvent and countermand His benevolent purpose for the entire creation? Hell is God's cosmic disposal unit; yet it is not prepared for men but for Satan and his angels, and the only persons



who will be finally lost in hell are those who elect to follow the influence of Satan and must also partake of his destiny.

Christ spread wide His bleeding hands upon the cross in order to woo men and to save them, and redeem them from the power of the evil one. Men who rush past the warning signals can ultimately blame no one except themselves.

Who can think of a better way to deal with Satan than by his being cast into hell which God prepared, or may be in the process of preparing, for the eternal one?

What would you do, if you were God? Would you permit Satan to continue unabated for all eternity with license to, rob, rape, plunder, seduce, destroy and deceive, corrupt, wound, and slay forever? God has revealed His will in His announced purpose to overwhelm Satan and the fallen angels in the “lake of fire that burns with brimstone.” In a certain fearful sense, one may thank God for hell. It is the place where the great enemy of mankind shall at last be destroyed.

Those who have been deceived into thinking hell as some kind of torture arrangement which God, through peevishness or caprice, has devised for naughty children of men, have failed to comprehend the scope and power of the mighty spiritual conflict which has opened a seam in the nature of every man ever born on earth, nor have they taken account of the vicious destruction of man’s arch-enemy, Satan.

As to the speculation of what hell will be like, it is safe to assert that we do not know. It has not even entered into the heart of man what wonderful things God has prepared for the redeemed (1 Corinthians 2:9); and it may safely be assumed that man’s mind has not fully conceived what may be the details of eternal punishment.

The very figures used in Scripture such as “lake of fire” and “outer darkness” are not such as lend themselves to building a clear mental image of what hell will be. Enough that men have been adequately warned. May none who read these lines ever know what it will really be!

“The devil and his angels . . .” indicates that some of the angels, in a sense belong to Satan. Why? Because they kept not their first estate but elected to follow Satan in a course of rebellion and disobedience of God’s will. Note: 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 1:6 shed additional light upon the status of Satan’s angels.

### **Verses 42-45**

It is remarkable that in this passage the unsaved refer to Christ as: “Lord,” giving support to the interpretation which refers this entire judgment scene to the church only, but in refutation of that idea, it should be recalled that, “Every knee shall bow and tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11) At that great moment when all nations shall have been assembled before the throne of Christ for judgment, infidelity will have finally and eternally disappeared; but the incorrigible sinners who have mocked God’s word shall plead in vain before the gates of life.

### **Verse 46**

This overwhelming word from man’s only Redeemer is shocking! The soul draws back from the contemplation of anything so terrible as eternal punishment.

## **CHAPTER 26**

### **THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS**

### **THE PRECIOUS OINTMENT**

### **THE BARGAIN OF JUDAS**

### **THE BETRAYAL AND SEIZURE**

### **THE TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN**

### **PETER’S THREE DENIALS**

#### **Verse 1**

The teachings of Christ to Israel at this point were concluded. The atonement for the sins of all men was the next order of His divine will.

#### **Verse 2**

Christ related the crucifixion to the Passover, rather than to the ordinary Sabbath. The Passover always came at sundown on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, which means that it came on a different day of the week each year. In this place Christ named the kind of execution He would receive: crucifixion.

Christ here placed His crucifixion as an event that would occur “after two days,” and that it would take place during the Passover festivities. Yet at the very time Christ revealed this to the disciples, the chief priests decided otherwise. They decided that He should die by subtlety (that is secretly, by

assassination or murder, and that it should not be done during the feast (verse 5), thus clearly postponing His death for at least a week. However they were not the architects of our Lord's death. As the Master said, He would lay down His life of His own accord; and Christ, not the priests, would choose the hour and the manner of His doing so.

### **Verse 3**

The court of the high priest was his palace; and the high priest mentioned here, Caiaphas, a son-in-law of Annas, had been named to that position by Valerius Gratus prior to 26 A.D., and was deposed by Vitellius in 37 A.D.

Annas was appointed high priest in 7 A.D., by Quirinius, governor of Syria. He was a fierce passionate zealot and after putting a man to death in 14 A.D., he was deposed and replaced by his son Eleazar, and the power to exact the death penalty was henceforth denied to the Jews except with the consent of the governor.

### **Verse 4**

The plan proposed by the priests in this verse was simply that of murder. They intended to capture Christ and quietly destroy Him. They could not have succeeded in this, because Christ said, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative." (John 10:18)

Not having the right to invoke the death penalty without the consent of the governor, they decided to murder Jesus. In such an event, Christ could merely have disappeared, but Christ simply would not allow them to get away with such a deed. His case, the instigation of His will, would have a hearing, in fact, six hearings, before both Jews and Gentiles; and He would compel them to go on record, and the record would last for all ages to come. Moreover, the true reason for their hatred would be duly set forth in the imperishable record for the information of thousands of generations of men.

### **Verse 5**

"But they were saying . . ." How futile was what they said. Naturally, with people present for the Passover from all over the ancient empire, they shrank from murdering a popular and noble person like Jesus was known to be, lest their deed should lose some of the popular support which they enjoyed from the

multitudes. Thus, caution dictated that they wait till the feast was over. That, however, was not to be.

The incident that precipitated Judas' shameful deed took place that very evening at a feast in the home of Simon the leper.

### **Verses 6-7**

Since Christ alone was able to cure that malady, this means that Christ had healed Simon, and probably out of gratitude, Simon held this dinner in his home for Jesus. The woman mentioned was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha who were also present at the dinner. Lazarus was a guest, Martha as usual was helping with the serving, and Mary, also as usual, was blessed with a deeper insight into the spiritual realities of the occasion.

A. T. Robertson's clear word on this incident removes any chance of confusing it with a similar event recorded in Luke 7:36ff which occurred in the home of Simon, the Pharisee. A. T. Robertson (A Harmony of the Gospels. P. 187, footnote), wrote: "This anointing has nothing in common with that given in Luke, except the fact of a woman anointing the Savior's feet, and the name Simon, which was common. The former was in Galilee; this is at Bethany near Jerusalem. There the host despised the woman who anointed; here, her brother is one of the guests, and her sister an active attendant. There the woman was a sinner, a notoriously bad woman; here it is the devout Mary who "sat at the Lord's feet and heard His words," months before. There the host thought it strange that Jesus allowed her to touch Him; here the disciples complained of the waste. There the Savior gave assurance of forgiveness, here of perpetual and world-wide honor. Especially notice that here the woman who anoints is anticipating His speedy death and burial, of which at the former time He had never distinctly spoken. In view of all these differences, it is absurd to represent the two anointments, as the same and outrageous on such slender grounds to cast reproach on Mary of Bethany."

John adds the information that Jesus' feet were also anointed, gives the monetary value of the ointment as 300 denarii, and names the precious ointment as nard or spikenard. John also gave the name of the principal objector among the disciples as Judas, mentions Mary's wiping His feet with her

hair. His mention of the odor that filled the house (along with other special details) indicates that John was also among those present.

#### **Verse 8**

Judas kept the bag and, as John revealed, he was not at all concerned for the poor, but wanted the money in the bag that he might steal it. This was not the first nor the last time that unworthy motives and designs were cloaked in pious words.

#### **Verse 9**

One cannot resist the temptation to compare this with the pleas of politicians who are always declaiming about the poor.

#### **Verse 10**

Christ's words indicate that Mary herself has been reproached by Judas and the others regarding the "waste!" Jesus intervened in Mary's behalf and uttered a strong approval of this "good work" upon His person. Some apparently believe that "good work" in the church is a matter of leading public prayers or passing the collection plate; but the fact that sacrificial giving is also a good work should not be overlooked.

#### **Verse 11**

This statement of Christ is true both in and out of the context. All the social schemes of all ages have not changed the situation, nor will they ever do so. The reasons are in men themselves who indulge their pride, their appetites, their passions, and foibles without regard to consequences until poverty comes like an armed man upon them. Christ placed His own requirements above even the legitimate needs of the poor.

#### **Verse 12**

Christ accepted the ointment poured upon His body, first on the loving basis upon which Mary offered it, and that He then extended the meaning of it to encompass His approaching death and burial. Christ said, "She did it to prepare Me for burial."

#### **Verse 13**

Who but God (in Christ) could have had such thoughts and made such promises as contained in these words? Condemned though He stood by the rulers of His people, betrayed by a friend, and facing shame upon the cross, the

Savior, far from being intimidated by such realities, was thinking of the sweeping triumph of the gospel “in the whole world!” The Lord during those dark hours saw not the shame, the agony, or horror of death, but the universal victory of the true and everlasting glory of them who would love and appreciate it. (Hebrews 12:2) This is another fruitful example that what is given to Christ is saved; all else is lost.

## **BETRAYAL BY JUDAS ISCARIOT**

### **Verse 14**

Matthew’s arrangement of the events in this chapter certainly suggests that the events concerning the “waste” of the spikenard are definitely connected to the defection of Judas. A. T. Robertson (op. cit., p. 142), wrote: “Judas, stung by the rebuke of Jesus at the feast, bargains with the rulers to betray Jesus.”

If such assumptions are true, avarice, wounded pride, and disappointment appear as prime ingredients in Judas’ motivation for betrayal. One could come nearer understanding it if Christ had been betrayed for some big reason, but the things which apparently motivated Judas were extremely small considerations.

### **Verse 15**

“Willing to give me . . .” Ah, there was the fatal cleft in the heart of Judas. Such an attitude says, “I’ll take the cash; let the credit go; a bird in the hand’s worth two in the bush! Get yours while the getting’s good! You’ve got to look out for number one!” Such an attitude betrayed the Son of God, and it is still doing so.

It surely seems almost incredible that those priests who were supposed to know so much Scripture could have been so oblivious to the prophecy of Zechariah that they should have exactly fulfilled it, matching to the penny the Messiah’s betrayal price as set forth by that prophet. (Zechariah 11:12-13)

### **Verse 16**

The words “deliver Him” are translated “betray Him” in some of the versions of the Bible. The opportunity Judas sought was a quiet one in which Christ could be pointed out and captured by the priests without tumult, or in the absence of the multitude. (Luke 22:6) Judas, knowing the place where Jesus was

accustomed to retire for prayer with His disciples, would have no difficulty in finding such an occasion.

### **Verse 17**

The first day of unleavened bread was the day before the preparation for the Passover, namely the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nisan; and whether the Lord ate His last meal with the disciples on Wednesday or Thursday does not really matter. The day on which He was crucified corresponded to the day the paschal lambs were slain, Christ thus fulfilling, even in His death the figure of the “lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Technically, His last meal occurred on the day of His crucifixion, although actually it occurred the night before, a fact derived from the Jewish method of reckoning time and marking the day as beginning at sunset and ending at sunset the following day. That Christ was crucified, not on the 15<sup>th</sup> Nisan but on the 14<sup>th</sup> is plain from these considerations:

- (1) The 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan would not be called merely the preparation. (John 19:31)

Yet that was the day Christ's body was upon the cross; and the concern of the leaders in hastening His death by the breaking of His legs (as they intended) was precisely for the purpose of preventing His body from remaining upon the cross over the Passover (15<sup>th</sup> Nisan), which began technically at sundown the day He suffered (14<sup>h</sup> Nisan).

- (2) If the day of the crucifixion had been the Passover (15<sup>th</sup> Nisan), the officers and men who arrested Jesus the night before (after the Passover had legally begun) would not have borne arms on such a high day.
- (3) If the day of the crucifixion had been the Passover proper, Joseph of Arimathea would not have prepared spices on that day.  
(Mark 15:46; Luke 23:56)

In view of the above, Christ's last meal, called the Passover, was not actually that. At least, it was not on the Passover day. It preceded the Passover. There is no evidence that a lamb was prepared and eaten by the Lord and His disciples.

### **Verse 18**

J. R. Dummelow (One Volume Commentary, p. 709) wrote: “The Last Supper is here called the Passover, because in many respects it resembled it. It is not,

however, certain that there was a lamb. Jesus Himself was the Lamb; and, as He intended to supersede the type by the reality, it was not absolutely necessary for the type to be present.”

Christ did not say, “I will eat the Passover,” but that, “I keep the Passover.” Moreover, He did not say, “The Passover is at hand,” but that “My time is at hand.”

Dummelow (Ibid), said: “The disciples would doubtless be surprised at the proposal of Jesus to keep the Passover a day before the legal time. The disciples were therefore instructed to give the reason, “My time is at hand.” The meaning was, “My death will happen before the legal time arrives.”

#### **Verse 19**

They no doubt thought that Christ would actually eat the Passover with them the following night, not that very evening, for it would have been impossible for them to procure the lamb, properly slain and blessed in the temple, until the day following.

#### **Verse 20**

This cannot mean, “He was eating the Passover.” That is not what the passage says. Those who assume that this was the Passover should explain why Jesus ate it sitting down, or rather reclining at the table,” as the Greek has it. The Law specifically required that it be eaten standing up (Exodus 12:11); and the fact that the Jews no longer honored that commandment did not change God’s law.

