

The Sayings Of Jesus

“LET THESE SAYINGS SINK DOWN
INTO YOUR EARS” (LUKE 9:44)

The 2002

POWER



Lectures

Hosted by the Southaven church of Christ
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Lectureship Director

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Dedication

You have no doubt heard the statement that behind every good man there is a good woman. It could also be said that behind every good work of the church there is a good woman. Whereas God has stipulated that women are not to teach over a man (1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 14:34-35), and not to assume positions of leadership in the church (1 Tim. 3:2, 12), it is nevertheless true that women play an invaluable role in the work of the Lord.

This has always been the case and it always will be. Although Jesus did not call any women to serve as apostles, the earthly ministry of our Lord was most assuredly enhanced by women of great faith. Luke 8:2-3 makes mention of certain women which ministered unto Jesus out of their substance. A group of women were present at the crucifixion who, when Jesus was in Galilee, had followed Him and ministered unto Him (Mark 15:40-41). Of course, the early church had its share of outstanding women of faith, such as Dorcas and Lydia (Acts 9:36-41; Acts 16:14-15). Paul's closing words in the Roman epistle are saturated with references to women of great importance to the work of the church (Rom. 16).

The Southaven church of Christ is blessed with many women of great faith. There are so many women who do so many things behind the scenes. They do not serve for public recognition and praise. They serve out of love and devotion for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of these women are greatly appreciated, but in this dedication we wish to single out three women of great importance to the work of the church here at Southaven.

These three women do whatever is needed, whenever it is needed. For the most part, their work is done out of the view of the members who sit in the pews. But I can guarantee you that if they didn't show up for work for a few days, it wouldn't take long for people to notice.

These ladies wear many hats, and they do so in such a pleasant and effective fashion. They take a big load off of the elders and preachers and allow them to attend to other more pressing matters. Their spirit of cooperation and love for the church makes it only fitting that the 2002 POWER lectureship book be dedicated to Geraldine Chaney, Pam Eaton, and Betty Marshall, the three women who serve the church as secretaries. Thank you so much. We love and appreciate each one of your for your unique contributions to the work of Lord's church!

Geraldine Chaney

Pam Eaton

Betty Marshall

Acknowledgments

Two of the most meaningful words in the English language are the words “Thank you.” I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to a number of different people who are responsible for the book you hold in your hand. If this book assists you in any way, then please remember the names I am about to mention, and be grateful for them.

Of course, without the willingness of our speakers to take the time to write a manuscript, there would be no need to thank anyone else. If you have never taken the time to write a chapter for a book, then you have no idea how much effort is represented in the hundreds of pages which follow this acknowledgment. Each speaker had to, in addition to his regular responsibilities to the local church, and his family, find time to do the research and writing necessary for this project. As you will see, their time was well spent. They did a great job.

Once the speakers have completed their work, the mammoth task of formatting and proofreading begins. As he has done for more years than I can count now, Robin Smith came through like a champion again by doing the initial typesetting and proofreading of each chapter. He always does his job thoroughly, professionally and pleasantly. If you were to add up all the hours he has spent over the years volunteering to work on the book, you would be talking about several months out of his life, and this has probably added several months of life to mine. Thanks!

Last, but certainly not least, there are those individuals who helped to put the finishing touches on the book. Thanks to my treasured wife and children who burned the midnight oil with Daddy the night before the book had to go to press. Thanks also to Francis Fairley, who, as usual, has made my task much easier!

Foreword

This volume represents the third installment in our study of the life of Christ. The 8th annual POWER lectureship, conducted in the year 2000, dealt with The Parables Of Jesus. Last year we followed up with a study of The Miracles Of Jesus. At the end of last year's lectureship brother Tom Wacaster suggested the idea of doing a lectureship on "The Words of Jesus." He was even gracious enough to suggest a number of topics for study. The more I thought about his suggestion, the more I was attracted to the idea. Then one day I was reading the Gospel of Luke and I ran across the statement that Jesus made to His disciples, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears" (Luke 9:44). One verse led me to another, and another, and I noticed for the first time just how often the word "sayings" appears in the New Testament to describe the teaching of our Lord. I was impressed by the sheer number of times Jesus would preface His remarks with the phrase "I say unto you" or "And I say unto you."

Indeed, the very heart of the Gospel accounts is the sayings of Jesus. These sayings are not on the same level with the uninspired sayings of men like Confucius or other philosophers. Rather, the sayings of Jesus soar above the sayings of ordinary men. I believe that your heart will soar with love and appreciation for the sayings of Jesus as you read the pages which follow. The first two chapters are introductory, after which three major sections follow: (1) What Jesus said at certain events in His life; (2) What Jesus said to certain people in one-on-one conversations, and (3) What Jesus said about certain subjects. The book concludes with four outstanding lectures especially for ladies. These four messages zoom in for a look at how Jesus interacted with women during His earthly ministry. Our prayer is that these sayings will sink down into your ears and bless you until He comes!

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CHAPTER 1

What Did Jesus Really Say?

Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

A *GAIN I EXPRESS MY* great thanks for the pleasure of being able to speak at the 2002 **POWER** Lectures. The emphases on the deeds and words of Jesus these last three years have provided the brotherhood with some great study materials that have not been abundantly accessible in the recent past. This topic on “The Sayings of Jesus” should provide a welcome addition to the previous years of this lectureship.

The Southaven congregation continues to be a model for others in a number of ways. The working relationship of the elders, deacons, ministers, and members continues to insure that the Lord’s work is being done here in an impressive way. This does not just include the annual lectureship and book, but in many areas of local and mission work. Of course, I continue to be very proud of the work and dedication of my son, B. J., in the service of the Lord and this congregation.

One thing Jesus said is:

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words,
hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have
spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.
For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father
which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what

I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak (John 12:48-50).¹

Since Jesus' words are to be the standard of judgment for all men, and since He speaks the words of the Father which are "life everlasting," surely we should all desire to know the answer to the question, "What did Jesus really say?"

Elsewhere in John, Jesus said, "It is the Spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63, ASV). When many of His disciples were leaving Him because of what they considered "an hard saying" (John 6:60), Jesus asked His twelve apostles, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68).

On another occasion, when Jesus was teaching about giving oneself completely in service to Him, He warned, "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Knowing, believing, loving, and obeying the words of Jesus are keys to our eternal salvation. Anyone who does not know what Jesus said and does not obey Him will be lost (Heb. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:8-9).

The Gospel Accounts

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the New Testament (hereafter, NT) accounts of the Gospel of the teaching and work of Jesus Christ. The word "Gospel" in our NT comes from the Greek word *euangelion* and means **good news**. It

was used in Graeco-Roman literature for announcements such as the accession of a new emperor. In Jewish writings the cognate verb

(Greek *euangelizomai*) is used [in the Greek Old Testament] in announcing the coming of Yahweh [God] to save his people (eg. Isa. 40:9; Isa. 52:7; Joel 2:32; Nah. 1:15).²

As it applies to the NT, the Gospel (good news) is the coming of God's Son to save His people. The Gospels are not strictly biographies of Jesus, but a revelation of God's working among man through Jesus Christ to save sinful mankind. Christ's becoming God incarnate through His virgin birth; His life, teaching, and ministry upon the earth; His death on the cross; His burial and resurrection (during which time He showed Himself to His disciples for forty days); His ascension to heaven and the promise of His return—all these are part of the greatest announcement that ever was worthy of being called good news. The Gospel message continued through the apostles and the church Jesus built and is still preached by the church of Christ today, as we await His Second Coming and our final redemption (Heb. 9:27-28; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). While the Gospel involves the whole NT, this lesson will key on whether or not we can know the words of Jesus in the Gospels (Matt., Mark, Luke, and John).

The Gospels As History

Everything about the Gospels represents them as presenting factual history for our most serious consideration. The prologue of Luke's Gospel account makes it clear that this was his purpose:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the

certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

The ASV translates “having had perfect understanding” as “having traced the course of all things accurately.”

John makes a similar claim, stating:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name..This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written (John 20:30-31; John 21:24-25).

Matthew’s Gospel begins with, “The book of the generation [genealogy] of Jesus Christ” (Matt. 1:1), and presents the historical lineage of Jesus from Abraham to His birth. When Matthew writes, “Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise” (Matt. 1:18), he is saying, “it happened this way,” implying that he was reporting historical fact. Mark takes the same type of approach, writing, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1), but he begins later in history with John the Baptist’s work in fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi (Mark 1:2ff).

Once one accepts that the gospels reflect attempts to write reliable history or biography, however theological or stylized its presentation may be, then one must immediately recognize an important presupposition which guides most historians in their work. Unless there is good reason for believing otherwise one will assume that a given detail in the work of a particular historian is factual. This method places the burden squarely on the person who would doubt

the reliability of a given portion of the text. The alternative is to presume the text unreliable unless evidence can be brought forward in support of it. While many critical scholars of the gospels adopt this latter method, it is wholly unjustified by the normal canons [rules] of historiography. Scholars who would consistently implement such a method when studying other ancient historical writing would find the corroborative data so insufficient that the vast majority of accepted history would have to be jettisoned.³

Matthew and John were chosen apostles of Christ (Matt. 10:2-4). As were all the apostles, these men were **eyewitnesses** of Jesus' ministry, "beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he [Jesus] was taken up from us" (cf. Acts 1:21-22). This included being eyewitnesses of His resurrection. As eyewitnesses, their testimony is accorded the highest degree of acceptance.

While Mark and Luke were not apostles, they were contemporary with the apostles and close companions to them. Mark was a companion of Paul and later Peter (Acts 13:13; cf. Mark 15:37-40; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13). Mark's and Luke's association with any apostle would have placed them in position to receive miraculous spiritual powers through the laying on of the hands of an apostle (Acts 8:14-18). The reception of revelation through any one of several gifts of the Holy Spirit would have enabled Mark or Luke to record infallibly eyewitness testimony, or anything else revealed, accurately (cf. 1 Cor. 12:8-10).