Why should Matthew have mentioned that Jesus was “reclining” at the table unless this had pertinence and significance? Must we conclude that Christ had thereby consented with the Jews of His generation to eat the Passover lying down, instead of standing up as God’s law required; or is it intended that we should see that this is not the Passover at all?

#### **Verse 21**

Why was this warning spoken? Did our Savior, by this means and at so late an hour, try to stay the mad progress of Judas on his way to destruction? Was it to impel the heart-searching that immediately followed on the part of them all?

He was Jesus’ friend, even an apostle; he was trusted, even carrying the bag; he ate of His bread. Characteristically, Christ expanded and extended the



prophecy in more detail, noting in the following conversation that it would be one, “Who dipped his hand” in the dish with Jesus. (Verse 23) Of the Twelve, only one man carried the bag and sat next to Jesus at the table.

The argument that Judas was predestined to the tragic role he played and that he was, therefore, not to blame for his conduct, is false. It was by choice and by transgression, that Judas fell. God’s foreknowledge of it did not require him to commit such a sin.

Judas was not a devil from the beginning; at first he was a noble apostle, receiving from Christ the same commission as the others to heal the sick and cast out demons. (Matthew 10:8)

#### **Verse 22**

In this heartbreaking scene, the earthly fortunes of our Lord were at their lowest ebb. One of His chosen was a traitor with the blood-money already in his bag. The gathering storm would soon break, the darkness deepened, and every man present felt the awful possibility of forsaking and betraying Him.

#### **Verse 23**

Thus Jesus plainly identified Judas as the traitor.

#### **Verse 24**

This was possibly a last-minute effort on the part of Christ to arouse in Judas some desire of repentance. Christ had already indicated to Judas that his treachery was known; and if Judas, convicted of sin, had only confessed it instead and asked Jesus’ forgiveness, he could have been spared participation in the actual delivery of Christ to his foes.

“The Son of man is to go . . .” probably means ‘go his way to death.’ Alfred Plummer (op. cit., p. 359) viewed this passage regarding the sin of Judas and wrote: “These counsels did not necessitate the sin of Judas; they would have been fulfilled if he had remained faithful. Of his own free will, he helped to carry them out in a particular manner, and for this he is responsible and stands justly condemned.”

#### **Verse 25**

“You have said it yourself . . .” was a well-understood affirmative in the idiom of the Jews. Judas’ treason was known to all, and he would move at once to effect Jesus’ delivery to the chief priests. Christ announced that to

whomsoever He should give the sop, the same it was who should betray Him. He then gave the sop to Judas. (John 13:23-30) Judas was admonished, “What you do, do quickly.” (John 13:27, 28)

Why did Christ admonish Judas to do his foul deed quickly? It was inappropriate that he should participate in the Last Supper. The presentation of “the sop” to Judas is ironic in that he was betraying Christ for a mere pittance, a financial sop, a single mouthful, a trifle, giving up something of infinite value for something of the most trivial worth.

“It was night” also carries the deepest implications. How dark was that night when the Savior’s friend betrayed Him, the disciples forsook Him and fled, and the powers of darkness seized possession of the body of the Christ of God.

## **INSTITUTION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

### **Verse 26**

This and through verse 30 is Matthew’s account of the establishment of the Lord’s Supper. Christ often used metaphor in His teaching, saying, “I am the door,” “I am the way,” “I am the bread of life,” etc.

The expression “This is My body” which they were to take and eat, actually focuses attention upon the lamb of the Passover, the type, of which Jesus was the glorious fulfillment. It is not in eating an actual lamb, but in living the word of Christ will men receive eternal life.

### **Verse 27**

“Drink from it, all of you . . .” means that all of them were to drink of it, not just that some of them were to drink. The “all” are to partake is a mandate for the whole church in all ages, refuting the notion that some, the priests for example, may drink of the cup and that the laity may not.

### **Verse 28**

Christ made the Lord’s Supper the solemn sign and seal of the covenant for the forgiveness of the sins of His disciples in all ages. Christians who forsake the Lord’s Supper are described in the New Testament as having “trodden underfoot the Son of God” and as having “counted the blood of the covenant wherewith

(they) were sanctified an unholy thing” and as having “done despite” (insulted) the Spirit of grace. (Hebrews 10:29)

Christ’s blood was not shed because men were already forgiven but in order that they might be forgiven. Christ did not die because men were already saved but in order that they might, as a result of His death, receive salvation.

“Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Whatever the expression means in one place it must also mean in the other. Thus the familiar heresy that baptism is not related to forgiveness of sins is refuted, incidentally but devastatingly, by Christ’s use of the key phrase in this verse.

Acts 2:38 and Matthew 26:28, both passages in the Greek text, and as far as is known in all translations are identical in form and meaning. Therefore, if Christ’s pouring out of His blood was a prerequisite in the procurement of human forgiveness, then also baptism is a prerequisite action in the procurement of that same forgiveness on behalf of His disciples. He must shed His blood. We must be baptized. Christ’s atonement was the enabling act; man’s baptism is but human compliance with one of the conditions upon which men are privileged to participate in it, but that human compliance is necessary too; hence, baptism is “unto remission of sins.”

### **Verse 29**

Christ in this verse referred to the cup which He had just blessed as “the fruit of the vine!” That, of course is what it was before He blessed it; and this is divine testimony to the fact that it is exactly what it was after He blessed it—“the fruit of the vine.”

“When I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom . . . “ in a sense, Christ always partakes of the Lord’s Supper with His disciples, since “Where two or three are gathered together in His name”, Christ is spiritually present with them. (Matthew 18:20)

Three conditions prerequisite to His partaking of the fruit of the vine with His disciples were spelled out:

- (1) it would be “new” wine;
- (2) it would be with His disciples; and
- (3) it would be “in,” the kingdom. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that Christ refused the wine mingled with gall when He was crucified.

In that case:

- (1) the wine was not new,
- (2) it was not with His disciples, and
- (3) the kingdom had not at that time been set up.

#### Verse 30

Chapters 14-17 in John record the following as having taken place at that time:

- (1) the farewell discourse,
- (2) concerning the Comforter, and
- (3) I am the true vine,
- (4) Christ’s intercessory prayer, and other significant teachings.

The singing of a hymn is significant. Singing and not instrumental music was always associated with Christ and the apostles. The presumption with which men have loaded the worship of Christ with their own devices is reprehensible. The New Testament affords no example of such innovations, but repeated references to singing are recorded. (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19, etc.)

## **PETER'S DENIAL FORETOLD**

### **Verse 31**

The prophecy cited in verse 31 is Zechariah 13:7, and Christ's quotation of it sheds new light upon its meaning. It is God who will smite the shepherd. The Lord will lay upon Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:7) Thus, the crucifixion is God's doing. Christ will be the architect of His own death, as revealed in the conversation with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. Satan and evil men will be used, not as designers, but instruments of the divine purpose.

In the approaching hours when the Son of man would be among the slain, His disciples could not be strong. The Lord would no longer be with them. They would be cast upon their own resources, without His sustaining love and presence and would quickly fall. The inference in this passage then, is not the relative weakness of His disciples as compared with others, but the awful weakness of all men apart from their only Savior and Redeemer.

### **Verse 32**

Christ here calmly made an appointment to rendezvous with His disciples after His death and resurrection! He even named a specific hill or mountain where the meeting would occur. (Matthew 28:16) Christ made an appointment to meet His disciples after His death, and then kept it!

### **Verse 33**

One's sympathy lies with Peter here, although he was wrong. His error was threefold, in the fact that he:

- (1) contradicted Jesus' words,
- (2) rated himself superior to others, and
- (3) relied upon his own strength alone.

Furthermore, he did not realize that the strength and righteousness he had were not his own, but were only the reflected strength and righteousness of Christ. Many "righteous" people today make the same mistake. Peter's estimate of his own power, based on the character and endowment received from the

Lord, was a profound miscalculation in that it failed to recognize Christ and not Peter as the fountain of it. Any “righteous person” who has been kept back from gross sin should not thank himself but the Lord for his victory. Peter’s blindness to this truth made it necessary for Christ to teach him through bitter experience that all of man’s righteousness are as filthy rags.

#### **Verse 34**

The cock crow (in a place like Jerusalem was at that time) always began with one or two, then swelled into a mighty chorus of hundreds or even thousands of roosters uniting to produce that phenomenon called simply, the cock crow.

#### **Verse 35**

Not merely Peter, but all the disciples affirmed their intention to die with Christ and rejected any thought that they would forsake Him; and yet it was Peter who took the lead, involving the others in his contradiction of Christ’s words, and therefore he is the more to blame.

### **IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE**

#### **Verse 36**

What irony! Whereas the disciples were so sure they would not fail, even the Christ approached the cross with “strong crying and tears.” (Hebrews 5:7) It was the humanity of Christ that was in ascendancy from that hour and until death came upon Him. As a man (and He was perfect man), He shrank from the ordeal of Calvary; and the common view that Christ wept only for the sins or sorrows of others is not correct. As the stark ugliness and utter horror of the cross loomed before Him, His sorrow could be measured only in maximum dimensions.

#### **Verse 37**

Christ often prayed alone; but in the crisis of that agonizing hour, He desired the companionship of His apostles. The need of Jesus for human support and companionship is that in that dark and critical hour was genuine and indicated the fullness of the Lord’s human nature, no less entire and complete than His heavenly nature. Although admonished to watch with Jesus, the apostles were

not invited to pray for Him. There is no record of any man ever having been invited to pray for Christ, for He is not the subject of our prayers but their Master. Men must pray to Him, not for Him.

### Verses 38-39

This prayer is remarkable for many reasons. The use of “My Father” is significant because, whereas Christ taught His disciples to pray, “Our Father,” He himself used the first person possessive singular, “My!” God is the Father of Christ uniquely. Christ did not lose any of His divinity even while suffering the humiliation of agony and death.

The one purpose of Christ’s coming into the world, was to make an atonement through death, for man’s sin; but as the agony approached, His human nature found the ordeal abhorrent and repulsive.

Even in that chilling scene in Gethsemane, Christ prayed, “Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” This clearly shows that the humanity of Christ, for the moment, was not fully in tune with the will of the Father, through the weakness of all flesh; but it was quickly brought into complete harmony by means of the prayers in Gethsemane.

“If it is possible . . .!” Are not all things possible with God? Yes, and no! It was possible, of course, for God to take away the cross; but to have done so would have taken salvation away from humanity. The dreadful, soul-shaking truth is that not even God could redeem man without the sacrifice of Himself (in the person of Christ) to pay the penalty of man’s redemption.

Satan marshaled every possible force to thwart God’s purpose. Having found it impossible to murder the Lord, which he had repeatedly attempted, there remained only two means of possible victory for the evil one.

These were:

- (1) he might cause Christ to sin, and
- (2) he might induce Christ to refuse the cross.

No refinement or sadistic lust or barbarous cruelty was overlooked. Christ was to die the worst death any being ever suffered on earth. Would the Savior,

rather than endure it, renounce His mission? Only His great eternal love for man brought Him through the depth of humiliation and temptation that swept over Him in that chilling scene in Gethsemane.

#### **Verse 40**

The Lord was not yet through the crisis, and His finding the apostles asleep only added to His sorrow. After each heart-breaking petition He paused, sought companionship, and waited for God's answer. What is meant by the "hour"? Such a brief prayer would have required a moment. Thus it must be concluded that for a much longer period, "one hour," our Lord was in a deep agony of spirit.

#### **Verse 41**

Christ attributed their failure to watch with Him to weakness of the flesh but repeated the admonition.

In a sense, even His flesh was weak. He had been in agony of temptation and had felt the awful conflict in His soul. How much more then would be the pressure of darkness upon the apostles, His spiritual children, so sure of themselves, so naively unaware of the overwhelming fires of discouragement and sorrow through which they were to soon pass, and yet, at the moment, wasting their opportunity by sleeping instead of preparing for the coming ordeal.

#### **Verse 42**

Alfred Plummer (Commentary on Matthew, p. 370) wrote some very perceptive words regarding this prayer, "Why did He repeat His prayer in Gethsemane? We may reverently suppose that He Himself knew that the first utterance of the prayer had not been complete in its success. His human will was not yet in absolute unison with the will of His Father; and, in this way, we may trace progress between the first prayer and the second. In both cases, the prayer is made conditional; but in the first the condition is positive; in the second it is negative. "If it be possible" has become "If it is not possible," and there is no longer any petition that the cup be removed. We may believe that in



the third prayer, even if the same words were used, the “if” has become equivalent to “since:” “since this cup cannot pass from Me, thy will be done.”

### **Verse 43**

That the disciples actually tried to stay awake may be assumed, since they had so boldly proclaimed their loyalty only a little earlier. As extenuation, the hour was long past midnight. Very strong emotions had attended the Last Supper, the identification of the traitor, and the contemplation of Christ’s death. Also, the crowded events of that entire week had left them physically and emotionally exhausted.

“For their eyes were heavy, “ shows the strain under which they had arrived at that dark hour.