Eusebius was a church historian who wrote a book on church history about AD 325. In that book, he quotes from the written works of others who are often called "apostolic fathers" because they are closer to the end of the apostolic age, when the last apostles died. Early church history testifies to the fact as to who wrote what Gospel account, even though the writers do not name themselves

in the text, as the authors of most of the epistles do. One of those early sources was Irenaeus, who wrote about AD 180:

Matthew indeed produced his gospel written among the Hebrews in their own dialect, whilst Peter and Paul proclaimed the gospel and founded the church at Rome. After the departure of these, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also transmitted to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. And Luke, the companion of Paul, committed to writing the gospel preached by him, i.e. Paul. Afterwards John the disciple of our Lord, the same who lay upon his bosom, also published the gospel, whilst he was yet at Ephesus in Asia.⁴

Note that Irenaeus says that Matthew wrote his Gospel **before** Mark. This will be important testimony to remember later in our study.

Another writer quoted by Eusebius is Papias. Several experts in church history believe that Papias wrote about AD 95-110, which would place him right at the end of the apostle John's life.⁵ Others place him a little later, about AD 120. Either way he is an important historical source:

[W]e shall now subjoin to the extracts from him, already given, a tradition which he sets forth concerning Mark, who wrote the gospel, in the following words: "And John the Presbyter also said this, Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy but not however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord, but as before said, he was in company with Peter, who gave him instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord's discourses: wherefore Mark has not erred in anything, by writing some things as he has recorded them; for he was carefully attentive to one thing, not to pass by any thing he heard, or to state any thing falsely in these accounts." Such is the account of Papias, respecting Mark.⁶

Luke was also a frequent companion of Paul and could easily receive any spiritual gift needed for his service to the Lord. See the “we” sections beginning in Acts 16:10 throughout the rest of the book, where the author includes himself as a part of the events that he records. Also Paul’s epistles mention Luke as being with him (Col. 4:14; Phile. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). While Paul was not an eyewitness of the personal ministry of the Lord, he was of the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:8). Additionally, Luke’s association with Paul would have brought him into the company of other apostles who were eye and ear witnesses of the teaching and life of the Lord. Such contact may have been part of what Luke mentioned in his Gospel prologue (Luke 1:2). Eusebius also speaks of Luke writing his Gospel:

But Luke, who was born at Antioch, and by profession a physician, being for the most part connected with Paul, and familiarly acquainted with the rest of the apostles, has left us, in two inspired books, the institutes of that spiritual healing art which he obtained from them. One of these is his gospel, in which he testifies that he has recorded, “as those who were from the beginning eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word,” delivered to him, whom also, he says, he has in all things followed. The other is his Acts of the Apostles, which he composed, not from what he had heard from others, but what he had seen himself.⁷

Thus, as companions of the apostles and possibly other eyewitnesses of the life of Christ, Mark and Luke had firsthand testimony, though not the personal experience as did Matthew and John, to construct their Gospel accounts under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. Even if one was not prepared to accept inspiration as an essential part of the record of the Gospels, as liberal scholars frequently object, one must still rank their Gospels as directly influenced by eyewitness testimony.

We have already mentioned John's Gospel, but another comment of Papias acknowledges the different content in John's work. He states that John, having seen the work of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, concluded his work would "commence with the doctrine of the divinity [of the Lord], as a part reserved for him, by the divine Spirit, as if for a superior."⁸

There is every reason to treat the Gospels as historical presentations of the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Unless one can demonstrate that these accounts are factually inaccurate, we should place the utmost confidence in them to report what Jesus said and did. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to present all the evidence that can be garnered to support the historicity of the Gospels, but there are some excellent books to aid you in such a more detailed study.⁹

The Inspiration Of The Gospels

One does not have to read much to find out that liberal scholars in Biblical studies do not hold to the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Inspiration insures the factual nature and accuracy of the Gospel records. We mention some facts about inspiration here to remind our readers of the claims that Scripture makes for itself in this area.

Revelation is the act of God's revealing or making known His truth to man. This revelation comes about through the direct work of the Holy Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10). **Inspiration** is the reception of God's revelation by persons selected by God, in order to convey those truths to others, either orally or in writing (1 Cor. 2:11-13; 1 Cor. 14:37). These two come together in Paul's explanation to the church at Ephesus:

How that by **revelation** he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

[inspiration] Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:3-5).

The Bible is a product of God's revelation to man and God's inspiration upon man to produce the record of Scripture:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect [complete, ASV], thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The word translated "inspiration" in our Bibles is from the Greek word *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed." God breathed out His Word into the minds of those selected to receive His revelation, enabling them by His Spirit to receive and communicate His will to others in an authoritative and inerrant manner:

The Bible writers were "inspired" not just in some intuitive way, but in a way that insured that what they penned would **be** God's message. The message was "God-breathed." The Holy Spirit "moved" those ancients to write, and the writers submitted their minds and wills to the Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). The writer's normal cognitive functions, however, were not abandoned as if they were mere dictation machines, for their styles and thought processes were maintained as they wrote. This is "verbal" inspiration but not "dictation." God can and did use the words that the writer would already know, but the writer would not pen his own message but God's.¹⁰

Although four different Gospel writers were used by God, and their writings at times reflect different styles,

purposes, ordering of events, and varied phraseology, what they wrote was guided by the Holy Spirit so that God's total truth was preserved without any admixture of error. Because of the inspiration of the Spirit, it is unnecessary to postulate that the authors used written sources to compose their Gospels. If for some reason they were led by the Spirit to do so, as many popular theories suppose, He would also have guided their selection and presentation of the materials from those sources.

The early church accepted those four Gospel accounts as inspired Scripture, and many came to faith in Jesus Christ through them, as well as through the inspired oral preaching that continued during the apostolic age. They also used those Gospels to evangelize the world. We can use them today with the same confidence that they present to us what Jesus really said!

At first, inspiration was bound up with the oral presentation of the Gospel only (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). Then it passed to both oral and written sources of those whom God selected to receive His revelation (1 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Thess. 2:15). When God's Word was completely revealed and recorded, inspiration was bound up solely in the unchanging written Word (1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11-14; Rev. 22:18-19).

Challenges To The Gospel Records

Sources Of Common Material

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the "Synoptic Gospels," from the compound Greek words *syn*, meaning "together," and *optanomai*, meaning "to see"; thus, synoptic means "to see together."¹¹ The reason for this name is the vast amount of material that these three have in common. Those who have taken the necessary time to study the matter tell us that: "There are 661 verses in Mark and

601 are paralleled in Matthew and/or Luke. 97% of the words in Mark are found in Matthew; 88% of the words in Mark are found in Luke.”¹² Others use the figures that 90% of Mark is in Matthew and 50% of Mark is in Luke.¹³

Because of the common materials in these three Gospels, many NT scholars have sought for an answer as to why this is so. The general conclusion, even drawn by those in the denominational world who believe in some type of inspiration of the Scriptures, is that, instead of each Gospel writer independently recording his own material, one or more must have copied from another. Since there are so many different theories as to who copied from whom, we will only briefly discuss two.

The most common theory, which has circulated for a considerable time, is called the “Two Source Theory.” This is supposed to answer the question of the origin of the Synoptic Gospels and to account for both their likenesses and their differences. Supposedly, Mark wrote his Gospel first; then later Matthew and Luke independently copied the bulk of Mark as the foundation and organization of their Gospels. This is the position set forth in Robert Stein’s book, **The Synoptic Problem**, and in one of the most recent introductions to the NT; by D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris, **An Introduction to the New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 19-134; and a host of other works. Sadly, the few so-called conservative scholars in the denominations who reject this view are generally styled as radicals. But there are some fairly good resources that deal with this compromise of inspiration.¹⁴

However, since Matthew and Luke also have over 200 verses in common between them that are not in Mark, it is also contended that they independently used a second source. This second source is usually identified as “Q,” taken from the German word “Quelle,” which means

“source.” “Q” is thought by this theory to be a sayings gospel, meaning that there is little historical narrative in it, mainly just short sayings of Jesus. (Additionally, Matthew and Luke have material that is unique to each of the two, but we will look at that in the next section.) Marcus Borg, of the Jesus Seminar, has published a book which he purports to be the contents of “Q.” He has entitled it, **The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings Of Jesus.**¹⁵ “Q” is an essential element of the Two Source Theory, but Borg’s admissions in his book show the utter impossibility of successfully defending such a view:

Thus Q is a hypothetical document; no copy of it has ever been found. Therefore it is possible to deny that it existed, and some scholars do not accept the Q hypothesis...This first gospel was compiled by some of the earliest followers in his native Galilee. Written about two decades after Jesus’ death, it is older than the traditional Gospels, older than the Christian church itself. Q, quite simply, is the closest we can come to the historical Jesus. More than any other document, this text holds the answer to the mysteries surrounding Jesus.

But no copy of it has ever been found. The words of Jesus you are about to read were not deciphered by archaeologists from the leaves of a crumbling manuscript. Rather than a rare single find, the discovery of the Lost Gospel Q has been the result of over one hundred fifty years of detective work by historians and theologians. They did not disinter it from the archaeological layers of the earth, but found it buried within the literary layers of the New Testament itself.¹⁶

Incredible? Indeed! How can men of supposedly great intelligence assume such impossible scenarios in place of inspiration? Borg’s assertion that this phantom gospel source is older than the church is laughable and demonstrates his lack of knowledge of what the Bible teaches on this

matter. Also, if “Q” is the closest we can come to Jesus, then we have no Savior, for “Q” says nothing about Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. In addition to Borg’s admission that “Q” is hypothetical, and that no copy of it has ever been found, the following quote properly dismisses the supposed “Q” as a source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke:

Apart from the fact that no two scholars agree on its content, “Q” stretches credulity to the limit—to imagine that in the first Christian century a document, so highly treasured and copied so carefully and lovingly by both Matthew and Luke independently, should have disappeared without leaving a single trace or any real objective clue to its existence and nature.¹⁷

Nevertheless, nearly all but the most conservative of Biblical scholars contend that Matthew and Luke basically copied Mark and used much of the hypothetical “Q” to compose their Gospels. They claim that they cannot see any other solution to what they call “The Synoptic Problem,” since there is so much material common to all three Gospels.

Sources Of Uncommon Material

In addition to saying that Matthew and Luke used Mark and “Q”, some contend for two additional sources to account for the material peculiar to Matthew that is not in Mark or Luke, and that peculiar to Luke not in Matthew or Mark. These supposed sources are called “M” for Matthew and “L” for Luke. This is known as the Four-Source Theory.¹⁸ The claim is that Matthew used “M” for over 230 verses in his Gospel, and Luke used “L” for over 400 verses. You can see that these theories for the origins of the Gospels essentially strip the writers of those books from any direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit for their content. These theories make Matthew and Luke nothing

more than collectors of sayings already written down by others.