### **Verse 44**

Repeated prayers are acceptable, provided only that they are prayers. Christ repeated the prayer three times, over a span of at least an hour; but, as noted above, there is a definite progression in the prayers, and they were, in each case, separated by intervals of time sufficient for Christ to return to the sleeping disciples.

The apostles' sleep is attributed to sorrow (Luke 22:46), and He mentioned the great drops of blood falling to the ground. Men under torture have been observed to sweat blood, a phenomenon always followed immediately by death. If such was the type of blood-sweat endured by Jesus, it would explain the necessity of angels coming to strengthen Him. (Luke 22:43)

The blood-sweat, a portent of immediate and impending death, is thought by some scholars to be “the cup” which Jesus prayed to be removed, thus referring it primarily to the agony of that hour and not to the crucifixion.

God answered the Savior’s prayer for the cup to pass, not by removing the cup, but by sending an angel to strengthen Him. One may only wonder at the agony which produced such a phenomenon.

### **Verse 45**

The expression, “Are you still; sleeping . . . “ is difficult, for, almost in the same moment He said, “Arise, let us be going.” To be sure, they did not long enjoy their sleep. Immediately, perhaps even as He spoke, came the sudden onset of His arrest and capture.

### **Verse 46**

Christ did not propose to flee or to hide, but went out to meet the foe. Just how He knew the moment was at hand is no problem. He knew all things, even what was in men’s hearts; also, the lanterns and torches of the arresting party were plainly visible.

## **THE BETRAYAL AND SEIZURE OF JESUS**

### **Verse 47**

Prompted by Judas’ treachery, a fundamental strategy-change occurred in the camp of Jesus’ enemies. They at first thought to murder Jesus privately (verse 1-5), but now they decided to move against Him boldly with a public arrest and trial. The great company of the arresting party showed that at that time, for better or worse, the religious hierarchy was irrevocably committed to the more open tactic.

As a result of this change, men of all ages would be able to declare, as Paul did before Festus, “For this has not been done in a corner!” (Acts 26:26)

It has already been noted that the great multitude bearing arms that night eliminates any supposition that Passover Day had begun at sunset that same night. The temple guard under command of the high priest would not have borne arms on such a high day.

### **Verse 48**

Who but Satan could have thought of such a sign as that? To betray with a kiss has come to signify the ultimate in infamy. It was not that difficult to tell Christ from His disciples (nor is it now!).

The repulsive betrayal kiss, therefore, was a gratuitous personal insult, conceived in hell, instigated by Satan, and bestowed in blindness. It was effectively designed to augment the shame of the cross to which it would lead.

The impudent audacity of Judas has been a marvel ever since. How could he dare to pollute the face of Christ with such a kiss?

### **Verse 49**

Judas' conduct here gives a case study of excessive wickedness which answers some of the problems confronting society in any age. Wherein did Jesus fail with Judas? How could Judas' environment have been improved? How was society to blame in this case?

The freedom of the will, individual responsibility, and personal accountability are being more and more rejected by a materialistic and secular society; but the word of God reveals the higher view that men are responsible for their deeds.

### **Verse 50**

The term "friend" in this passage does not convey the exact meaning. The Greek word is actually "companion." In the New Testament, this term is again and again addressed to the enemies of the Lord, and that of a particular kind. "Companion," Judas certainly was; friend he was not.

The command, "Friend, do that, etc.," indicates that Judas had now passed the point of no return. Having laid the conditions for it, Judas was at that time under the divine compulsion to act out the sordid drama he had already contrived in his heart. Jesus said, "Everyone that commits sin is the slave of sin." (John 8:34) There was then left for Judas no place of repentance—no point of return.

In the arresting multitudes were combined many factions: Jews, soldiers, Romans, the rabble, Pharisees, and all parties, united in a common front against the Lord. It even included the false apostle, Judas.

Doubtless that remarkable event was for the purpose of demonstrating that Christ could have avoided capture, even by a force a hundred times as large as theirs, if He had elected to do so.

### **Verse 51**

It was Peter who drew the sword and Malchus whose ear was removed. From the human view, one must admire Peter. His was the only blow struck in defense of the Lord, although struck contrary to Jesus' will and without His approval. By such bold action, Peter was beginning, so he probably thought, to make good his boast that he was ready to die for the Lord. Peter was striking toward the high priest, which indicated that he recognized where the hatred and enmity against Christ were centered.

### **Verse 52**

Christ did not command Peter to throw his sword away, but to put it in its place. Paul described him that bears the sword as a "minister of God to you for good." (Romans 13:4) Our Lord's merciful healing of Malchus' ear was a marvelous evidence of His power and divinity that went unnoticed in the excitement and stress of that moment.

### **Verse 53**

The mention of at least 36,000 holy angels is a revealing glance into the mysteries of the eternal world above. Also, the mention in this context of the possibility of Jesus being rescued by angelic interposition strongly suggests that He had considered that very possibility and rejected it.

Since Christ rejected such a suggestion, it is evident that Satan's cause would have been served if He had done so.

Christ's mention of the twelve legions of angels and the possibility of their rescuing Him shows that such a termination of His earthly mission had been contemplated by Jesus. Only His redeeming love for men enabled Him to reject it.

### **Verses 54-55**

Jesus' emphasis was ever upon the fulfillment of God's word. The Scriptures were the only weapon on which Christ relied in His encounter with the prince of evil.

Christ's mention of sitting daily in the temple teaching, confirms the existence of an extensive ministry of Christ in Jerusalem.

Jesus' mention of His teaching daily in the temple is viewed as an appeal over the heads of the arresting authorities to the general opinion of all the people, and eventually of all mankind, with reference to the essential injustice of this night-time arrest, so utterly incongruous and out of joint with what the situation required.

### **Verse 56**

The Lord here mentioned a fact known perfectly to Him but utterly unknown to the evil multitude participating in His arrest, and that was the fact that all of them were positively engaged at the very moment in the fulfillment of prophecy concern-ing Christ.

B. C. Caffin (op. cit., Vol. 15, Matthew II, p. 546) wrote, "Those wicked men were ignorantly working out the eternal purpose of God. They were guilty, all of them, more or less; but their will was free. But yet, in the mystery and divine foreknowl- edge and overruling providence of God, which is so infinitely above our reach, they were bringing to pass the utterances of God through the prophets. The Scriptures must be fulfilled."

Why was it at that particular time that the disciples forsook Him and fled? "Then all the disciples left Him, and fled." Why then, at that particular time? It could have been what certainly must have appeared to the disciples as the most impractical way in which Christ met the crisis and challenge of that hour. He had rejected any fighting.

The Jerusalem rabble was as irresponsible as the Parisian mob during the Terror, and the disciples knew it. Christ also knew it; but His words we directed, not to the moment, but to the centuries.

### **Verse 57**

Christ was tried six times, three times before the Romans and three times before the Jewish tribunals.

### **THE FIRST TRIAL BEFORE ANNAS**

Matthew omitted the first trial and arraignment before Annas, the ancient head of the high priestly conclave who was doubtless the prime mover of the cabal against Jesus. Annas lived into his nineties and appears in history as a venomous and zealous bigot, deformed in mind and body. He covered his deformed hands with silken gloves, but there was no covering for the mind of this man, who was described by the infidel Roman as a “fit architect indeed to fashion the death of Christ.”

### **THE SECOND TRIAL BEFORE CAIAPHAS**

This was conducted before Caiaphas who also later presided over the convention of the Sanhedrin at daybreak. (Luke 22:66) Peter’s triple denial took place at the long night-trial, at which only a part of the Sanhedrin was present, and during which Christ was mocked, taunted, smitten, and abused throughout the night by the soldiers.

### **Verse 58**

Peter’s following the Lord “afar off” in this instance has been cited as one of the reasons that he faltered and denied Jesus.

Other preconditions that led to Peter’s fall are seen in that he:

- (1) contradicted Jesus’ word,
- (2) relied on his own strength,
- (3) turned to carnal weapons,
- (4) sustained the Lord’s rebuke,
- (5) followed afar off,
- (6) accepted a place in the company of Christ’s enemies, and
- (7) warmed himself at their fire.

## **Verse 59**

Having changed their strategy from murdering Christ secretly to the more open method of seeking a legal execution, the high priests and their followers worked throughout the long night to put together some kind of case that would stand up against Christ.

It is evident that considerable consternation came upon that evil company as the long night wore on. Things were not going according to plan. False witnesses indeed came, but their testimony was so absurdly false and unconvincing that it was unusable. If they had thought that Judas would provide the inside details needed to sustain a capital charge against the Lord, they were utterly confounded when Judas returned the money, confessed his own sin, and proclaimed the innocence of the Master. Those wily hypocrites were caught in their own net.

## **Verses 60-61**

If such a tale as these words of the false witnesses was all they had to report, one must be amazed at the plight of the evil men who had relied on it. After searching all night that was all they had, and no one knew any better than Caiaphas that it was not enough for their purpose. Matthew's "afterwards" indicates that their weak and inconclusive charge was all that could be culled from a whole night of coaching and hearing false witnesses.

## **THE THIRD TRAIL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN**

This trial was the formal arraignment and prosecution before the whole Sanhedrin and immediately following their all-night circus in the house of Caiaphas, where it may be assumed that Christ made limited answers if any at all. He knew well that the preliminary trial was only a fishing expedition and that the issue would be decided before the whole council after daybreak. The night runners had fanned out over the dark city, and the emergency meeting of the most sacred court of the Hebrews got under way very early, perhaps by four o'clock in the morning, as the first rays of morning light brightened the summit of the Mount of Olives. The trial, began, Caiaphas presiding; the arraignment was made; the suborned witnesses came on with their lie: "destroying the

temple and building it in three days!" Much to the discomfiture of Caiaphas, Jesus did not even reply. Why? It was not necessary.

Caiaphas stood up. The judicial bench had suddenly become a very hot seat for him. The whole wretched business was badly out of hand, and they were at their wits' end to know how to get out of it. Little did they dream that at the precise moment decided by Christ, He would stand forth in all His solemn majesty and hand them, of His own volition, the key to His crucifixion; but it would not be upon their terms, but upon His!

### **Verse 62**

He held His peace till the full import of the impasse in which the Sanhedrin found itself was apparent to all of them. Without Him, they could do nothing. It was true of them no less than of Pilate, to whom Christ said, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:11) The third trial, ended like a stroke of lightning.

### **Verse 63**

That was the vey instant toward which Christ had unerringly moved from the very first moment of His public life to the precise moment.

The high priest placed the Christ upon judicial oath, lifting his hands over his own head after the customs of Israel, and intoning the solemn oath, "I adjure you by the living God that You tell us whether You are the Christ , the Son of God." The answer of Jesus is recorded by Mark 14:62: "I am, and you shall see the Son of Man setting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

### **Verse 64**

Both Christ and His enemies understood this as a claim to be the divine Messiah.

### **Verse 65**

It seems never to have occurred to that Satan-blinded court that Christ's words were true and not blasphemous. The blasphemy they imputed to Jesus, on the basis of His answer, was not from the mere claim that He was the



Messiah. That was not a capital offense to claim to be the Messiah; but it was, for making Himself the divine Messiah, as they viewed it; this led to the charge of blasphemy. In John 19:7, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die, because He made himself out to be the Son of God!"

Can anyone imagine the judge forsaking the judicial robes to come down and usurp the role of the prosecutor? Any night trial of a capital offense was illegal; and, whereas an acquittal could be announced in a single day, no death penalty could be pronounced till three whole days had elapsed.

### **Verse 66**

Amazingly, if Christ's claim as the divine Messiah was untrue, that verdict was altogether proper and correct. Without calling further witnesses, not even Christ; without waiting for an instant, let alone the legally required three days, the judge put the question to the court, and the predetermined verdict was promptly given.

How unspeakably tragic that humanity could so wretchedly fail that Roman justice and Hebrew religion should alike concur in sentencing the Son of God to die for testifying under oath to the truth of that sublime fact that He was actually the Son of God.

### **Verses 67-68**

We pass over this repugnant scene without elaborating its shameful and repulsive details. Every possible humiliation that evil men, instigated by Satan, could contrive was heaped upon our Lord.

### **Verse 69**

No odium is heaped upon Judas, and there was no softening of the facts concerning Peter's denial. The additional details that a fire had been kindled and that Peter was warming himself are given by Luke in chapter (22:55).

### **Verse 70**

Peter might have thought that he was wanted by the authorities for his attack on Malchus; he was frustrated and embarrassed because his plan to

attend their meeting incognito had failed, and he had suffered massive psychological shock during the earlier hours of the momentous night.

#### **Verse 71**

Peter's change of location was probably an effort to remain unrecognized, but that was not to be. Another maid saw him and charged him with being a disciple of Jesus.

#### **Verses 72-73**

How vain was Peter's thought that he might remain unknown, unchallenged, or unnoticed by that vicious company gathered around the Lord. One fatal flaw in the plan exposed him and that was his speech.

"I do not know the man!" How sadly do those words burn upon the sacred page. He who had first confessed Christ as the "Son of God" had at that point so far defected as to deny that he was even acquainted with Jesus and to reinforce the denial with an oath.

#### **Verse 74**

The typical onset and progress of temptation are evident in this shocking sequence of events. It was the very casualness of temptation's initial onset that proved his undoing. It was only a "little deception" that Peter envisioned at first. He was only trying to shake off the obtrusive curiosity of a maid who had no business asking him in the first place. The beginning of this shameful episode can be pinpointed in that unwelcome, unexpected, unfair intrusion of that maid into the privacy of a man's thoughts; but that was only the tiny hole in the dike that rapidly enlarged till the flood overwhelmed him.

#### **Verse 75**

God has used some very humble creatures to preach mighty sermons, among them the message conveyed by the barnyard fowl on that occasion. The message of Balaam's donkey is another. The cock-crow aroused Peter to a new sense of reality, and he immediately began to make his way back to Jesus.

Somehow, the sad failure of this great impetuous man of the outdoors, who forsook his fishnets to become a fisher of men, endears rather than repels. He was so like all men that every man can see himself in Peter's place.

Peter never failed again. The tradition that he at last was martyred for the blessed Jesus is supported by the Scriptures (John 21:18-19), and thus this most lovable of all the apostles, despite his mistakes, at last made good his promise that he was willing to go both to prison and to death for the Lord!

The words: "And he went out and wept bitterly" are a fitting close to this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 27**

**JESUS DELIVERED UP TO PILATE; THE END OF JUDAS;  
JESUS BEFORE PILATE; THE MOCKERY; THE CRUCIFIXION;  
THE DEATH OF JESUS; JESUS LAID IN THE TOMB;  
POSTING A GUARD; SEALING THE TOMB**

### **Verses 1-2**

This occurred on the morning of the day of preparation for the Passover, which had technically begun the night before at sunset. That was the day on which the paschal lambs would be ceremonially slain in the temple; but on that day of preparation, God Himself would slay the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world and would upon Him "the iniquity of us all."

Pontius Pilate, first procurator of Judaea, or governor as he was called, was appointed by Tiberius, 26 A.D. and his administration was often in conflict with the Hebrews whom he doubtless despised.

A 52-foot pyramid stands at Vienne on the Rhone which purports to mark the place of his suicide. He was also supposed to have drowned himself in Lake Lucerne, where an adjacent mountain is called Pilatus. It was known that he was summoned to Rome to face charges, but when he arrived, Tiberius had been

succeeded by Caligula, and Pilate was deposed. Eusebius affirmed that soon after Pilate, “wearied with misfortune, he killed himself.”

After all, he put to death an innocent man, in full knowledge of his innocence, and did so for purely personal and expedient considerations. That he did not truly know the full identity of Christ does not mitigate his guilt.

### **Verse 3**

Even in repentance, Judas did the wrong thing. If he had gone to his Savior instead or to the priests, it is possible he might have been forgiven.

### **Verse 4**

How callous and bitter do the religious leaders appear in this cold and heartless exhibition of total indifference to moral and spiritual values. They could not have cared less about right or wrong, truth or falsehood, justice or injustice. The testimony of the traitor at that tragic moment is of surpassing value to the Christian gospel. Even the man who betrayed Christ confessed His innocence, not under duress but voluntarily, and not before His disciples but before His enemies.

### **Verses 5-6**

The casting of the silver into the sanctuary fulfilled Zachariah’s prophecy. (Zachariah 11:12) Other things forbidden to the treasury were the hire of a harlot and the price of a dog. (Deuteronomy 23:18)

The capacity of those men “who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel” (Matthew 23:23ff) is almost unbelievable. They were not above hiring perjured witnesses, bribery, plotting to murder the Son of God, or doing any other evil thing that might have seemed expedient; but to take back their own money from repentant Judas, that was unlawful!

### **Verses 7-10**

Judas cast the money “into the house of the Lord,” and they made it “unto the potter.” Acts 1:19 gives the Aramaic name for the field, popularly known as Akeldama.

“Jeremiah” was the name of a larger grouping of the Hebrew Scriptures which contained both Jeremiah and Zechariah, along with other books including all the Minor Prophets.

### MATTHEW

He departed and went away and hanged himself . The chief priests took the silver and bought with it the potter's field to bury strangers in.

### ACTS

Now this man obtained a field, the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

John W. Haley (Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, p. 349) said: “Neither of these statements excludes the other, Matthew does not deny that Judas, after hanging himself, fell and burst asunder; Luke does not assert that Judas did not hang himself prior to his fall. Probably the circumstances are much as follows: Judas suspended himself from a tree on the brink of the precipice overhanging the valley of Himmon, and the limb or rope gave way; and he fell and was mangled as described in Acts.”

If Judas hanged himself, as plainly said, the only way he could have come down was by falling, or by tender and loving removal at the hands of others. To say that he did not fall, as plainly said, one would have to be able to affirm that some person or persons prevented it. Furthermore, if the body remained suspended till it fell of natural causes, which was likely, the bursting of the body as it fell would have been a certainty.

Now, note the so-called contradiction in Acts which ascribes the obtaining of the field to Judas as contrasted with Matthew’s recording that the priests bought the potter’s field.”

Since Judas provided the money to buy the field, it is highly proper to say that he “obtained” it. That the actual purchase and arranging of the legal

transfer of the property was done by the priests makes it also that they actually “bought” it.

## **THE FOURTH TRIAL OF JESUS**

### **Verses 11-12**

Those infamous hypocrites were still up to their old game of trying to get Jesus crucified for sedition and had obviously represented Christ to Pilate as a political aspirant to the non-existent throne of the Hebrews. It was plain as daylight to Pilate that Christ’s “kingdom” was not such as to be any concern to Caesar! The Sanhedrin was most unwilling to give Pilate their true reason for demanding the death penalty, namely that Christ had claimed to be the divine Messiah; so the first part of this fourth trial was used by them to allege all kinds of crimes against the Christ in the hope of getting Him crucified on any charge except the true one. Christ’s serene composure and restraint throughout the trial infuriated them more and more, as it became increasingly evident that they would not be able to deceive Pilate.

### **Verses 13-14**

They were talking a bold case against Christ, but they had no proof; and Pilate perfectly understood the unreliability of all the wild charges they alleged against Him. Christ’s silence in the face of all the vicious allegations of the chief priests and elders doubtless struck Pilate as a very daring and courageous evidence of confidence. At that point Pilate was determined to release Christ and subsequently made a number of clever and determined maneuvers to acquit Him.

## **THE FIFTH TRIAL OF CHRIST**

### **Pilate’s first Effort to Release Christ**

The fifth trial of Christ came about from Pilate’s seizure upon the priest’s mention of “Galilee” as an excuse to send Christ to Herod.

Herod, like all Roman deputies, was in Jerusalem for the Passover, and Pilate did a politically clever thing by sending Christ to Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee.

Herod's curiosity was frustrated; Jesus performed no miracle; in fact He said nothing. The Lord was mocked; and Herod, after allowing his guard to make sport of Christ, sent Him back to Pilate. Herod found no cause of death in Christ and refused to condemn Him.

## **THE SIXTH TRIAL OF CHRIST**

### **Pilate's Second Effort to Release Christ**

This second effort of the procurator to release Christ was not recorded by Matthew but is outlined in Luke 23:13-15. It came in the form of a confrontation in which Pilate summoned them and bluntly announced that both he and Herod had found "no fault" in Christ. "Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him." (Luke 23:15ff) That was precisely the point at which Pilate should have broken off the trial and released Christ, ordering the legions to disperse the crowds, and announced the decision of the court in harmony with the verdict of innocence; but as Christ Himself so often said, "The Scriptures must be fulfilled!" The second maneuver failed.

### **Pilate's Third Effort to Release Christ**

This was an offer to impose the milder punishment of chastisement instead of the death penalty. "I will, therefore punish Him and release Him." (Luke 23:16) True, Pilate would not yield without further struggles to extricate himself from a distasteful involvement in the terrible business; but the end had already begun with this third effort to spare Christ's life.

### **Pilates Fourth Effort to Release Jesus**

#### **Verses 15-17**

No doubt Pilate thought they would choose Christ; but he had reckoned without consideration of the fanatical hatred of the leaders against Christ. Barabbas was a notorious seditionist and robber (Mark 15:7), and leader of a group who had made an insurrection against Rome (presumably). His crimes were murder, robbery, and sedition; and Pilate's strategy at that point was directed to forcing a choice between such a man and Christ.

### **Verses 18-19**

Matthew knew that for “envy” they had delivered Him. Pilate thus knew the innocence of Christ, the hypocrisy as well as the true motive of His accusers; and he could see through the tissue of lies in their charges.

It is significant that Pilate, a pagan, should have received just such a warning as a pagan would have been most likely to heed. Thus, just as Judas was warned by the Lord, God gave Pilate his warning also.

### **Verses 20-21**

This shows that Pilate’s judgment relative to the popularity of Christ versus Barabbas was correct. If left to them, the multitude would surely have chosen Christ; but the priests left nothing to chance, and did a “hard sell” on the multitude. They had enough influence to accomplish their purpose.

The fourth effort of Pilate to release Christ was drowned in the roar of the mob, “Give us Barabbas!” “Crucify Jesus!”

What a triumph of evil in that horrible choice of Barabbas instead of Christ! It was not enough that the Prince of Life be rejected; such was the cunning of the evil one that the Lord’s chosen people shouted their preference for a brutal criminal instead.

As Paul said, “And will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.” (2 Timothy 4:4)

### **Verse 22**

Sooner or later, every soul is confronted with the same question, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” The problem will not go away. They all said, “Let Him be crucified.”

“What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is He?” That question is the moral watershed down which the several streams of eternal life and eternal death move inexorably to the wide seas.



### **Verse 23**

This was the climax of the trial. None of the hundreds of thousands who ever witnessed the Passion Play can ever forget the mob scene in which a large number of people portray the unreasoning fury of that Jerusalem rabble, shouting for the crucifixion of Christ.

It is not difficult to understand how the weakling governor wilted and quailed before such a sadistic onslaught of hatred and cruelty. “In humiliation, His judgment was taken away.” (Acts 8:33)

Pilate’s reference, even at that late stage to the innocence of Christ was the prod which finally extorted from the Pharisees the real reason for their demanding Christ’s execution. They concealed it till the very last moment, for they were loathe to have even the Savior’s death appear in the records upon its true foundation. Thus, at last they reluctantly, not because of any sense of honor due the facts, but from a sudden fear that even then Pilate, insisting on Christ’s innocence, might not sign the death warrant. “Why?” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.” (John 19:7)

#### **Pilate’s Fifth Effort to Release Jesus**

This answer of the Jews (John 19:7) frightened Pilate, and, moved with fear, Pilate “made efforts to release Him.” (John 19:11-12)

#### **Pilate’s Sixth Effort to Release Jesus**

Pilate tried another approach. It was possibly a little earlier (John 19:6) that Pilate suggested, in view of their determination to kill Jesus that they take Him without legal process and crucify Him. This would appear as an implied offer to look the other way if the priests decide to take the law into their own hands. The Jews, however, would not settle for half a loaf.

The detestable manner in which they did it is recorded by John, “The Jews cried out, saying, If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be king opposes Caesar.” (John 19:12-13) That was the shaft that did it, as far as Pilate was concerned. He would as readily have

crucified a hundred innocent men if, in so doing, he had thought to strengthen his position with Caesar.

#### **Verse 24**

Dramatic as that gesture was, it was meaningless. It was still Pilate's hand that must sign the death warrant, washing or no washing.

#### **Verse 25**

This evil prayer was answered; thus men receive what they ask. All the subsequent sorrows that came upon Israel were then and there invoked by a multitude that included the highest official representatives of the nation.

This was the first time that Israel had prayed and received the answer of so rash a petition. Their ancestors had cried in the wilderness, "Would that we had died in the wilderness." (Numbers 14:2) Of course, that is exactly what that generation did; they died in the wilderness. A similar thing happened when Rachel prayed, "Give me children, or I die!" (Genesis 30:1) She died in childbirth when Benjamin was born. The petition recorded here, "His blood be on us and our children," was also answered in the most dramatic and overwhelming manner when, according to Josephus, 30,000 young Hebrew men were crucified upon the walls of Jerusalem by the soldiers of Titus when the city fell during the summer of A. D. 70.

#### **Verse 26**

Scourging was a part of the execution by the cross. Pilate did not know that every stripe laid upon the Lord by the scourge was a fulfillment of the word of God.

### **THE MOCKERY**

#### **Verses 27-28**

This appears to have been a customary sport allowed the soldiery at the expense of any condemned man. The place of the mockery was the Praetorium, so named from the barracks of the emperor's personal guard in Rome, being presumably, therefore, the common hall where the soldiers held their drill and other exercises, adjacent to the governor's residence and perhaps part of it.

The “scarlet robe” mentioned in this place was called “purple” by Mark. (15:17) Perhaps part of the garments placed upon him in derision were purple, the whole attire being topped off with a scarlet robe; for it is significant that Mark does not actually refer to the robe as purple, but to his clothing.