Another type of “uncommon” material is suggested when one Gospel writer records something different than another Gospel writer about the same event, or reports Jesus as saying something different than the other Gospels which also report on the same event or saying. In general, there are some differences in details in describing events common to two or more Gospels, differences in the order or sequence of some events, and differences in recording the words spoken by Jesus and others. We are asked to account for these differences, frequently called contradictions by liberals or unbelievers.

Thus, the material common to the three (or two) Synoptic Gospels is said to present a problem for the independence and originality of the Gospel authors, and the uncommon material in part or whole poses the problem as to why there are serious differences or supposed contradictions between these accounts. John’s Gospel is later in time and about 90% different from Matthew, Mark and Luke, but he does share some material in common with them, and there are differences in some of that shared material as among the Synoptics. We will not focus on John, but the solutions we propose for the likenesses and differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke will generally apply to similar situations within John’s Gospel.

How Were The Gospels Composed?

This subject by itself, if thoroughly covered, would require a book. We cannot but briefly comment on it and refer you to some further resources. Is there a real Synoptic Problem for which solutions can be found? Eta Linnemann, a female German scholar who for years taught the two source theory mentioned earlier, does not think so:

There will be, however, no real solution, nor can there be, because the problem is not a genuine

problem. It did not emerge from painstaking observation of the data. The Synoptic problem is a contrivance that has been fisted onto the Synoptic Gospels from the outside. For what reason? To help us understand God's Word better? Absolutely not.¹⁹

Ms. Linnemann left her position at Philipps University in Marburg, West Germany when she discovered upon personal close examination that the methods of historical criticism used by most so-called Biblical scholars were faulty. She stated, after her long period of reexamining her beliefs and studying those who promote such theories, "Instead of proof I find only assertions. Instead of arguments there is merely circular reasoning."²⁰ Linnemann became a Bible-toting, Bible-quoting scholar who believes fully in the divine inspiration of the Bible. I do not agree with everything she presents, or some of her doctrinal beliefs, but she has provided a great deal that demolishes the idea that Mark was written first and was copied by Matthew and Luke and that the latter two also used "Q".

Explaining The Common Material

Why is there so much material in common among the Synoptic Gospels?

Clearly the Gospels intend to report the words and deeds, as well as the suffering, of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is evident in every pericope; it is expressly stated in Luke 1:1-4. What historical-critical exegesis rejects as "historicizing"—taking what is reported in the Gospels as historical—is, therefore, a legitimate approach to the Gospels; **Behind what the Gospels report stand the words and deeds of Jesus.** That is the source of similarities in content and sequence of the pericopes. The Gospels all have the same foundation: What Jesus said, did, and suffered; that led inevitably

to similarities in content.²¹ [A pericope is a self-contained unit of Scripture, short or long, that covers a particular saying or event, TJC]

Whenever a person talks or acts, there are specific words or actions that can be reported or described. If, for example, several people follow you around for a week, they will have a number of significant events and sayings on which they can report. One of these personally following you may decide to write an account of that week. Two others, who may not personally have been in your company that week, may inquire of other eyewitnesses who were with you for that period. These two may then separately decide to write accounts of the eyewitnesses' testimony of that week, recording what you said and did. Most eyewitnesses will remember the major events and conversations that transpired and record or report those accurately. Some eyewitnesses will remember things that others did not recall, and some will choose to report things others omit, but in those three reports they will present a basic outline of what you said and did for that week. Because of the differences in individuals, their styles, the order or sequence of events, and the words they use, there may be significant differences; but there will be, if all reported accurately, a tremendous amount of material in common.

The situation described above is not strictly identical to the writing of the Gospels, for there is no Holy Spirit guidance of the writers in the event I described. However, I think you can see my point. Would the **eyewitness** who wrote have to depend upon the written record of either of the two who were not personally present with you for the week, but wrote their accounts from interviews with other eyewitnesses? Surely not. Based on their own firsthand interviews with the eyewitnesses, would either of the non-eyewitnesses who wrote have to depend upon each other's writing or the written record of the one eyewitness who

wrote? Such would be totally unnecessary. So it is with the Gospels.

Those who promote the priority of Mark and “Q” use different standards to judge what is “parallel” among the Gospels. Some judge the percentage of common material based on topical considerations, including similarity of events or sayings, but similarity does not mean identity. Undoubtedly many similar events occurred in the three years of Jesus’ ministry, just as He must have taught the same things many times, often using the same words as well as varying His expressions.

Eta Linnemann went through a laborious effort in her book to prove that there was no literary dependence among the Gospels. We cannot detail her work but give you a summary of her findings:

In view of the data in part 2, it is incumbent on anyone wishing to assert the literary dependence of the three Synoptics to demonstrate credibly a form of literary dependence consistent with these data. May no one think ill of me for harboring doubt that such a demonstration is possible.

In chapter 3 we learned that the material shared by Matthew and Mark comprises 55.46 percent of Matthew; material shared by Luke and Mark comprises 42.91 percent of Luke. Similarity in content is, however, no proof of literary dependence, for it could just as easily be due to historical rather than literary factors.

Chapter 4 showed that 50.43 percent of the three Synoptic Gospels follow a similar narrative sequence, 75.65 percent of the sequence in Matthew and Mark is similar, and 70.43 percent of the sequence in Mark and Luke is similar. This cannot, however, facily be chalked up to literary dependence. The same results could as well be due to the actual sequence of the events reported. In favor of this is the almost seamless similarity in the passion and resurrection accounts, where the order of events is substantially conclusive.

Chapter 5 identified the extent of parallelism between Matthew and Mark at 46.5 percent, and between Mark and Luke at 36.17 percent, based on the entire Gospel of Mark.

Chapter 6's quantitative cross-sectional Synoptic investigation showed that only 22.17 percent of the words examined that are parallel in all three Synoptics are totally identical. In Matthew and Mark the amount is 40.99 percent; in Luke and Mark it is 34.29 percent. The differences in wording of parallel verses come to 95.68 percent in Matthew and Mark and 100.43 percent in Mark and Luke. Such data do not favor literary dependence among the three Synoptics.

Of course, it is possible here and there to point to half and occasionally entire sentences containing literal agreement in at least two of the three Synoptics. This is possible even outside the words of Jesus, which occupy a special position. But such agreement is rare. Only exceptionally does it cover an entire verse, and it never goes so far as to cover an entire pericope.

Chapter 7 made clear that no literary dependence can be based on significant similarities in vocabulary, which come to 0.22 percent of Mark compared to the other two, to 2.3 percent for Mark and Matthew, and to 0.97 percent for Mark and Luke.

In view of these data, I would like to ask whether the reader is willing to continue to hold to the assumption of literary dependence among the three Synoptic Gospels. If there is no proof for literary dependence then it makes no sense to offer theories to tell who was dependent on whom. It is true that the two-source theory has become a habit of thought, but those stalwarts who refuse to be dissuaded from clinging to the two-source theory should consider the data which speak against their assumption.²²

Another study,

by analyzing exact agreements rather than vague generalities, [shows] that **words which agree** in Matthew and Mark are only 17 percent

of the total, in Mark and Luke, only 8 percent, and in Matthew and Luke, only 6 percent [emp. mine, TJC].²³

Such agreements could be covered by the independent writing on common historical themes, but these percentages are “not enough agreement...to warrant the presupposition of literary dependence.”²⁴

Explaining The Uncommon Material

If Luke copied Mark, no one can explain satisfactorily why he omitted all of Mark 6:45-8:26 from his Gospel. “There is a short section, [Luke] 6:20-8:3, and a longer one, 9:51-18:14, where Luke seems to make no reference to Mark, which is most curious if Mark gave him his basic framework.”²⁵ Indeed, such facts are hardly proof that Luke copied Mark.

Regarding these differences and others, Linnemann offers the following:

Similarly, the additional minor details present a problem for the two-source advocate in both directions. One must, for example, explain why Matthew shortened the pericopes he took from Mark by 2915 words or 28.01 percent of their total, yet at the same time added 2270 words, or 21.82 percent to them (see p. 104). One blanket explanation might account for either situation alone, but hardly for both together. The advocate would also be responsible for explaining why Matthew failed to include thirteen Marcan pericopes.

With respect to Luke, one must account for the omission of no fewer than twenty-four pericopes and at the same time explain why Luke shortened the pericopes he relied on by 3343 words, or 38.19 percent of their length. Yet at the same time the writer expanded them by 1330 words or 15.19 percent of their original extent (see pp. 103-5).

Also in need of explanation are the marked differences among the Synoptics in how they

formulate their common material. These differences run to something like 100 percent, while similarities in the wording of the common material are, at most, 40 percent when comparing two Gospels.²⁶

Minor variations are natural among the Gospel witnesses, depending upon their style of writing, any special emphasis they wish to highlight of a particular event or saying, and whether or not they have given greater detail or less regarding a historical event. Blomberg admits: minor variations that do occur, when coupled with the much greater amount of close agreement in detail, actually strengthen confidence in the evangelists' trustworthiness.²⁷

And the variations which appear in most of the parallels are no greater, and often much more trivial, than those which characterize any two independent historical accounts of the same events – a different selection of details, themes, and phraseology, which periodically brings one account into apparent tension with the other because each reflects a unique perspective and neither tells the whole story.²⁸

Harmonizing The Differences

Casting off the Bible's claim to be inspired has led many critics to imagine that the Gospels are full of "embellishments, distortions, or contradictions of historical fact. As parts of the Bible came to be treated more and more as merely human literature, it became easier to assume that they contained errors like those found in any other ancient history book."²⁹ These sorts of difficulties used to be treated as problems that could be resolved by the principles of harmonization, some of which Augustine (ca. AD 354-430) spoke of using:

St. Augustine's approach was somewhat more nuanced, emphasizing that the gospels often fail

to give a clear indication of the location or sequence of the events they are reporting, and that one is to assume continuity of time and place only when it is explicitly mentioned in the text. He also emphasized that parallel passages may vary in wording yet still convey the same sense, whereas highly divergent 'parallels' may in fact represent similar events from separate occasions in Jesus' life.³⁰

A sense of the inspiration of the Gospel accounts leads us to seek the harmony that must exist in anything God causes to be written as His Word. A very rich and rewarding study in harmonizing accounts which may **appear** at odds awaits those engaged in such. J. W. McGarvey, in his great book, **Evidences of Christianity**, discusses the definition of a contradiction and when one does and does not exist:

Before we take up these allegations for special consideration, it is necessary that we state very clearly what is meant by a contradiction. Two statements are contradictory not when they differ, but when they can not both be true. If, on any rational hypothesis, we may suppose them both to be true, we can not rightfully pronounce them contradictory. We are not bound to show the truth of the given hypothesis; but only that it may be true. If it is all possible, then it is possible that no contradiction exists; if it is probable, then it is probable that no contradiction exists; and the degree of the latter probability is measured by that of the former. This being true, it follows that an omission by one writer of a fact which in a full account would have been mentioned, and is mentioned by another, is not a contradiction. It shows that the writer who makes the omission does not give a full account; but throws no suspicion on the author by whom the fact is mentioned. It follows, also, that when there is an appearance of contradiction between two writers, common justice requires that before we pronounce one or both of them false we should exhaust our ingenuity in searching for some probable supposition on the ground of

which they may both be true. The better the general reputation of the writers, the more imperative is this obligation, lest we condemn as false those who are entitled to respectful consideration.³¹

McGarvey gives a considerable section to applying the principles of harmonization of the Gospel accounts; those given by himself, Augustine and others.