The robe was probably three colors, blue and scarlet, with a co-mingling blue and scarlet to form purple in the center, after the manner of the veil of the ancient tabernacle.

### **Verse 29**

Who but Satan himself could have sent a soldier scurrying about to prick his own hands on a thorn bush and weave such a crown for Christ? The kneeling, and mocking salute, “Hail, King of the Jews!” have lost none of their repulsiveness, though nearly two thousand years have intervened.

As to the kind of thorns used, we may safely leave that to the people who have “discovered” a hundred kinds of trees on which Christ was crucified, ranging from the dog-wood with the nail-scarred petals to the quaking aspen tree, “quaking for the deed that was done!”

There will always be something especially poignant and emotionally quickening in this instance of His wearing that tragic emblem of man’s shame, the thorn crown.

### **Verse 30**

What an avalanche of shame and brutal treatment descended upon our Lord in those dark hours of His humiliation! Yes, it was God who did this, in the sense that He allowed it. God and Christ were the architects of this awful event in which His soul was poured out as an offering for sin.

Evil men had a part in it, but the cross must not be viewed as something in which Satan partly blocked and frustrated the will of God. Far from it! The cross was the occasion when Christ did indeed bruise the head of Satan forever.

### **Verse 31**

“They” who mocked Him were not the same as the “they” who led Him away—a conclusion based on a change of tense. (Alfred Plummer, Commentary on Matthew, p.393)

A special detail of soldiers, commanded by a centurion, took over the bloody and terrible business of crucifying Christ and the two robbers condemned along with Him. Perhaps the purple” or “scarlet” robe, having fulfilled its purpose, was returned to its owner; and Christ, clad in His own garments, went to the cross. Those garments included the “seamless robe,” different from the colored one; and it was upon that that the soldiers cast lots.

### **Verse 32**

Executions inside the city were forbidden. The necessity for having someone bear Jesus’ cross probably derived from His fainting from physical weakness induced by the scourging and long previous night of brutal abuse.

### **THE VIA DOLOROSA**

Matthew’s gospel gives little of the details connected with the journey to the cross; pressing of the cross upon Simon. The proffered wine and gall were not the only events which marked that epic procession. Summarizing the details from all the gospels to form a composite gives the following:

1. Christ at first carried the cross Himself. (John 19:17)
2. After Christ could not bear it, Simon did. (Mark 5:21)
3. “Weep for yourselves” was addressed to the company of sorrowing women who followed. (Luke 23:27ff)
4. Two robbers were also in the procession. (Luke 23:32)
5. The wine and gall were given as they neared the cross, or perhaps after their arrival there. (Mark 15:23)

### **Verses 33-34**

The name Golgotha, the place of the skull, however, favors another location; the rocky eminence northwest of the city, an extension of the Temple Hill. The

rock is rounded with large holes, making it resemble a skull viewed from certain positions.

The wine (and gall) was a potion designed to deaden the sensibilities of condemned men and to alleviate some of the suffering. Much questioning has arisen over the Lord's tasting, and then refusing to drink. Did He not know, without tasting, what was in the cup?

Why did He reject it? Surely not because He wanted to suffer as much as possible, else He would not have tasted it at all. Another possibility, regarding the wine and gall, is that Christ tasted it in fulfillment of the prophecy: "they gave Me gall for My food; and in My thirst, they gave Me vinegar to drink." (Psalm 69:21) Christ's tasting the drink, thus constituted a most accurate fulfillment of the prophecy; and one may well believe it was for that reason He tasted it, although He already knew what was in it.

### **Verse 35**

These words point to a remarkable fulfillment of Psalm 22:18 which reads, "They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." It was the enemies of the Lord who fulfilled the prophecy.

### **Verse 36**

The indifference and oblivious insensibility of His executioners to the magnitude of the deed in which they were incidental participants staggers the imagination. This is a fair example of the attitude of all men who live and die as if Christ had not died for their sins.

Alfred Plummer (op. cit., p. 396) said: "No two gospels agree as to the wording of the title on the cross . . ."

But let any impartial reader read for himself:

Mathew: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS

Mark: THE KING OF THE JEWS

Luke: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS

John: JESUS OF NAZARETH - THE KING OF THE JEWS

## **THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS**

Each of the gospels quoted exactly from the inscription, although none of them gave all of it. It was the custom of those days that the accusation under which men were condemned should, in every case, be posted above their heads; and under the circumstances, the inscription posed by Pilate amounted to a sadistic jest.

### **CHRIST UPON THE CROSS**

During the hours ending at noon, the following events took place:

The first three of the seven utterances of Christ were spoken:

- (1) Father, forgive them;
- (2) Today you shall be with Me in Paradise; and
- (3) Woman, behold your Son; behold your mother  
(John 19:26-27; Luke 23:34, 43).

The chief priests tried to get Pilate to change the inscription.

- (1) The soldiers gambled for the Lord's garments.
- (2) The derision and scoffing by the Sanhedrin, the multitude, the soldiers, and the robbers.

The futile efforts of the priests to get Pilate to change the superscription, as detailed by John 19:20-22, means that Pilate had struck home with that device, which had exactly the effect he probably intended. The Jews were certainly embarrassed by it, especially since the crucifixion took place where countless numbers of the Passover throngs could see it, as they were going to or coming from the city.

Over against every evil deed there finally appears the finality of, "What I have written I have written." The chief priests were suddenly left out in the cold with their deeds. They could no longer bend a weak and vacillating governor to their evil will.

### **Verse 38**

John A. Broadus (Commentary on the New Testament, Vol. I, p. 571) wrote: “These two robbers were comrades of Barabbas who would have been here between them had not Jesus taken his place. Our Lord had said the night before, “This that is written must yet be fulfilled on Me, and He was numbered with the transgressors.” (Luke 23:37; Isaiah 53:12) This was substantially fulfilled by punishing Him as if for transgression, but all the more strikingly by associating Him with actual transgressors.”

Another remarkable prophecy relative to these events is: “His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in His death.” (Isaiah 53:9) In the prophecy the term “wicked” is plural, there being two robbers, while the expression “rich man” is singular, there being only one Joseph of Arimathaea to provide the grave.

### **Verses 39-40**

An accurate description of this railing was given in Psalm 22. (Note a more detailed analysis of that Psalm is given at the end of this chapter.)

Christ would soon do the thing they suggested, “raise up the temple (of His body) in three days. John 2:21 records the words of Christ who referred to His body as the true temple.

### **Verses 41-42**

History scarcely affords another such astonishing example of brutal and unfeeling inhumanity on the part of the judges toward the condemned. The taunting promise that they would believe on Him if He then came down from the cross was, of course a lie.

Christ did a more marvelous thing three days later by coming forth from the tomb, although they had it sealed and guarded, and yet they did not believe on Him even after that.

### **Verses 43-44**

It was only natural that the robbers should have joined in the railing; but later, one of them rose to immortality by recognizing Jesus as Lord and asking His remembrance.

### **THE SECOND THREE HOURS**

The first three hours on the cross had belonged to Jesus' enemies, but the last three, in a very wonderful sense, belonged to Christ. It was in this period that there began a most astounding series of wonders, called the Six Calvary Miracles.

The sun's light failed, darkness descended upon the earth, and the remaining four words of the "Seven utterances" were spoken by Jesus. The centurion in charge of the execution confessed Him; there was an earthquake; the graves of the righteous were opened; the veil of the temple was rent into; and Christ died!

### **Verse 45**

From noon till three o'clock in the afternoon, there was darkness everywhere. It was not mere eclipse, lasting far too long for that; it was not a dust storm, mist or fog; Luke added the words that the "suns light failed."

### **Verses 46-48**

The inconsistency in supposing that Elijah's Lord would call upon him for aid only indicates the utter failure of the Pharisees to see in Christ the true Son of God. They were aware, of course, of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, but they rejected it out of hand. (Matthew 27:40, 43)

The "Son of God," as Jesus claimed to be, was thought by the Pharisees to be capable of coming down from the cross, and in that they were right. He was capable of it, but it was not His will to do so. (On Christ's receiving the vinegar, see under verse 34.) In this instance it must be viewed as an act of mercy, prompted by His saying, "I thirst."



### **Verse 49**

All this talk of Elijah sprang from Pharisaical prejudice and the propaganda they had waged, alleging that Jesus could not be the “Christ because Elijah had no yet come.” Theirs was a misinterpretation of the prophecy that, “Elijah must come first.” Christ had already identified John the Baptist as that Elijah which was to come—the Elijah foretold by the prophecies.

### **Verse 50**

Matthew stressed the fact that Jesus submitted to death by personal surrender, as an act of His own volition, and well ahead of the time it could have been naturally expected. The words, “Father, into your hands I commend My spirit,” are given by Luke.

The time of the Master’s death was three o’clock in the afternoon on the day of preparation for the Passover, making it occur on the afternoon, before sunset, when the actual Passover legally began.

### **Verse 51**

This and the next two verses relate to the Six Wonders of Calvary which received considerable attention in Matthew’s gospel and which are of such surpassing interest that a special study of them is here included.

## **THE PHENOMENA ATTENDING THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION**

There are actually seven Calvary miracles, the greatest and most wonderful, of course, being the resurrection of Christ. Attending that prime wonder of all ages were six others, truly wonderful in themselves, and designed to support and confirm the greater miracle they attended. These were:

- (1) The Three Hours of Darkness
- (2) The Rending of the Veil
- (3) The Earthquake
- (4) The Opening of the Grave
- (5) The Undisturbed Grave Clothes

- (6) The Resurrection of the Saints
- (7) The Three Hours of Darkness

“It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun being obscured.” (Luke 23:44-45)

This could not have been an eclipse, because:

- (1) It came at Passover, always held at the time of the full moon when an eclipse is impossible, and
- (2) It was too long in duration, lasting three hours, as contrasted with the very longest of eclipses which last less than an hour and usually only a very few minutes.

The reason for this darkness was “the sun’s light being obscured.” (Luke 23:45) The sun itself is but a vast nuclear fire, a sustained and continuing reaction, in which the sun’s mass is being reduced at a rate of “four million tons per second.” William R. Nicholson (The Calvary Miracles, p. 6)

God halted the reaction for three hours during the crucifixion. Appropriately, while the Son of Righteousness was suffering humiliation and death, the literal sun refused to shine.

Pontius Pilate (ibid, Vol. III, p. 463) sent the following report to Tiberius, emperor of Rome: “And when He had been crucified, there was darkness over the whole earth, the sun having been completely hidden, and the heaven appearing dark, so that the stars appeared, but had at the time their brightness darkened, as I suppose your reverence is not ignorant of, because in all the world they lighted lamps from the sixth hour until evening. And the moon, being like blood, did not shine the whole night, and yet she happened to be at the full.”

This manifestation of God’s power should cause the soul to tremble. Only the true God and Creator of the universe could step forth and lay His hand upon the established routine of the natural creation and bring to pass such a darkness as that which enveloped the world during three full hours of the crucifixion. Why did God do it? It was a singular witness to the power and godhead of Him

who was crucified. It was a signal that even the most brutal and depraved could understand.

That awe-inspiring darkness was God's seal upon the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ's identity and mission upon earth. It was a sign of God's personal presence in the crucifixion. "He bowed the heavens also, and came down with thick darkness under His feet." (Psalm 18:9)

The darkness symbolized the magnitude and effect of Jesus' suffering. It clothed the Savior's humiliation with decent privacy. No man could have gone home that night and said, "I saw the whole thing." That darkness also marked the summary end of the Sabbath day. It was likewise a fitting symbol of God's wrath upon all who reject the world's only Redeemer.

### **The Rending of the Veil of the Temple**

#### **Verse 51**

The miracle in this instance, was that a veil untouched by human hands should have fallen into two equal pieces, in a progressive rending from top to bottom, the force which parted it coming, not from beneath as if violent hands had been laid upon it, but from above as though some unseen hand had passed down the center of it, The event occurred at three o'clock in the afternoon, at a time when the priests would have been busy with the evening sacrifice, going about their tasks with lighted lamps, with a very large number of them present; and it is from this group of eyewitnesses to that remarkable wonder that we suppose is the explanation of why such a large "company of the priests believed" (Acts 6:7), being later converted to Christ. One may only imagine the fear and awe which attended the rending of that veil, witnessed by so many people, priests, busy with their lanterns, apprehensive of the enveloping darkness, and eventually associating the event with the final cry of Christ as He perished on the cross.

The rending of the veil, occurring simultaneously with the death of Christ, must be associated with that death; and, looking more closely, it is plain that the veil, in practically all of its functions and even in its colors, was a most instructive type of Christ.