Critical NT scholarship, instead of seeking harmonization of these difficulties along the lines that McGarvey and others suggest, says that these differences are the result of Matthew or Luke (or both) changing what Mark wrote (called “Redaction”) in order to adapt the text to their particular design. Mind you, this is not the same as saying each Gospel writer used different details or words to emphasize a particular point of **truth** in his account. The Gospel of Mark is held, by many of the two-source proponents, to be the original Gospel; they also believe that changes in his Gospel are what produced the discordant differences.

The Synoptic Solution

Can we know what Jesus really said, and do we have a more sure Word by accepting the Two or Four Source theories for the origins of the Gospels? I aver that we can know what Jesus really said, but not through accepting the theories of literary dependence promoted nearly everywhere.

It would be difficult for me to write a better summation to close this section than the one below:

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each writer worked independently using his best means of obtaining the necessary information about the life of Christ. For Matthew, the best source was his memory of personal experiences with Christ as one of the Twelve. For Mark, early tradition speaks loudly and with unanimity that

his main source was the preaching of his mentor, the apostle Peter. For Luke, the path of diligent research was the appointed means, as he records in the prologue of his gospel (Luke 1:1-4). Nothing forbids allowing that Matthew may have prodded his memory through consulting many traditions retained in and around Jerusalem in the days after Pentecost or through utilizing research techniques similar to Luke's. The same is true of Mark. Besides these channels, the three writers had contacts with each other that would have allowed for exchange of information on a personal basis.

But when they penned their gospels, the three writers did so under the dominating control of the Holy Spirit. He utilized their personal characteristics to cause them to write accounts that were free from error. It need not be ruled out that the Spirit even supplied Matthew, Mark, and Luke with information about Jesus that was inaccessible through any other channel, in other words, through direct revelation. After all, the Lord Jesus had promised that (John 14:16; cf. John 16:13).³²

The Jesus Seminar³³

In 1985 a group of very liberal theologians, who generously identify themselves as among the best of Biblical scholars, began "The Jesus Seminar." You may be familiar with the names of Robert W. Funk, John Dominic Crossan, Roy W. Hoover, and Marcus Borg. These have been the most public in promoting the work of this group.

The Jesus Seminar participants worked six years to determine, "What Did Jesus Really Say?" They supposedly critically considered more than 1500 sayings of Christ and then voted as to which sayings of Jesus were really spoken by Him. Each scholar had four different colored beads to use in casting his vote. Casting a **red** bead meant the saying considered was authentic, Jesus really said that. A **pink** bead meant Jesus probably said it, but whether He did was less than certain. A **gray** bead meant Jesus did

not say this, but it's close to His ideas. A **black** bead meant Jesus did not say this; it is different from what He would say and has to be from another source. A point system was assigned to each bead and the total for each category was divided by the total number of votes cast.

The finished work was produced in a 553 page book entitled, **The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus**. The front part of the dust cover of the book has the question, "What Did Jesus Really Say?" emblazoned in red. On the title page of the book it is described as a "New Translation and Commentary." The translation the Seminar produced is not surprisingly called "The Scholars Version" (hereafter abbreviated as SV).

Why is the SV called "The Five Gospels"? They state:

Foremost among the reasons for a fresh translation is the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas. The scholars responsible for the Scholars Version determined that Thomas had to be included in any primary collection of gospels. Early translations of Thomas were tentative and wooden; the SV panel has produced an accurate version in readable English.³⁴

Elsewhere the Seminar says that the "Gospel of Thomas has proved to be a gold mine of comparative material and new information"³⁵ for studying the sayings of Jesus.

What is the Gospel of Thomas?

The Gospel of Thomas is not a connected narrative of the events of Jesus' life, but a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, most of them introduced simply with the words, "Jesus said." These were allegedly revealed in secret to the apostle Thomas, but no one today believes this claim. Many of the sayings have a patently Gnostic flavour, and little can be said in support of their authenticity. One of the most striking of these is the final one (Thos. 114), which forms a brief dialogue:

Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life." Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven."³⁶

Another writer, commenting on this passage from Thomas, notes:

Such an understanding of spirituality and of sexuality is hard to attribute to any first-century Christian movement, even after due consideration is given to Hellenizing influences. But it is quite intelligible (though hardly more palatable) in a second-century gnostic-tending milieu.³⁷

Indeed, there is nothing in the words of Jesus in all of Scripture that even hints at such ridiculous teaching that the so-called "Gospel of Thomas" puts in Christ's mouth.

Thomas is called a gnostic-flavored book because of such passages as above. Gnosticism was a heretical movement early in the church that taught all physical matter was evil and that therefore Jesus Christ could not be God manifested in the flesh. He only "appeared" to be human. On the other hand, a different type of gnosticism said that Jesus was merely a man upon whom Christ descended at Jesus' baptism and left before his crucifixion. Another element of gnosticism included salvation from this world through attaining a special "secret" knowledge of one's origin.³⁸ The Gospel of Thomas pretends to be part of that special and secret knowledge. The prologue and saying number one reads, "These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas recorded. And he [Jesus] said, 'Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death.'"³⁹

The Gospel of Thomas is one of a large number of apocryphal books written in the second and third centuries

AD which claim to be sayings of Jesus or narrative histories of His life. Apocryphal books, such as Thomas, claiming some type of NT association are described as below:

[The apocrypha are] a substantial collection of works that were published under the names of apostolic writers during the second and subsequent centuries. For the most part they were deliberate fabrications and never had any serious claim to canonicity. Hence, in this connection the word “apocrypha” is used in its meaning of untrue or spurious.

Evidently the NT Apocrypha arose primarily for two reasons. First, some sought to satisfy the curiosity engendered by the failure of the canonical Gospels to describe Christ’s early life or numerous aspects of his personage. Others tried to supply details concerning the apostles omitted from the Acts. Second, those with heretical tendencies made an effort to gain an acceptance for their views by embedding them in works attributed to Christ and the apostles. Especially did the Gnostics seek to advance their cause in this way.

Writers of NT apocryphal works attempted to produce literary forms parallel to those of NT books. Hence their efforts may be classified as gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalypses.⁴⁰

All of these apocryphal books, like Thomas, use parts of the NT to add a flavor of genuineness to their writings, but their false teachings are bitter tasting and have no parallels in the NT Gospels. Saying 90 in Thomas had Jesus say, “Come to me, for my yoke is comfortable and my lordship is gentle, and you will find rest for yourselves.” This is somewhat parallel to Matthew 11:28-30, and there are several such parallels in Thomas with the NT Gospels. But Thomas is also filled with sayings like the two below, which make no sense at all and are as foreign to the NT teaching of Christ as can be:

22—Jesus saw some babies nursing. He said to his disciples, “These nursing babies are like

those who enter the (Father's) domain." They said to him, "Then shall we enter the (Father's) domain as babies?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter (the {Father's} domain)."

105 – Jesus said, "Whoever knows the father and the mother will be called the child of a whore."⁴¹

For the Jesus Seminar to place such nonsense on a par with Christ's great teaching in the NT may lay claim to be scholarly, but the early church, influenced by the apostles and those who knew them, never received such books into the canon of Scripture.

The Canon And the NT Gospels

A "canon" is an instrument of the measurement, from the Greek word *kanon* meaning "rule." As applied to the Bible the word canon means, "Which books measure up to belonging to God's Word?"

The Jesus Seminar also published a book called, **The Complete Gospels**.⁴² On the front cover they advertise the Scholars Version of "the Bible's four Gospels **plus** the Gospels of Thomas and Mary, the Sayings Gospel Q, the Secret Gospel of Mark, and twelve other gospels from the first three centuries." Some of these books are found in collections sold in bookstores under misleading titles such as, "The Lost Books of the Bible." Obviously, these books are not lost and they **never were** part of the Bible. How did the early church decide which gospels "measured up" as God's Word and which did not?

Spurious writings claiming to be from God's spokesmen seemingly existed even in the days of the

apostles. Paul wrote and warned the Thessalonian church, “That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, **nor by letter as from us**, as that the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:2). To guard against such false writings being received by the church, Paul said he would sign every epistle of his with his own hand (2 Thess. 3:17). Genuine epistles were to be read to “all the holy brethren” and exchanged among churches (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16). Paul’s letters were identified by Peter as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16). So the process of identifying, circulating and gathering genuine books of Scripture began under apostolic supervision and must have continued until the completion of the NT canon at the end of the first century and the death of the apostle John.

It is important to note that the NT church did not bestow authority upon Scripture in order to make certain books “measure up” to canonical status. The church **recognized** the inspiration of the various NT books, accepting them as authoritative works from God, and gathered them for inclusion in the body of the NT. There were criteria the church used to determine if a writing was Scripture from God. The first was **apostolic authority**. Did the writing originate directly from an apostle of Christ or bear the indirect influence or authorization of an apostle? What we said previously in this article regarding Mark and Luke being directly influenced by the apostles, although they were not apostles of Christ, would also apply to the books or authors of James, Hebrews, and Jude. F.F. Bruce says, “Even at an earlier period, apostolic authorship in the direct sense was not insisted on, if some form of apostolic authority could be established.”⁴³

One of the reasons why so many phony books claimed to be by an apostle, or other NT figure, is the hope that their claim to be Scripture would be recognized. But there

were other tests which exposed these books to be fraudulent. A second and closely related criterion is that of **antiquity**:

If a writing was the work of an apostle or of someone closely associated with an apostle, it must belong to the apostolic age. Writings of later date, whatever their merit, could not be included among the apostolic or canonical books.⁴⁴

Inspiration in writing the NT was by a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit that belonged only to the apostles or those on whom they had conferred the gift by the laying on of their hands (cf. Acts 8:14-18). When the last apostle (John) died and the final books of the NT were written (John's epistles and/or Revelation), inspiration ceased. This was about AD 96. Books claiming to have apostolic authority after the close of the apostolic age were fraudulent and rejected from being inspired.

A third test for the claim of a book to be Scripture was its **orthodoxy**, its faithfulness to what was taught "in the undoubted apostolic writings and maintained in the churches which had been founded by the apostles."⁴⁵ If something in a book claiming to be inspired contradicted what was known to be true, the book was rejected, for God cannot lie (cf. Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Rom. 3:3-4).

The fourth measure of a book's claim to be recognized as from God is its **catholicity**. This has nothing to do with the Roman Catholic church. The word comes from the Greek *katholikos* which means general or universal. If a work was acknowledged by the greater part of the church in general, it would likely receive universal acceptance, as the 27 books comprising the NT were so recognized by the church.

These criteria provide checks and balances for each other, so that even if a book might be accorded favor in

one area, it could be disqualified by failing to meet the other criteria. For example, the Roman Catholic church, which for centuries was the predominant “Christian” religion in the world, included seven apocryphal books with the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible. However, by applying the same general criteria which were used to recognize genuine NT books, those apocryphal OT books should be excluded. While these books may have received universal acceptance by the Roman church, they fail in other areas. The OT Apocrypha were written after the close of the OT canon (ca. 400 B.C.), so they fail to meet the test of antiquity. In fact, some are fraudulent because they claim to have been written hundreds of years before they actually were. Also, there are false teachings in some of these books that contradict clear teaching of genuine Scripture; so they also flunk the test of orthodoxy. These same checks and balances would hold true for books seeking NT acceptance. In fact, Bruce mentions such a “check” exercised by one writer of the second century AD who composed a list of books accepted as canonical:

The compiler of the Muratorian list had a high regard for the Shepherd of Hermas; he recognized it evidently as a genuine work of prophecy. However, it had appeared too late to be included among the canonical prophets; and equally it had appeared too late to be included among the apostolic writings, for it was written only the day before yesterday, so to speak.⁴⁶

The apocryphal gospels valued so much by The Jesus Seminar utterly fail to meet the criteria for inspired NT works. They were never seriously entertained as given by God by the early church. Although they may have some parallels to our canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they cannot contribute to our knowledge of what Jesus really said.

Why Four Gospels?

Why are there four Gospels, especially since three are so much alike? Each Gospel writer gives the essential teaching and ministry of Christ's saving work, but each has a special emphasis, evidently guided by the Holy Spirit. **Matthew**, with his 60+ quotes from the OT shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT as the promised Messiah. **Mark** lays emphasis on the awesome power of Christ as a miracle worker, especially as He exercises His authority over demons and healing people. **Luke** shows Christ especially ministering to the common people's needs – the poor and underprivileged, social outcasts, sinners, women, children, Samaritans and Gentiles. **John** focuses on the Divine nature of Jesus and His humanity. He is the Son of God; the Word Who is God made flesh. Christ's great "I am" claims are buttressed by His miracles with a view toward faith in Him as the Christ and Son of God. No other Gospel is needed to add to the picture of Jesus painted in vivid and fine detail by these four Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Every Gospel presents a complete, unique testimony. It owes its existence to direct or indirect eyewitnesses. In each testimony a distinctive personal individuality, and specific perspective takes written form. God did not extinguish the personal individuality of each Gospel writer but rather made use of it, as it is written: "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:21b, NASB). In each of the four Gospels we can, therefore, discover a unique facet of the entirety of what took place, a true depiction of events that is recorded authoritatively and found nowhere else.

As the four testimonies supplement each other we arrive at the complete picture of what our Lord Jesus said, did, and suffered. This does not mean, of course, that we are to construct from the four one unitary harmony. At the level of individual pericopes, too, we gain a complete

portrait of the event from that which the various Gospels report. This is not to be disparagingly condemned as “harmonizing”; it is, rather, the normal procedure of the historian who uses several reports of the same event.⁴⁷

Some might wonder why there are only four Gospels when there were 12 apostles. We do not know for certain but it may well be for the same reason the book of Acts of the Apostles deals primarily with only two apostles, Peter and Paul. Since Acts gives examples of both Peter’s preaching to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles, across a broad spectrum of the countries of the world, the Lord may have thought it would have been redundant to recount the same kind of work among the other apostles wherever they went. Likewise, each apostle could have written a Gospel account, but there was no need for that when the four that are written have revealed all truth necessary for full faith in Jesus Christ. There are many false gospels that were unnecessarily written (because there are no true Gospels in the other apostles’ names), but such works were never accepted as inspired by the church. Those false gospels came after the close of the apostolic age and did not measure up.

The Jesus Seminar And Jesus’ Words

The Jesus Seminar claims to be giving us tools whereby we can find the real Jesus of history and separate Him from the Christ of faith, but they actually reduce Him to little more than a wandering wise man who says little and does less:

In the course of the modern critical study of the Bible, which was inspired by the Reformation (began formally, 1517 C..E.) but originated with the Enlightenment (about 1690 C.E.), biblical scholars and theologians alike have learned to distinguish the Jesus of history from the Christ

of faith. It has been a painful lesson for both the church and scholarship. The distinction between the two figures is the difference between a historical person who lived in a particular time and place and was subject to the limitations of a finite existence, and a figure who has been assigned a mythical role, in which he descends from heaven to rescue human-kind and, of course, eventually returns there. A Christian wrinkle in this scheme has the same heavenly figure returning to earth at the end of history to inaugurate a new age.⁴⁸

The Seminar goes on to say that the creeds of denominationalism have obscured the real Jesus and we would agree with much of that observation. However, not everything in those creeds is contrary to the picture of Christ in the Gospels. Notice in the quote above the Seminar assigns as “mythical” the teaching that Christ came from heaven to earth to rescue mankind, that He ascended back to heaven and that He’s coming again. Of course, the Bible does not teach He is coming back to earth, but the redeemed will meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Such belittling of Jesus’ redemptive work is characteristic of the Seminar.

What does the Jesus Seminar offer in place of the picture of Jesus that a literal reading of the Gospels presents? Robert Funk, a co-founder of the Seminar said:

We want to liberate Jesus. The only Jesus most people know is the mythic one. They don’t want the real Jesus; they want the one they can worship. The cultic Jesus.⁴⁹

I plead guilty to desiring the great and lovely Christ of Scripture whose teaching leads to eternal life (John 6:63; John 6:68). No other Jesus is worthy of our attention and allegiance; certainly not the pale, emaciated and muted Jesus the Seminar presents.

Consider these facts from the Gospel accounts in the King James Version of the NT. Using a red letter edition of the KJV, I went through the Gospels and counted three times the verses attributed to Jesus in each Gospel record in an effort to be accurate. In Matthew, 633 out of 1068 verses are the words of Jesus; roughly 59%. In Mark, the count was 287 verses out of 678 for about 42%. Luke has 584 verses of Jesus speaking out of 1151, for 51%. In John, 414 verses out of 879 are Jesus' words—about 47%.

Remember that the Jesus Seminar also used red letters in their SV translation to signify the words/verses that they believed could be definitely attributed to Jesus speaking. In their translation and coloring of the verses **in John's gospel there is not one verse colored in red to signify that "Jesus really said this!" Not one!** Think of all the great speeches of the Lord that are removed from the Gospel by the counting of beads. The sin of the Roman Catholic practice of counting rosary beads pales in comparison to the greater sins of the Jesus Seminar and their bead counting that excises so much of Christ's Words from the Scripture. In place of one Jehoiakim cutting up God's Word the Seminar has over 70 (cf. Jer. 36:23). John 4:1 is the only verse colored pink, which means, "Jesus probably said something like this." Three verses in John 12:24-25; John 13:20 are the only gray ones in John. Gray means, "Jesus did not say this but the ideas in it are close to his own." Everything else in John is black, meaning, "Jesus did not say this." Out of 414 verses traditionally assigned to Jesus' speaking, there are no verses definitely credited to Him and only one He "probably" uttered. **You basically have no Jesus by the time the misnamed Jesus Seminar gets through with Him!**

It doesn't get much better. **In Mark's Gospel in the SV only one verse is colored red and definitely ascribed to Jesus' speaking.** That is Mark 12:17,

rendered in the SV, “Pay the emperor what belongs to the emperor, and God what belongs to God!” 286 verses are excluded from the lips of the Lord. Matthew’s account has 23 verses of 633 colored red by the Seminar and assigned to Christ (Matt. 5:39-42, Matt. 5:44; Matt. 6:9; Matt. 13:33; Matt. 20:1-15; and Matt. 21:21). Luke is given 22 verses in red as spoken by the Lord (Luke 6:20-21; Luke 6:27; Luke 6:29-30; Luke 10:30-35; Luke 11:2; Luke 13:20-21; Luke 16:1-8; Luke 20:25). Out of 1918 verses in the four Gospels representing the words of the Lord, the Jesus Seminar says only 46 are directly accepted as coming from His mouth. When you eliminate the parallel verses, that amounts to about 15 sayings. What kind of picture of Jesus can one get from that? Only one that is so dim and fuzzy that one cannot be certain of any real image.