## **THE MEANING OF THE VEIL AND ITS RENDING IS EXTENSIVE.**

- (1) Its three colors, blue, purple, and scarlet (Exodus 26:31) symbolize the nature of Christ, blue standing for His heavenly nature, scarlet for His earthly nature, and the co-mingling blue and scarlet (purple) standing for the perfect two natures in one, Immanuel.
- (2) The ancient worshiper (in the person of the high priest) went through the veil to the Holy of Holies; the present-day worship has access through Christ into heaven. (Hebrews 10:19)
- (3) It symbolizes His death on Calvary. As the veil was rent, Christ's body was rent for the sins of the whole world.
- (4) The rending also means the removal of obstructions between the worshiper and His God. No longer is there a veil. God Himself removed it. Christ's followers have boldness, freedom, and "access." (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12)
- (5) The rent veil means that the Old Testament can now be understood in the light of the New. Out of Christ, the Old Testament is a mystery; in Him it is gloriously understood. (Corinthians 3:14-16) Christ is thus the true "Key to the Scriptures." Accept no other.
- (6) The rending meant that Christ has conquered death, the fear of it now, the fact of it ultimately. (Isaiah 25:7-8)

This figure also makes the veil a symbol of death, which of course it is. The "place" it occupied makes that certain. Squarely between the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies, it corresponds to death which lies between the church and heaven; and all who enter heaven shall pass through the veil of death, or be "changed" which is equivalent to it. Christ rent the veil of death in two ways, (a) by passing through it unharmed, and (b) by destroying it for His children.

- (7) The rent veil abolished the office of the earthly high priest.

The line of demarcation between lesser priests and the high priest was removed by God's hand. The office of the high priest on earth was no longer needed, nor is it now. All functions held and performed by earthly high priests,

for a season, have now been taken over by the true high priest, Christ. (Hebrews 9:11) He is the only mediator. (1Timothy 2:5-6)

There can be no use, then, for the daily sacrifice, whether of the mass or of anything else. The true sacrifice has already been offered once for all in heaven. Christ offered Himself once (the Greek term *hapax* means once without repetition). (Hebrews 9:23-28; 7:27)

All Christians are “priests.” (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10) Since the only true high priest is in heaven, and all God’s children are now priests, every human being who moves into a position between one of the Lord’s children (priests) and try to be something of a higher priest to grant absolution or perform other mediator functions is merely trying to patch up that old veil. But God has torn it down. Let no man therefore, hide behind a veil to hear another’s confession, to pass sentence, or to perform any service whatsoever.

The veil has been rent into. Do not let it come back. Take it away forever. Let it come no more between the face of the redeemed and that of the Redeemer. The access assured to the sons of God is not subject to human permission and does not derive from human authority, but is from God. Men are no longer children, hiding in the folds of an old veil. Let them walk in the light!

### **The Earthquake**

Why was this earthquake a miracle, seeing that earthquakes are ordinary events? First, even the most ordinary of earthquakes would in this case, due to its timing, have been strongly suggestive of the supernatural; but this was far more and utterly different from any ordinary earthquake. The peculiar violence of the quake was sufficient in the vicinity of Calvary to rend the rocks, yet the great buildings of Jerusalem, not more than a mile away, were left undisturbed.

Note that the earthquake did not disturb the cross, that it discriminated among the graves of Calvary, opening those of the righteous but not the others; and, from these considerations, one could be hard pressed indeed to explain it as an ordinary earthquake, however timed!

It was Calvary answering to Sinai. There was a great earthquake at Sinai (Exodus 19:18) when the Law was given; and that Law, so long associated with the sin and death (Romans 8:2), was being removed and replaced by the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

The earth itself should have borne witness to the event that mercy had triumphed over justice, and grace had superseded law. Also, there was prefigured and symbolized the earth-shaking consequences of Christ's; redemptive death and the gospel which would be preached and which was destined to shatter ancient empires and destroy the power of the devil himself. (Hebrews 2:14)

### **The Opening of the Graves of the Righteous**

#### **Verse 52**

The implication that only the graves of the righteous were opened comes from the immediate connection with what followed the resurrection of the saints. At first it seems those two events occurred simultaneously; but the next verse notes that it was "after the resurrection" that they actually came out of their graves and appeared in the city, thus the mention of the saints in verse 52 is for the purpose of revealing which graves were opened.

Accepting the amazing fact recorded here by Matthew; one naturally turns to a consideration of its meaning.

- (1) It means that God knows the location of every grave where His redeemed ones are at rest. Matthew's use of "sleep" for "death" suggests that death is a sleep only for the righteous. Death, like sleep, is only temporary and shall be followed by an awakening.
- (2) It means that all the dead shall eventually rise from the tomb; and, although this resurrection was but a few compared to the numberless millions of the dead, it is a pledge of much more wonderful things to come when "all that are in their tombs" shall come forth. (John 5:28)
- (3) The resurrection of the "bodies of the saints" indicates a bodily resurrection for all.

The opened graves had to be left open over Passover, since it would have been unlawful for anyone to have filled a grave during the holy week; it would have been unlawful even to touch one. While the graves were exposed for three days and nights, a period was provided during which the identity of the graves as belonging to “the righteous” could have been made and verified.

### **The Undisturbed Grave Clothes**

Matthew made a very slight reference to the place where the Lord lay (28:6), but John gave a full account of this miracle. (John 20:6-8)

Matthew’s words attributed to the angel, “Behold the place where He lay” (28:6), have meaning only in the light of what was there. Thus it may be said that Matthew recorded all of the Seven Wonders. Precisely what was the wonder here?

It was the form of the grave clothes as they remained after our Lord’s resurrection. They were not folded but were “lying!” The implication of that word is plainer if the verb is changed to “standing” or “walking.” Those clothes were “lying,” having exactly the same form they had when Christ was within them.

Even the napkin, uncollapsed, appeared appropriately where His head had been. Thus Jesus rose through His clothes just as He rose through the tomb. The angel did not roll away the stone to let the Lord out but to let the witnesses in! The tomb remained as it was, and so did His grave garments.

John devoted no less than ten verses to a description of this wonder, and to the fact that it was upon that evidence that John was said to have “believed!”

This emphasizes the difference between the resurrection of Christ and that of the “saints.” They came out of their graves horizontally; Jesus “rose” from His . Whereas their graves had to be opened, Christ’s did not, except to provide access for the witnesses.

## **The Resurrection of the Saints**

### **Verse 53**

There are eight resurrections recorded in Scripture, besides the resurrection of Christ which is uniquely different. The other seven are:

- (1) son of the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17);
- (2) son of the Shunamite (2 Kings 4);
- (3) the man raised by the bones of Elijah (2 Kings 13);
- (4) daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9);
- (5) son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7);
- (6) Lazarus (John 11); and
- (7) Dorcas (Acts 9:41).

The meaning of this amazing event is:

- (1) that Christ is the true Redeemer and Lord of all men;
- (2) as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22).
- (3) Christ has the keys of death and of the grave; (Revelation 1:18)
- (4) Christ's work on the cross was the center and climax of His saving mission to man. All our salvation and our only hope of eternal life find their Fountain-head in Him and in His death upon the cross.

### **Verse 54**

Practically all beings with anything to do with Christ confessed Him in one way or another.

### **Verses 55-56**

The women were the last to wait upon Jesus at the cross and the first to whom He revealed Himself after the resurrection. Spiritual leadership naturally belongs to women. The disciples fled, but the women waited to watch and did not forsake the Lord even in the depth of His humiliation. The names of those



women were introduced because they aided Joseph of Arimathea in preparing the Lord's body for burial.

### **THE ORDER OF PILATE TO BREAK HIS LEGS**

To hasten the death of the condemned and to prevent their remaining upon their crosses over the Passover, the Jews begged Pilate for a detail to break the legs of the condemned. Such an order was given the soldiers by Pilate and in obedience the soldiers broke the legs of the two robbers; but they came to Christ and found Him already dead. They disobeyed their orders, thrust a spear into His side without orders, and thus fulfilled two prophecies at one time. (John 19:31-37)

Psalm 34:20 prophesied of the Messiah, that "He keeps all His bones; not one of them is broken." Zechariah prophesied, "They will look upon Me whom they have pierced." (Zechariah 12:10) The manner of fulfillment of those prophecies, one that Christ would be pierced; another that none of His bones would be broken, is an amazing demonstration of the providence of God working at Calvary.

### **Verse 57**

Isaiah 53:9 was fulfilled by this. In the common version, the word "rich" in Isaiah's prophecy would appear as either singular or plural, but it is in reality singular, as evidenced by the more accurate translation as "a rich man." From John 19:38 it is evident he followed Jesus "secretly for fear of the Jews," and that Nicodemus was a member of the burial party. Along with Barnabas, Joseph of Arimathea ranks with a very select few who in the Scriptures, are called good men.

In times of distress and danger, God has frequently raised up a JOSEPH. When Israel was threatened with famine, when Herod would have slain the infant Christ, and then again when the helpless body of our Lord was upon the cross, there stepped forth upon the stage *JOSEPH*. The awful storm was at the full, the enemies glorying in their triumph, supposing Christ was out of the way forever; but in that hour came *JOSEPH!*

Why, then, did Joseph appear at that particular hour of Christ's death to perform such noble and honored service for our Lord?

- (1) Surely it was the power of the cross. Yes, Christ was right (John 12:32) in that it was not the miracles but the cross that would draw all men unto Himself.
- (2) It was the revelation of the true ugliness of sin.

Joseph, as a member of the Sanhedrin, had not concurred in the dark deeds of that body; but in the beginning of the Pharisee's opposition to Christ, they had been able to hide their envy, spite, jealousy, and the covetousness in their rotten souls, masking their hatred under such respectable disguises as respect for the Sabbath day, regard for the law of Moses, reverence for the prophets, or zeal for the God of Abraham; but then it was no longer possible to do so. "Sin when it is finished brings forth death" (James 1:15.)

- (3) The action of Christ's followers who forsook Him and fled might also have had a part in urging Joseph to step forward.

It has often been noted that when the church is confronted with some unusual or extraordinary crisis, there is always one who, seeming indifferent to that hour, steps forward to shoulder the burden and make himself known.

- (4) Again, Joseph and Nicodemus were at last compromised by the Sanhedrin, of which they were members, and the shameful and grossly wicked conduct of that body forced upon its nobler sons the utmost necessity to separate from it and take an opposite stand.

Many disciples since that ancient day have discovered that their place outside the ranks of the openly confessed and redeemed finally becomes absolutely untenable. Outside are the infidels, blasphemers, dogs, whoremongers, scoffers, profane murderers, and robbers. As long as a believer is outside the church, he is a member of the world's Sanhedrin. Joseph and Nicodemus learned, as may all of us, that "secret" discipleship must at last break with the forces of evil.

### **Verse 58**

Assisting Joseph were the women mentioned in verses 55-56, and also Nicodemus. It was “this man” who took the official and leading part. He provided the tomb, laid out the expense money, obtained permission, and took the body down from the cross.

### **Verses 59-60**

From John it is learned that Christ was buried in a new tomb, that of Joseph, wherein never before had man lain. And that it was situated in a garden near the site of the cross. In giving his tomb to Christ, Joseph had every reason to believe that his gift was final and that his own burial in it was thus precluded. However, as is invariably true, nothing was ever lost by its being given to Christ. Joseph received his grave again! (Matthew 14:20)

### **Verse 61**

The “other Mary” is the mother of James and Joses. (Verse 56) These women show that they had taken up a watch by the tomb, and were thus the last lingerers to remain mourning the death of the Son of God. This could well have been one of the reasons why Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene after He came forth from the grave. (John 20:11-18)

### **Verse 62**

The old enemies of Jesus were badgered by second thoughts. The request for a guard of the tomb shows that they were fully aware of the prophecy that Christ would rise again. The day after the preparation indicates that this request was made on the Passover itself.

### **Verse 63**

The statement of the Pharisees quoting Jesus as promising to rise again “after three days” is viewed by some as evidence for a 72-hour period in the grave. Scholars hold the traditional Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection to be correct and views the traditional days of those events as harmonizing with the word of God.

## Verse 64

In all history, where is there another case of a posted guard and sealed tomb to prevent reports of a resurrection? True, graves have been sealed and guarded many times but never before or since, for such an ostensible purpose as this.

This request of the Pharisees is astonishing. It shows that they anticipated the preaching of the apostles that, "He has risen from the dead!" Their supposition, however, that the apostles would do so even if it was a lie, can be explained only on the basis that the Pharisees imputed to the apostles of Christ the shame hypocrisy and falsity they had in themselves.

The behavior of those faithful men who preached the truth removes every suspicion that it was anything other than the truth and gives a solid ground on which two thousand years of believing disciples of Christ, have founded their conviction that those wonderful things, including the resurrection of the Christ, did actually occur.

There is also an admission of the Pharisees in this verse that the crucifixion was an "error" although they probably did not intend such an admission. The fact that even so mild an admission of "error" fell from their lips can be understood only in the light of the marvels that attended the death of our Lord. The earthquake, the darkness, the rending of the veil, etc., along with the confession of the centurion, had produced the most overwhelming demonstration that the "Holy One" indeed had been upon the cross; and as a result, those pious hypocrites were at last willing to admit, quite piously and indirectly of course, that perhaps it was an "error!"

Satanic instigation of the request for the sealing of the grave and posting a guard is evidenced by the following: The Lord's disciples were scattered, discouraged, and, for the most part, disbelieving that any resurrection would occur. There was not the slightest possibility that any of them would have stolen the body, nor could any of them, not even Judas, have been capable of such futile and unrewarding fraud as that suggested by the Pharisees. Why then was the watch set?