Even when one adds all the pink verses (verses Jesus probably spoke) to the count, it is pitifully lacking. Read the words of the Seminar itself regarding how much you can know about Jesus from what they say He really said in Scripture:

Eighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the gospels were not actually spoken by him, according to the Jesus Seminar. How do scholars account for this pronounced discrepancy? Is it realistic to think that his disciples remembered so little of what he said, or that they remembered his words so inaccurately?⁵⁰

To answer their question, No, it is not realistic to believe Jesus’ disciples remembered so little of what He said! Their 18% Jesus is not even a wisp of the real Lord. I believe we can reverse their charge, that we don’t want the real Jesus, to show that they are the ones who have whittled away at the Lord like one who would chop away at one of the majestic Cedars of Lebanon till they have Him down to a barely visible splinter.

Why An 18% Jesus?

Since The Jesus Seminar participants constantly refer to themselves as scholars, shouldn't we expect them to provide well reasoned evidence for their rejection of 82% of the words commonly assigned to Jesus by the Gospel writers? Consider their attempt to justify their actions:

The Jesus Seminar formulated and adopted "rules of evidence" to guide its assessment of gospel traditions. Rules of evidence are standards by which evidence is presented and evaluated in a court of law. A standard is a measure or test of the reliability of certain kinds of information. More than two centuries of biblical scholarship have produced a significant array of rules or criteria for judging the reliability of the evidence offered by the gospels, which are, after all, reports of what Jesus did and said.⁵¹

The "rules" the Seminar "formulated" are some of the most ridiculous imaginable and show an obvious bias intent on purging nearly everything from the NT attributed to the voice of Christ. They speak of rules of evidence for a court of law, but they refuse to let the Gospels testify for themselves:

The evidence provided by the written gospels is hearsay evidence. Hearsay evidence is secondhand evidence. In the case of the gospels, the evangelists are all reporting stories and sayings related to them by intermediate parties; none of them was an ear or eyewitness of the words and events he records.⁵²

Again we state, the Gospels are written by those who had firsthand knowledge (Matthew and John) of the events they record, or those who had intimate association with witnesses who were present (Mark and Luke). The Jesus Seminar actually disparages history. They say, "the gospels...are, after all, **reports** of what Jesus did and

said”⁵³ [emphasis, TJC]. Yes, attempts to accurately “report” what others do and say is writing history! It is prejudicial and unfair for the Seminar to dismiss the testimony of the Gospel authors who profess to be writing objective history. Even if the Seminar could disprove the claims of the Gospel writers of being eyewitnesses or recording direct testimony from eyewitnesses, they could not disprove that it is possible for a person to write factual history from records already in existence or from interviews with those who have reliable information. But the Seminar is not even willing to grant any of our canonical Gospels the status of being a historical document.

Luke 1:2 speaks of his having received eyewitness testimony and in Acts 1:1 he claims that he wrote “of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” until His ascension. That is history. The charges made by the Seminar below are also baseless:

Indeed, the information may have passed through several parties on its way to the authors of the first written gospels. Those initial transmitters of tradition are, of course, anonymous; they cannot speak for themselves and we cannot interrogate them about the source of their reports. We don’t even know who they were. The authors of the written gospels are also anonymous; the names assigned to the gospels are pious fictions...

Because the evidence offered by the gospels is hearsay evidence, scholars must be extremely cautious in taking the data at face value.⁵⁴

Believing that the Holy Spirit guided the selection and recording of Gospel facts colors the way we look at the gospels, but suppose for the sake of argument that an author of one of the Gospels was incorrect in recording some important event or saying of Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels were written at a time when most eyewitnesses to the events of Christ’s life and teaching were still alive,

in the 50's or 60's, within 20 years or so of Christ's ascension. Paul noted that verification regarding Christ's resurrection was wide open to investigation, since the majority of over 500 people who saw Him were still alive (1 Cor. 15:1-6).

The Seminar's comments that we do not know who actually wrote the Gospels, that "the names assigned to the gospels are pious fictions," is another instance of rejecting the historical evidence available. Our earlier quotes from Papias, who wrote between AD 95-120,⁵⁵ shows that early after the close of the apostolic age all four of the Gospels in our NT were bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. "[W]e have no evidence that these gospels ever circulated without an appropriate designation...(‘according to Matthew’) or the like”⁵⁶ [emphasis mine, TJC].

Another major reason The Jesus Seminar felt moved to minimize the sayings of Jesus in the NT is their rejection of the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. This rejection begins with a denial of the Christ of Scripture. Co-founder of the Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan,

denies the deity of Christ, declares that Jesus' pedigree...including his virgin birth in Bethlehem...is myth-making by the writers of the Gospels, and concludes that the stories of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection were latter-day wishful thinking of the early church.⁵⁷

The few passages of Scripture which the Seminar seeks to attribute to Jesus produce a partial and distorted view of His words and deeds. To say Jesus was a teacher of wise sayings, a magician, a spiritual mystic or even one who challenged the status quo of the socio/religious culture of His day is not enough—not singly nor all combined:

My fundamental disagreement with each of them [the views of Jesus described above] is that

such a Jesus would never have been crucified, would never have drawn the fire that he did, would never have commanded the following that he did, and would never have created a movement that still shakes the world. A Jesus who went around saying wise and witty things would not have been threatening enough to have been crucified during Passover when he was surrounded by hundreds who liked him. A Jesus who was a religious genius who helped people in their relationship with God and was kind, compassionate, and gentle would not have been crucified either. A social revolutionary would have been crucified (and this partly explains Jesus' death, in my view), but it is doubtful that such a revolutionary would have given birth to a church that was hardly a movement of social revolution...No, these pictures of Jesus will not do.⁵⁸

The Jesus Seminar yearns to put a veil over the eyes of those who seek to see the clear revelation of God's Son set forth in Scripture. Perhaps they are driven to try to justify their desire for a Jesus who makes no demands on us, nor does He warn of consequences if we ignore or reject Him. However, neither does that kind of Jesus give us anything we need. Contrast the emptiness of the type of Jesus portrayed by the Jesus Seminar with the more complete one furnished by the Gospels in our NT:

Jesus Christ provides the only truly satisfying solution to the dilemma of the modern person. This is why the ideas of the Jesus Seminar are so devastating. They are not only intellectually insufficient, but they leave people spiritually bankrupt and hopeless. If we adopt the portrait of Jesus that is offered in some of their works, we have simply a wise teacher, a religious sage, a pious spinner of tales and proverbs, a revolutionary figure, a Jewish peasant and Cynic preacher, or a spirit-person. This is the kind of Jesus who cannot offer eternal salvation or the power to live life as we know we should.

Fortunately, as we have seen, the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar do not stand up to careful scrutiny.

Jesus Christ came to offer a kingdom in which human life can be lived with such richness and sufficiency that genuine hope can be offered to anyone, irrespective of his or her circumstances of life. He offers a purpose for life, to bring pleasure to the One who made us, to enjoy the richness of his fellowship, and to spread the good news about Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. He offers us forgiveness for the darkness and failings that come from the depths of our hearts. And who among us does not need this forgiveness each day of our lives? It has been the testimony of millions throughout the centuries that through certain spiritual practices his reality, guidance, and companionship can be our daily source of nourishment. He has left us clear moral guidelines about the fundamental issues of life. He formed a community of those who have gathered together in his name, in which we can find the type of human relationships we were made to experience. Make no mistake about it; the demands of following Jesus Christ are indeed taxing. But it needs to be said in this context that the price of not following him is higher still.⁵⁹

A Fortune In Fool's Gold

The Jesus Seminar has mined a lot of glitter from their claims to find the real Jesus. However, what may be bright and shiny at first glance turns out to be fool's gold when analyzed. They have staked their claims on washed out ground that has been gone over again and again. What the Seminar has done may be bold and new, in that they have tried to maintain a pretense of Christian belief while removing the main historical sources for the knowledge of Jesus. But their supposed resources, upon which their methods are built, cannot support their theories.

At the heart of the Seminar's proposal lies the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, which we mentioned earlier.

They believe that Thomas was written before any of the gospels we have in our NT, about AD 50. Since Thomas was mainly a collection of brief witty sayings and parables, Seminar scholars believe these are the only types of material one can legitimately assign to Jesus and they have formulated most of their supposed rules of evidence around this major assumption.

One of their boastful claims is that, “The scholarship represented by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar is the kind that has come to prevail in all the great universities of the world.”⁶⁰ Companion to that assertion is the charge that attacks against the Seminar come “especially from those who lack academic credentials.”⁶¹ That such is not true can be seen by a survey of many of the works cited in this lecture. Most of those whom we have quoted have doctorates in areas in which the Seminar has worked and have researched and written extensively in those areas. These men do not embrace all of the Seminar’s premises nor do they share their conclusions. The following quotes represent a vast number of scholars who dispute the findings of the Jesus Seminar:

One basic problem is the claim that the hidden gospels [such as Thomas] contain a wealth of information which is new and incendiary. To the contrary, much of what was uncovered is not relevant to Christian origins, while what is relevant is not new, still less inflammatory. Conservative scholars such as Luke Timothy Johnson and John P. Meier have fired powerful counterblasts against the whole historical methodology of the New Quest, particularly as practiced by the Jesus Seminar. As one aspect of this counteroffensive, and by no means the central one, conservatives largely reject the evidence of the various hidden gospels on which so much of the radical scholarship relies. Both Johnson and Meier attack the claims advanced on behalf of an early date for the gospels of Thomas and Peter, which also attract convincing

rebuttal in the collection of essays entitled *Jesus under Fire*. Conservatives cite an impressive array of specialist scholars who are thoroughly unconvinced by arguments for the revolutionary significance of the lost gospels, even outstanding texts like Thomas.⁶²

Most if not all of these denominational scholars are far from what we would call conservative, but we are thankful that they have spoken out and opposed the ungodly work of the Jesus Seminar and their attempts to try to destroy the Bible.

In an extensive review of the evidence for dating the Gospel of Thomas, Philip Jenkins, Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Penn State University, dates Thomas around AD 150.⁶³ This is far too late for it to represent the sayings and acts of Jesus upon which our four Gospels for the NT are based.

Note the awareness of Jenkins to the extreme prejudice and bias of the Jesus Seminar against the NT and the great confidence he expresses for our NT Gospels compared against any others:

Reviewing suggestions for a potentially revised New Testament canon, we are repeatedly struck by just how weak are the claims of most of the candidates. Furthermore, these weaknesses are scarcely a secret for the advocates of the alternative gospels, who must know that the early dates and independent authority which they are claiming for their pet documents are bitterly contested by other scholars of equal merit, and in no sense represent a consensus. The Jesus Seminar affects to believe that its efforts represent an impartial endeavor in social science, in which authentic Jesus sayings are collected in a “database,” in a project which seeks an objective Scholars’ Version of the early Christian scriptures. In practice, though, the group demonstrates a powerful bias, obsessively magnifying the noncanonical sources while

denigrating the traditionally accepted scriptures. In the Complete Gospels project, particularly, this ideological agenda becomes quite blatant. Contrary to recent claims, the more access we have to ancient “alternative gospels,” the more we must respect the choices made by the early church in forming its canon.⁶⁴

If we do not have the words Jesus really said in our NT gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we have no sure way of recovering what He did say or knowing if He said anything. Efforts like the Jesus Seminar seek to steal away from us the only inspired historical records we have of His very words, words which give us life and will judge us in the last Day (John 6:63; John 6:68; John 12:48-50). Read the Gospels again and listen to the voice of the Savior.

Does the Jesus Seminar represent a large number or majority of scholarship in the Biblical field? The answer is, No! More conservative scholars renounce the work of the Jesus Seminar and its conclusions and give thoughtful consideration to the claims of the NT Gospels:

The Jesus Seminar and its friends do not reflect any consensus of scholars except for those on the “radical fringe” of the field. Its methodology is seriously flawed and its conclusions unnecessarily skeptical...Renewed attention needs to be devoted to issues that can support an even more positive assessment of the trustworthiness of the Gospels. Traditional authorship claims are most likely correct, and the three Synoptics should probably all be dated to the early 60s or before. This places these documents well within a period to have been written by people able to preserve accurate historical information.⁶⁵

There are only about 70 scholars in the Jesus Seminar group, although there are likely many more who share their views not directly associated with them. Since this is the case why spend so much time reviewing their work?

The first reason is because souls are at stake. Unbelievers who might be persuaded to investigate the NT gospels, which will produce faith (cf. John 20:30-31), may be turned away from ever considering the truth if they are convinced the NT Gospels are not the truth about Jesus. The faith of immature believers may be weakened if they are swayed by the claims of superior knowledge by the scholars of the Seminar. Apart from the NT, there is no clear picture of Jesus, no path marked out for our footsteps to follow (John 8:24; 1 Pet. 2:21).

The second reason is because the Seminar has announced that they want to fully disclose their work to the public and they are laboring diligently to popularize it among the masses. Major publicity efforts have already taken place. Of course, the liberal media with its bias against Christianity gobbles up with glee anything that makes the Bible or Christians look badly. Error never rests; neither can truth:

While the Seminar members produce critical works, from its inception the Jesus Seminar has sought to make its views available to the general public, rather than just the scholarly community: “We are going to try to carry out our work in full public view; we will not only honor the freedom of information, we will insist on the public disclosure of our work” (Funk, *Forum*, 1.1). To this end the Seminar has sought publicity from every possible source. A TV summit, many articles, interviews with the press, tapes, and even a possible movie are part of this public information campaign for anti-supernatural theology. Funk frankly confessed the radical nature of the work when he said, “We are probing what is most sacred to millions, and hence we will constantly border on blasphemy” (ibid., 8). This is an honest and accurate disclosure of what has happened.⁶⁶

A Final Note On The Jesus Seminar

After reading the above work of the Jesus Seminar, you will not be surprised to learn that they continued their

work to consider the acts or deeds of Jesus. Their 1998 book is entitled, **“The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?”**. This work is subtitled, “The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus.” We haven’t the time nor space to analyze this book, but the results they give are not unexpected, given their bias against Jesus’ Divinity and miracle working power:

During the second phase of the Jesus Seminar, which lasted from 1991 to 1996, the Fellows examined 387 reports of 176 events, in most of which Jesus is the principal actor, although occasionally John the Baptist, Simon Peter, or Judas is featured. Of the 176 events, only ten were given a red rating (red indicates that the Fellows had a relatively high level of confidence that the event actually took place). An additional nineteen were colored pink (pink suggests that the event probably occurred). The combined number of red and pink events (29) amounts to 16% of the total (176). That is slightly lower than the 18% of the sayings—primarily parables and aphorisms—assigned to the red and pink categories in *The Five Gospels*.⁶⁷

The same arguments used against the Seminar book, **The Five Gospels**, apply to their book mentioned above. A rejection of the historical value of the Gospel records is totally unwarranted, as our study above has shown.

Christ’s Words—More Than Red Letters⁶⁸

While we can be thankful for red letter editions of the Bible, which help us locate words that Jesus personally spoke, the conclusion sometimes erroneously drawn is that the words of Jesus in red letters are more important than the rest of the words of Scripture. Actually, that is a wholly improper view. Remember, **“all** Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Gospel writers were as inspired in recording the acts and events in the life of Jesus as they were in reporting His words.

One must also recognize that the NT books of Acts through Revelation are as inspired as what Christ spoke in the Gospel accounts. In John 14:26, Jesus promised His apostles that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and that “he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” Continuing this same thought, Jesus later said, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:12-13).

On the Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection and the ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit filled the apostles with more of God’s truth than they had while Jesus was on earth (Acts 2:4; Acts 2:22-42). The first Gospel sermon on salvation through Christ was oral, as were subsequent lessons in Acts 3, 7,8,10,13,17 et al. The Gospels were later committed to writing (as noted in this lesson). However, the teaching of the apostles of Christ were also put in writing and called revelation and Scripture (Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul told those at Corinth that if they were truly spiritual people, they would acknowledge “that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). Since Christ sent the Holy Spirit to inspire His apostles, the NT books of Acts through Revelation are as much His words as the red letters of our NT Gospels. Anyone who tries to convince you otherwise is trying to take away the words of Jesus as much as the Jesus Seminar is in excluding Christ’s words in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Jesus Christ speaks to us in all the words of the NT. The words that Peter, Paul, John, James, Jude, and the Hebrews writer penned are just as much Scripture as the whole Gospels. They all have their source in Christ. “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that

sent me” (Luke 10:16; cf. Matt. 10:40; John 13:20). According to this Scripture, and I think the application is true, the people of the Jesus Seminar hate God because they despise Jesus and His words as recorded by Jesus’ disciples.

Conclusion

We can have great confidence, regarding the personal sayings of Jesus, that our NT Gospels have accurately gathered and recorded all that God wanted us to have of His Son’s spoken Word. Internal and external evidences of inspiration abound. Reliable historical references to the Gospels as they appear in our NT are likewise abundant in the writings of those who followed the close of the apostolic age. All these combine to establish a firm footing for our faith in the four Gospel records. Based on my knowledge of the Gospels I am staking my eternal destiny that they present to me the Jesus who died for me and is coming again to receive me.

On a broader perspective, if someone were to come to me and ask, “What did Jesus really say?” I would have no hesitation or shame in handing them my complete New Testament.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture references are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

2 David Wenham & Steve Walton, **Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospel & Acts** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), Vol. 1, p. 48.

3 Craig L. Blomberg, **The Historical Reliability of the Gospels** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), p. 240.

4 Eusebius Pamphilus, **Ecclesiastical History [5.8]**, trans. C. F. Cruse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989 reprint), pp. 187-188. The number in brackets refer to the book and chapter to help one locate the quote. There are many editions of this work.

5 Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Date of Papias: A Reassessment," IN: **Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society** 26 (June 1983), pp. 181-191.

6 Eusebius, [3.39], p. 127.

7 Eusebius, [3.4], p. 85.

8 Eusebius, [3.24], pp. 108-109.

9 A great deal of what I have learned about Christian evidences relating to the Bible over the years has come from John William McGarvey's, **Evidences of Christianity**. It is fairly old but I highly recommend it as a great resource tool in learning why we can place so much confidence in our Bible as God's Word. This should be available from most brotherhood bookstores. Although I do not agree with everything in it, Josh McDowell's **Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Vols. 1 & 2** are also full of information along these lines. Most of the books I have quoted from in this lesson have some good material, but I could not give them blanket approval.

10 Keith A. Mosher, Sr., **The Book God "Breathed"** (Privately published, n.d.), 16-17. I am happy to see brother Mosher write this book and its companion volume on the canon of Scripture, which is volume two of the same title. I am not aware that much has been written on the topic of inspiration for some time. See also the Spiritual Sword Lectures, **The Inspiration of the Bible**, ed. Jim Laws (Memphis: Getwell Church of Christ, 1996).

11 Merrill C. Tenney, **New Testament Survey** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 133.

12 Wenham & Walton, p. 62; Robert Stein, **The Synoptic Problem** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 48.

13 Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, **The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus** (New York: Polebridge/Scribner, 1996), p. 6. They do not explain the reason for their lower figures.

14 Eta Linnemann, **Is There A Synoptic Problem?; Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels**, trans. By Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), and Robert L. Thomas & F. David Farnell, **The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship** (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998).

- 15 Marcus Borg, **The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus** (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 1996).
- 16 Ibid., pp. 15, 25-26.
- 17 B. Orchard, "The Solution to the Synoptic Problem," **Scripture Bulletin** 18.1 (1987) 14 n23, as quoted in John Wenham, **Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 260.
- 18 B. H. Streeter, **The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins** (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1925), p.150.
- 19 Linnemann, p. 39.
- 20 Ibid., p. 10.
- 21 Ibid., p. 159.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 149-150.
- 23 Thomas R. Edgar, "Source Criticism: The Two-Source Theory," IN: **The Jesus Crisis**, p. 139.
- 24 Ibid., p. 140.
- 25 D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris, **An Introduction to the New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 119.
- 26 Linnemann, p. 150-151.
- 27 Blomberg, p. 114.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid., p. 5.
- 30 Ibid., p. 4.
- 31 J. W. McGarvey, **Evidences of Christianity, Vols. 1 & 2** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1964), Vol. 2, p. 2.
- 32 Robert L. Thomas, "Redaction Criticism," IN: **The Jesus Crisis**, p. 246.
- 33 Unless otherwise noted the information on The Jesus Seminar is taken from Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, **The Five Gospels**.
- 34 Ibid., p. xiii.
- 35 Ibid., p. 15.
- 36 Blomberg, p. 209.
- 37 Gregory A. Boyd, **Cynic Sage or Son of God?** (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint/Victor, 1995), p. 135.
- 38 E. M. Yamauchi, "Gnosticism," IN: **Dictionary of New Testament Background** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 414-418.