It is the view here that Satan anticipated the resurrection, knowing that it would occur perfectly on schedule; and the devil desired such a watch in order to provide suborned liars to deny it after the fact. That such was actually his purpose is manifest in the use that was quickly made of it. Not even the devil thought that the resurrection would be prevented by so naive and futile a device.

### **Verse 65**

It seems that Pilate half expected the Lord to rise from the dead, an attitude of mind which is fully in harmony with all the tremendous events of that great day in human history.

### **Verse 66**

Thus Christ was sealed in the grave, the guard posted, and the Pharisees settled down to enjoy their imagined triumph. The Sabbath whether the high Sabbath of the Passover or the ordinary weekly Sabbath, would find the Lord sleeping in His grave. The victory of evil was apparently complete and irrevocable. The sadness and discouragement that descended upon the disciples can only be imagined.

The entire Sabbath, by whatever reckoning, would be wholly spent by Jesus in “the heart of the earth!” And this makes it positively impossible that the Sabbath should ever be reckoned as “the Lord’s Day.” By what perversion of terminology could that awful day of His residence in the tomb be called “His day?”

## **SEVEN STATEMENTS FROM THE CROSS**

- (1) Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.  
(Luke 23:34)
- (2) Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)
- (3) Women, behold your Son . . . behold your mother. (John 19:26-27)

- (4) My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? (Matthew 27:46)
- (5) I thirst! (John 19:28)
- (6) It is finished. (John 19:30)
- (7) Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit. (Luke 23:46)

## **I. “FATHER, FORGIVE THEM.”**

The chief business of the cross was forgiveness, and Christ moved quickly to get on with it. Were those men, then and there forgiven? No. Forgiveness has two centers, human and divine; and on the human level, Christ forgave those men without either request or repentance on their part. Their forgiveness in heaven took place when they repented and obeyed the gospel. (Acts 2:36-38) That forgiveness of Christ on the personal level, even while they were crucifying Him, was in line with His command that men must forgive if they are to be forgiven. (Matthew 6:14-15) Luke 17:3 is not a permit to withhold forgiveness pending other's repentance, but is an admonition against the withholding of it even after they repent.

Therefore, if appears that even with Christ Himself praying for a person, as in the case here, that person will be truly forgiven in heaven only when he obeys the gospel. To view this otherwise would be to make a special case of the soldiers who crucified Jesus. Some of those, at least, who were guilty of His crucifixion (Acts 2:36) were forgiven when they repented and were baptized. To do so, merely because Christ prayed for them, is to set aside the plain word of Scripture that all must believe, repent, and be baptized unto the remission of sins.

## **II. “TRULY I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU SHALL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE.”**

Was the thief on the cross saved? Assuredly yes! Granted the premise that there is a separation of the righteous and the wicked in death, there can be no doubt.

The thief died before any of the distinctive obligations of the Christian life were published. He was dead and buried nearly two months before the Great Commission was given; he was never commanded to be baptized; and no person on earth today may claim any such status as that which pertained to the thief.

Furthermore, all efforts to disassociate oneself from the commandments and obligations of the Christian gospel, on the basis of the robber's salvation, rise from a total disregard of the truly remarkable exhibition of faith on His part.

Any thought that the robber was saved in some easy and perfunctory fashion disappears in the contemplation of what he actually did.

- (1) He believed on the Lord at a time when even his staunchest disciples had forsaken Him and fled.

Of all the men on earth, that greater thief alone stands in glorious isolation as the unique witness of our Lord's passion who appreciated it and moved to appropriate the blessing.

- (2) He believed on Him, and confessed Him as "Lord" while others were reviling Him.
- (3) He made that amazing confession when he himself was in agony of nakedness, suffering, death, and humiliation.

Can anyone fail to see the difference in his confession under those circumstances, and the ordinary profession of faith today, when one is all dressed up in his Sunday best and encouraged by a whole church singing and praying to urge him forward?

- (4) The robber confessed Christ in the presence of Christ's bitterest foes in the exact moment of their triumph, those foes being none other than the leaders and most influential men in all Israel.
- (5) He confessed Christ in the moment of Christ's deepest humiliation, but those who confess today do so with the concurrent testimony of nineteen centuries affirming His glorification!

- (6) The robber gave evidence that he indeed had seen “God,” by his humble acceptance of the horrible death by crucifixion as a “just” reward of his deeds.

In the light of these and many other considerations, it must be clear that those who would either claim for themselves or extend to others the promise of salvation without obeying the gospel, using the salvation of that ancient robber as a basis for it, are not worthy to be named in the same breath with that robber.

The thief died before the Lord’s will for all mankind was put in force (Hebrews 9:16) and was saved even before Christ died on the cross. Therefore, his salvation cannot possibly contain any precedent for redemption under the New Covenant; and as for the insistence that, after all, he was not baptized, we have already noted that no such command had yet gone out to all mankind; but even if it had, the thief had nails in his hands and feet and was in a position making it absolutely impossible for him to have been baptized.

The nails were holding him, but what is holding men today? Pride, prejudice, the opinions of divines, and an obstinate unwillingness to obey the Lord—these are the impediments now.

### **III. “WOMEN, BEHOLD YOUR SON . . . BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER!”**

The words addressed to Mary the mother of Jesus and to John the beloved disciple were for the purpose of providing for the earthly care of Mary. Why did Christ wait till the agony was upon Him before taking care of that detail? We may conclude that it was deliberately done in order to bring into sharp focus in the light that should forever beat down upon the cross, the true status of that blessed person who was privileged to be our Lord’s earthly mother.

Christ called her “Woman,” certainly not “Mother of God!” If such a title had been her due, Christ would have honored it and would not have withheld it on that occasion. Mary was not the mother of God, nor a perpetual virgin, but bore four sons and an unnamed number of daughters after the birth of Jesus.

In view of all the superstitions that have arisen around the blessed name of Mary, how charged with divine wisdom was the action of our Lord upon the



cross in bringing her into view on that occasion, not as a female deity to whom men have recourse for spiritual aid, but as a broken-hearted sufferer, herself in need of the tender care of John!

#### **IV. “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?”**

The awful depths of those words are unfathomable. What sorrow flows from that pleading cry! What can it really mean? Should men believe that God forsook Christ on the cross? If so, why? Was it that He could not physically die till that occurred? None may dare to give a dogmatic answer.

Some believe Christ was quoting Psalm 22 which has these exact words in its first verse. For example, only in Psalm 22:16 do the Scriptures reveal that Jesus' feet were pierced. As divine prophecy, written centuries before the fact, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm portrays a more vivid picture of the Lord's death on Calvary than a man can write today, with the literature of nineteen centuries at his fingertips.

No infidel can scoff this away. The crucifixion of our Lord fulfilled to the very letter the marvelous prophecies which foretold it. In view of the remarkable detail of this great prophecy, it is not unthinkable that Christ was calling attention to it by quoting its opening lines.

Still, the “why” of this passage haunts man. It echoes down the centuries. There was no immediate reply. Angels did not descend and take Him down from the cross, or smite the Pharisees blind, or compel Caiaphas to kneel before Him! Christ simply died with that awful question seemingly unanswered. Of course, there was an answer! It came in the form of an empty tomb and an angel of God announcing, “He is not here, He is risen!”

#### **V. “*I THIRST.*”**

The last three utterances are shorter, possibly due to the Savior's ebbing life. He who upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3) is here Himself upheld upon the rude and torturing beams of the cross. He who changed eighty gallons of water into wine is here athirst! He who is the Prince of Life must taste death for every man! The thirst was prophesied in Psalm 22:15.

## VI. “It is finished.”

What was finished? The law of Moses (Colossians 2:14-16), the Sabbath institution (Amos 8:5-9), the works of His personal ministry, the power of Satan (Hebrews 2:14), the atonement for the sins of the whole world (Hebrews 9:26), the purchase price for the church (Acts 20:28), and the remission of sins prior to Calvary, as well as the remission of whatever sins will be remitted for all eternity—these are among the things finished that day on the cross of Christ.

Indeed, “It is finished;” but man’s work is before him. “Save yourselves from this crooked generation!” “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling!”

## VII. “Father, into your hands I commend My spirit.”

In a moment the body of Christ would fail, but that would not be the end. He made an appointment for the Father to take His spirit, and did so with the calm assurance of one who might make an appointment to meet a friend after lunch. Man has a body, but he is a soul.

Happy are the followers of Jesus, who, as the end nears, may feel the Father’s nearness as did Jesus, and commend their souls to His eternal safe keeping.

## **CHAPTER 28**

### **THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST; APPEARANCE OF CHRIST ALIVE; THE SANHEDRIN’S FALSEHOOD; FINAL INTERVIEW; AND THE GREAT COMMISSION**

#### **Verse 1**

Matthew in this place obviously used the Roman method of counting days, making the first day of the week begin at dawn, contrary to the Jewish usage which made it begin the night before at sunset.

### **Verse 2**

The earthquake in this place was different from that while Christ was upon the cross and which rent the rocks. This passage plainly reveals the power that broke the governmental seal on the tomb of Jesus. The flimsy falsehood of the Pharisees to the effect that the disciples did it while the soldiers were asleep is preposterous.

G. Fredrick Owen (*Archeology and the Bible*, p. 73), noted that: "Soft clay was placed about the stone and the entrance to the tomb; the official seal was pressed into this clay, thus sealing it officially. It would be a great crime to break this seal fixed by government authority, and would bring severe punishment."

Nor should it be supposed that the angel rolled away the stone to let the Lord out, but rather to let the witnesses in! If an angel did not do it, who did? After the custom of such things, the stone was larger than could have been removed by less than several men. That even a whole group of women could not have removed the stone is seen in Mark's account that "They were saying among themselves, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3)

### **Verse 3**

The glory, holiness, and celestial nature of the angel was apparent in his garments.

### **Verse 4**

Only a single angel was required to render impotent a whole band of armed men; in view of this, it was an almost incomprehensible power that was available to Jesus who might have called for twelve legions of angels to rescue Him from the cross. (Matthew 26:53)

How easily were the designs of the Pharisees countermanded by the Eternal. A solitary messenger from heaven appeared, and his simple presence struck the whole band into the semblance of death.

### **Verse 5**

Criticism of the gospel narratives in their various accounts of the angels are well known, being founded on the fact that Matthew mentions one angel seated; Luke mentions two standing (Luke 24:4), and John tells of two seated. (John 20:12) All such fault-finding ignores the truth that none of the gospel writers gave all the incidents attending the wonder of our Lord's resurrection.

The big news and revelation of this verse is to the effect that the crucifixion of Jesus was of the utmost concern and widest possible observance even in heaven, that the angels of God were intent and diligent in their following of the sublime events of Calvary, and that they knew even the hearts of those who were participants in the awesome battle for the redemption of man. The admonition of the angels for the women not to "fear" shows that, in all ages, those who truly seek Him have nothing to fear.

### **Verse 6**

"He is not here" is a message worthy of angelic transmission and is the most important fact, outside the resurrection of Christ, and is itself an essential portion of it. The empty grave is the one incontestable proof which has confounded every futile effort to cast doubt on the resurrection. It is an impregnable rock of truth upon which every attack of skepticism has invariably been shattered. What became of the body of Christ if He did not indeed rise from the dead?

The theft of any dead body would require motivation, but there was no possibility of such motivation relative to the body of Christ. If the disciples stole His body, would that every last one of them have then proceeded to go up and down the earth preaching His resurrection, denying every worldly consideration in order to do so, and suffering a last martyrdom and death to seal a lie with their blood? Indeed that would have been a greater miracle than the resurrection. Did His enemies steal it? If so, they would have produced it to confound His disciples and put an end to the doctrine they hated.

He is risen! The risen Christ belongs to the realm of history. Alfred Plummer (Commentary on Matthew, p. 414) wrote: "The Christian church exists

and has existed and grown since the year of the crucifixion. So enormous a fact cannot be explained without an adequate cause, and it is impossible to find an adequate cause if the resurrection of Christ from the tomb is rejected as fiction.”

Christ belongs to history, and is indeed the center of history, and so does His resurrection. We know His ancestry, where He was born, where He lived. The craft He learned, the names of His parents, brothers, and His relatives, the names and motivation of His enemies, the names and successes and failures of His disciples, their weaknesses, sins, and even their fears. Monumental evidence of the historical Christ is most impressive!

The Lord’s Day, the Lord’s Supper, are great and universally observed historical monuments to the historicity of Christ, more convincing than any that ever existed to honor the memory of any other. Those great memorials, to say nothing of the New Testament itself, flow down through history in an ever-widening stream of influence; and that is simply unbelievable that they were set in motion by a lie!

He is risen! Yet we know that Christ died. We know the name of the man who signed His death warrant. We know how He died, and what were His last words, and how Joseph of Arimathaea took the body and where he laid it, and how it was wrapped, and in what spices, and that the grave was sealed and a watch posted. And we know that an angel of God announced His resurrection, that at first His disciples did not believe it, and that later, after they had seen Him, they truly believed, and that they sealed their testimony with their blood.

It was the overwhelming certainty that Christ was alive again that motivated the early church and impelled it in a world-girding revolution of religious zeal and fervor. Never was a more important word spoken to men than that of the glorious angel who said, “He is not here; He is risen, even as He said!”

Even as He said! The true gospel is not merely that Christ arose, but that He did so “even as He said, and according to the Scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Come see the place where He was lying! That admonition indicated something profoundly important and observable was to be seen in the tomb, and such is a necessary inference from an angel of God in calling attention to it.

## **Verses 7-8**

The angel in this passage summoned the disciples to a prearranged meeting place with Christ in Galilee, upon a mountain. (Matthew 26:32) There Christ was seen by more than five hundred brethren at one time. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

### **THE TEN APPEARANCES**

- (1) To Mary Magdalene (John and Mark)
- (2) To Other Women (Matthew)
- (3) To Disciples on Road to Emmaus (Luke)
- (4) To Peter (Luke 23:24; (1 Corinthians 15:5)
- (5) To Ten Apostles, Thomas absent (John 20:20)
- (6) To the apostles Thomas Present (John 20:26)
- (7) To Seven by the Sea (John 21:1-25)
- (8) To Above Five Thousand (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- (9) To James and All the Apostles (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- (10) To All the Disciples with the Great Commission in different words (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8)

The first five of those appearances occurred on the day of His resurrection, and the other five later, during the interval before His ascension.

### **Verse 9**

Christ never once rejected worship offered to Himself. As God incarnate, He was fully entitled to it; and the worship of Him is truly fit and proper at all times, as here and throughout the New Testament.

### **Verse 10**

The triple mention of that appointment in Galilee, twice by Jesus and once by the angel, underlines its importance. Far removed from the turbulent hatreds of Jerusalem, Christ would give His Great Commission and establish His

disciples in their world-wide task of soul-winning, amid the peaceful scenes of that sacred rendezvous upon a mount in Galilee.

## **THE BIG LIE**

### **Verse 11**

Then was the opportunity for the chief priests to have made good their boast that they would believe Christ if He came down from the cross. It was an even more wonderful thing to come up from the grave, but still they did not believe Him. No one is so blind as one who will not see!

### **Verse 12**

Having attempted to convict Christ with suborned testimony, the same men, in perfect character with their evil nature, then made use of bribery to deny the resurrection after the event. The fact that money was paid labels their report as false; no bounty would have been required to tell the truth. One can only marvel at the callous disregard of the soldiery which for money, agreed to circulate a lie, denying the resurrection of Christ.

### **Verse 13**

The falsehood was its own refutation. Certainly no man can be trusted when relating what took place while he was "asleep!" There is always a cleft in their foot of a falsehood; it can never walk uprightly but must limp, hobble, and drag itself, leaving the tell-tale evidence visible to all.

The men who went to sleep would have been liable to the death penalty for having permitted it. In fact, Herod put to death sixteen soldiers at one time for their failure to keep Peter on that occasion when an angel delivered him. (Acts 12:19)

### **Verse 14**

There was a small chance, of course, Pilate would intrude into the thing, especially since it was a Jewish matter; and the governor had had more than enough of such things already.

### **Verse 15**

Thus it came out why Satan wanted a watch in the first place. By that means, the evil one provided suborned testimony to deny the resurrection after the fact. The resurrection seems to have been fully anticipated by Satan. Why in all ages before or since, has there never been another case of guarding a grave to prevent a report of resurrection from the dead?

Second only to the betrayal by Judas was the conduct of the soldiers of infamy. For money, they circulated a lie concerning the most important truth the human race would ever know, even if the race of man should continue a million years.

That the lie was not even contrived by them but by the priests, and that it was scandalously implausible even on its face, and actually unbelievable, made no difference. So they took the money! What an indictment! How perfidious was their shameful compliance with the mandate of the priests! There would, of course, be men in all ages who would consent to believe it. There at the grave of Jesus, the big lie was born; and it is the ancestor of every big lie since then. Holy men, fired with heavenly zeal, would girdle the earth with the “good news” of the gospel! They would endure hardships unspeakable and finally seal every word with the blood of martyrdom; but alongside the apostles, there always slithered that child of the serpent, the lie that the disciples stole the body. For men who will disbelieve, Satan provides more than enough opportunity.

### **Verse 16**

Matthew in this place recorded the official appearance of Christ to His disciples after the resurrection. This meeting, mentioned twice by Jesus and once by an angel—this meeting was the great appearance. It was attended by over five hundred disciples, as related by Paul (1Corinthians 15:6), and even infidels have been impressed by Paul’s affirmation of that stupendous fact.

If Paul could so boldly affirm Christ’s appearance to so many, it had to be true. The enemies of the Lord and of His holy religion would have welcomed nothing so much as a statement that they could challenge and prove to be false.



They certainly would have challenged Paul's statement if they could have done so, but they could not; and it is a mountain fact that all of the denials of Christ's resurrection came long, long after the death of that entire generation that witnessed it.

Christ made an appointment to meet His disciples in Galilee, and that appointment He kept. He kept it in spite of :

- (1) His sleeping disciples,
- (2) His betrayal,
- (3) their forsaking Him,
- (4) His death,
- (5) His burial,
- (6) Peter's denial,
- (7) the big lie, and
- (8) the unbelief of many.

The only persons who did not meet Christ on that mount in Galilee are those who did not go there to keep their appointment. In like manner, now Christ keeps His appointments with His disciples, in spite of similar lapses on their part; and what are those appointments?

They were:

- (1) to meet Him in baptism,
- (2) at the Lord's table,
- (3) in the trials of life,
- (4) in death, and
- (5) in the judgment to come.

Only those who will not obey Him shall miss the joy of meeting the Lord in those appointments; but in the case of judgment, all shall keep that appointment, whether they desire to do so or not.

### **Verse 17**

It is a strong witness to the candor and accuracy of Matthew's account that the doubters should have been mentioned at that particular confrontation with Jesus. Only one passionately concerned with giving all the facts would have done so.

### **Verse 18**

This indicates that Christ was first visible from a distance, and then "came to them," leaving the probability that some recognized Him at once while some doubted, and that as soon as He came to them, all believed. All present on that mountain were there for the specific purpose of meeting Christ, as He had appointed them; and it a safe conjecture that as soon as He came near, all believed.

## **THE GREAT COMMISSION**

### **Verses 18-20**

The surpassing magnificence of this grand conclusion to Matthew's gospel is unrivaled by anything even from the sacred pages of inspiration. This Great Commission, as the saints of all ages have consented to call it, constitutes the marching orders of His church for a day and to all eternity. It is a whole galaxy studded with many of the brightest stars in the firmament of Christian doctrine. It may well be doubted if many passages of similar length are more freighted with divine truth than are these words of the Commission. They are exactly what one should have expected, only far more, from the lips of a supernatural, divine Savior, on point of departure to the eternal world of the spirit, and uttering one last comprehensive command to His disciple for all generations to come.

(1) "All authority has been given to Me . . ."

This teaches the divinity of Christ. This says nothing of the countless passages in which He laid claim to attributes of deity, as for example when He said, "Before Abraham was, I Am!" Christ is God come in the flesh. That is the

central meaning and message of Christianity. Anything less than this regarding Christ is blasphemous.

(2) “In heaven and on earth . . .”

Christ is head of the church upon earth as well as in heaven. There is no true head on earth, else the church is a two-headed monster. This indicates the reign of Christ is now going on. There are the times of the regeneration when He is reigning with the Twelve in His kingdom, the Israel of God. Christ was not defeated on Calvary but was there victorious over death, hell, and the devil.

(3) “Go therefore and make disciples . . .”

Disciples can be made only by teaching. Thus teaching, as a prerequisite of discipleship, is evident as one of the basic principles of the faith. Infants cannot be taught, and therefore, in the true view, they cannot become disciples until they are old enough to be taught. The Great Commission is clearly opposed to infant church membership.

(4) “Of all the nations . . .”

Here is the world-wide missionary program of the church. Here is the world-wide brotherhood of all nations and races in Christ. God made of “one” all the families of the earth. (Acts 17:26) No limitation is permitted. All the nations . . . not merely all “the English-speaking nations” or “all the white nations,” but all the nations!

(5) “Baptizing them . . .”

If nothing else appeared in the Bible relative to the ordinance of baptism, Christ’s mention of it in this circumstance would have been more than sufficient to bind it upon all men for all time to come.

That Jesus Christ, the Head of our holy faith, in this grand finale of His earthly teaching, should be charged with having introduced secondary, subordinate, non-essential, and unnecessary commands is a reflection upon His divinity. Added to that is the sacred triple name of “Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit,” in which baptism was commanded to be administered. Where else in all

the Scriptures is there another commandment that enjoys the distinction conferred by those solemn words?

The commandment of baptism subjoined by the sacred name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is in this Great Commission elevated to a priority that men have been very reluctant to allow; and yet the inclusion of baptism in this Commission dispels any view that it can be considered optional or permissive; it is commanded, not for one or for a few, but for all, “every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

(6) “In the name . . .”

Three names are given, yet they are one name. God’s unity and oneness are taught by this. There are three persons in the godhead, and each has a name; but their name is one!

(7) “Of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit . . .”

The doctrine of the Trinity is nevertheless a true one, and appears throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The pronouns for God in Genesis are plural, as in “let us make man in our image.” (Genesis 1:26)

Even the passages affirming that God is one” employs a word which means a compound rather than an abstract unity. That word is echad and is also used in such passages as that which says a man and his wife shall be “one” flesh (Genesis 2:24), and in “the people is one.” (Genesis 11:6) Thus the “oneness of God is like the “oneness” of a man and his wife, or of the people. In the New Testament, the doctrine of the Trinity appears in this passage, and at Christ’s baptism. (Matthew 3:16)

(8) “Teaching them to observe . . .”

The perpetual mission of the church as a teacher is implicit in these words. Here is the necessity for indoctrination and grounding all the disciples in the Savior’s teaching. Here is the divine authority for the Bible School, the cottage meeting, the mid-week service, the evangelistic campaign, and whatever else may be useful in carrying out the divine injunction to teach the baptized to do all that Christ commanded.

(9) “All that I commanded you . . . “

This establishes the identity of the true doctrine; it is what Christ commanded, nothing else. The most important fact of Christianity is that it is “of Christ.” The true faith was “first spoken” by Him, (Hebrews 2:3), and not by any other. Whatsoever was not first spoken by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard Him can have no valid claim as a part of Christianity. Not even the Holy Spirit came to reveal new truth to the apostles but to, “Bring all things to their remembrance.” (John 14:26; 16:13)

In practical fact, this limits true Christianity to what is taught in the New Testament, for that is the only book that contains the authenticated teachings of the Master.

Men are commanded not to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6); the apostles gave all (things that pertain” to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3); and the true faith was “once for all” delivered to the saints, (Jude 3), etc. In the light of this, how much of present-day Christianity is valueless? Auricular confession, baptizing of babies, countless innovations in the worship, the doctrine of purgatory, penances, redemption of penances, and literally scores of doctrines, devices, and presumptions of men, are all identified as forming a part of Christianity, but it is not so. Christ knew none of these things. They were not first spoken by Him; on the other hand, we know the place, and the time, and the name of the man or men who initiated those things and bought them into God’s worship. Therefore, all such things must be rejected by those who would walk after the oracles of God.

(10) “I am with you always . . .”

This teaches the providence of God. God has not wound up His universe, or His church, and left them to run of their own accord. He “upholds all things by the word of His power.” (Hebrews 1:3) Christ promised to be with His disciples always. A solicitous and loving providence always watches over the fortunes of God’s church.

(11) “Even to the end of the age . . .”

This teaches immortality. It would have been a vast comfort if Christ had promised to be with His disciples till they die; but this promise far exceeds that.

He is still with Peter, James, and John, and all who ever truly served Him in all generations.

He is the God of the living and not of the dead. He brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:10)

(12) “The end of the age . . .”

This is the doctrine of the final liquidation of the entire material creation, especially of the earth and all that is in it. The apostle Peter elaborated on this. (2 Peter 3:1-13) This earth is destined to burn, whether by nuclear fires kindled by man himself, or by some catastrophic judgment of God, is not known. Even as recently as a generation ago, men scoffed at the idea that the earth could burn; but in the light of what is now known, it is safe to say the scientific knowledge has finally caught up with revelation. The sun itself is a “nova” and is a type of star that is capable of exploding to a million times its present size and intensity. (National Geographic Magazine, November 1965).

When and if such a thing happens, our poor earth will be millions of miles in the flaming periphery of the sun itself. In the light of Christ’s word in this place, and in view of Peter’s words on the same subject, the end of this world is certain. “But of that day or hour no one knows.” (Matthew 24:36)

The conclusion that thoughtful men should derive from these considerations is well stated by Peter who said, “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless, and blameless.” (2 Peter 3:14)