- 39 **The Five Gospels**, p. 471.
- 40 Howard F. Vos, "Apocrypha, NT," IN: **Evangelical Dictionary of Theology**, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), pp. 65-66.
- 41 **The Five Gospels**, pp. 486, 528.
- 42 Robert J. Miller, ed., **The Complete Gospels** (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994).
- 43 F. F. Bruce, **The Canon of Scripture** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 258.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 259.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 259-260.
- 47 Linnemann, p. 196.
- 48 **The Five Gospels**, pp. 6-7.
- 49 Quoted in Michael J. Wilkins & J. P. Moreland, eds., **Jesus Under Fire** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 2.
- 50 **The Five Gospels**, p. 5.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 Yarbrough, "The Date of Papias: A Reassessment."
- 56 Carson, Moo & Morris, p. 66.
- 57 Wilkins & Moreland, p. 2.
- 58 Scot McKnight, "Who Is Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus Studies," IN: **Jesus Under Fire**, pp. 61-62.
- 59 Wilkins & Moreland, pp. 231-232.
- 60 **The Five Gospels**, p. 35.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 Philip Jenkins, **Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 11-12.
- 63 *Ibid.*, pp. 54-81.
- 64 *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.
- 65 Craig L. Blomberg, "Where Do We Start Studying Jesus," IN: **Jesus Under Fire**, pp. 43-44.
- 66 Norman L. Geisler, "Jesus Seminar," IN: **Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 386-387.
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67 Robert Funk and The Jesus Seminar, **The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus** (San Francisco: Harper/Polebridge, 1998), p. 1.

68 I wrote two articles on this topic that appeared in our **Fulton County Gospel News** in 1991. You may have a copy of these articles by writing to **FCGN**, P. O. Box 251, Mammoth Spring, AR 72554. You must send a self-addressed stamped envelope.

CHAPTER 2

Let These Sayings Sink Down Into Your Ears

B. J. Clarke

Introduction

JESUS KNEW THAT HIS disciples would not understand what He was about to tell them, at least not yet. But He wanted them to remember it—so, He prefaced His statement with these words: “Let these sayings sink down into your ears” (Luke 9:44). When we have something really important to say we often preface our remarks with words like, “Listen up...pay attention...listen carefully.” Our aim is to draw even more attention to our words than usual. Likewise, on this occasion, Jesus implored His disciples to carefully consider what He was about to tell them. Literally, the Greek translation would read, “You lay into your ears these sayings.” In fact, the original language is emphatic regarding the word “you.” Essentially, Jesus was saying to His disciples, “Regardless of whether others listen to Me or not, ‘you on your part’¹ must listen to what I am saying and take heed.” Christ did not want them to hear His words and then dismiss them in lightning fashion. Instead, He wished for them to chew on these words, digest them slowly, and absorb them permanently.

What specific message precipitated such an urging from our Lord? Having commanded their very close attention, Jesus went on to say, “For the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men” (Luke 9:44). The

parallel account in Matthew adds, “And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again” (Matt. 17:23; cf. Mark 9:31). This was not the first time Jesus had warned of His approaching death, burial, and resurrection. After Peter boldly confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16), Jesus promised to build His church upon the solid bedrock of truth that He was the Christ. Furthermore, Matthew reports:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Matt. 16:21).

Approximately a week later, Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. Moses and Elijah also appeared in glorified forms and “talked with him” (Luke 9:30). Wouldn’t you like to know what they discussed? Fortunately, we don’t have to speculate about the content of their conversation. Luke records that they “spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). It appears that, due to being “heavy with sleep,” Peter, James, and John missed out on this portion of the transfiguration (Luke 9:32). Nevertheless, the next day Jesus plainly declared unto them that He would be delivered into the hands of men, be killed, and rise again the third day (Luke 9:37-44; Mark 9:31).

The disciples’ reaction to this saying of Jesus was a mixture of bewilderment, fear, and sorrow. Luke records that “they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying” (Luke 9:45; cf. Matt. 17:23). Throughout His ministry, Jesus often repeated the predictions of His coming passion at Jerusalem (Matt. 20:18-19; Matt. 21:38-39; Matt. 26:2; Luke 18:31). However, it was not until after His resurrection that the disciples comprehended these

sayings. At the empty tomb, the angel said to the women who came to attend to the body of Jesus:

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest (Luke 24:6-9).

Initially, the apostles rejected the tidings from the women as just idle chatter, “and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11). However, they ran to the sepulcher and soon learned that it was true (Luke 24:12; John 20:2-10; John 20:19-20). Suddenly, the saying of Jesus (from Luke 9:44) made sense. They had kept the saying in their hearts, but had failed to understand it. Now, at His resurrection, the meaning of the saying was crystal clear.

Of course, the saying of Jesus from Luke 9:44 is by no means the only saying that fell from the lips of our Lord. The Gospel accounts give great emphasis to the teaching ministry of Jesus. The phrase “he taught” occurs fifteen times in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As He was teaching the people, Jesus repeatedly uttered the phrase “I say unto you.” The phrase is found 52 times in Matthew, 16 times in Mark, 30 times in Luke, and 21 times in John. The similar phrase “I say unto thee” occurs 14 times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Indeed, the heart of the Gospel accounts is an inspired record of what Jesus said and did. The phrase “Jesus said” occurs 65 times in the four accounts of His ministry; the phrase “said Jesus” is found 23 times. The similar phrase “Jesus saith” occurs on 43 occasions; the phrase “saith Jesus” is found twice. The Gospel authors tell us on 65 occasions that “Jesus answered” certain questions or

comments posed to Him by both friends and enemies. The phrase “he said” is employed 170 times in the Gospels to introduce or refer to something Jesus said. Moreover, the books of Acts-Revelation document things that Jesus said, which were not recorded by the four Gospel writers.² Incidentally, this would be a good time to note that, although our focus in this lectureship is upon what Jesus actually and personally said to others, it is faulty thinking to suggest that only the red letters of the Bible really matter or possess authority over us. Jesus told His apostles that He had many things to say to them, but that they were unable to bear such teaching at that moment in time (John 16:12). Nevertheless, He promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. But where would the Holy Spirit get the message that He would give to the apostles? Jesus said:

For he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for **he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.** All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you (John 16:13-15).

The bottom line is that, whenever the apostles wrote down what the Spirit inspired them to say, they were writing the equivalent of the words of Jesus, because the Spirit took His message from Jesus, Who took it from the Father. No wonder Paul could write in his epistle to the Corinthians, “The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). That is why Jesus told His apostles, “if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20).

Wherever the sayings of Jesus may be found, they are worthy of our utmost attention and obedience. We should let **all** of the sayings of Jesus sink down into our

ears. But why should we let the sayings of Jesus sink down into our ears? Moreover, how should we allow His sayings to sink down into our ears? What are the benefits of allowing such to occur? And, finally, when should we let the sayings of Jesus sink down into our ears? The rest of this chapter will answer these crucial questions.

Why?

Why should we let the sayings of Jesus sink down into our ears? There are numbers of reasons, but it is mainly because of the **superiority** of His sayings. Many wise men have had their sayings recorded for the benefit of future generations. Millions have admired the sayings of Aristotle, Plato, Confucius, and countless other philosophers. However, the sayings of Jesus are superior to the sayings of these men, or any other man who has lived upon the earth. Of course, this brings us to another “Why” question: Why are the sayings of Jesus superior to all other sayings of men?

1. Because of the source of these sayings. God told Moses, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and **will put my words in his mouth**; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deut. 18:18, emp. mine throughout, BJC). In preparing the way for Jesus, John the Immerser said, “For **he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God**: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (John 3:34-35). Throughout the course of His earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly identified the Father as the source of His sayings. In John 7:16, Jesus declared, “**My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.**” This theme is echoed throughout the Gospel of John:

I have many things to say and to judge of you:
but he that sent me is true; and **I speak to the**

world those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but **as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things** (John 8:26-28).

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. **For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.** And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: **whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak** (John 12:48-50).

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? **the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works** (John 14:10).

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for **all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you** (John 15:15).

For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me (John 17:8).

2. Because of the sovereignty of His sayings.

The sayings of Jesus are not just superior to those of uninspired men like Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato; they are also sovereign over the statements of inspired men like Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. Now, to be sure, all truth proceeds from the Father and, when the aforementioned men spoke in spiritual matters,

their sayings were divinely inspired. However, comparatively speaking, the sayings of Jesus are sovereign, i.e., “having supreme rank, power, or authority... supreme, preeminent, indisputable.”³ This is evidenced in the transfiguration of Christ, wherein Christ, Moses, and Elijah appeared together before Peter, James, and John. While Peter was in the midst of planning to build tabernacles to honor all three, “a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him**” (Matt. 17:5). The sayings of Moses and Elijah were/are inspired, but the sayings of Christ are sovereign over them in the sense that His words will be the ones to judge humanity in the end, and His words are the ones designed to guide the church in the Christian age. After all, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, **hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son**” (Heb. 1:1-2).

3. Because of the sensation produced by His sayings. Those who heard Jesus speak knew that He was no ordinary man. After His temptation, Jesus “returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all” (Luke 4:14-15). When He visited the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, “all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22). When He concluded the Sermon on the Mount, “the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:28-29). Many of the Samaritans believed upon Him “because of his own word” (John 4:42). They exclaimed, “we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). After hearing the teaching of Jesus at the feast of tabernacles,

many of the Jews marvelled, saying, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:14-15). On the last day of this feast, Jesus continued to preach His message, and "many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ" (John 7:40-41).

When the Pharisees caught wind of the growing popularity of Jesus, they dispatched a group of officers to capture Him. When the officers returned from their mission empty-handed, the chief priests and Pharisees asked, "Why have ye not brought him?" The officers answered, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:45-46). Truly, Jesus was a teacher like no other:

Socrates taught for 40 years. Plato taught for 50, Aristotle for 40 and Jesus for only three; yet those three years infinitely transcend in influence the combined one hundred and thirty years of teaching of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, three of the greatest men of all antiquity. Jesus painted no pictures; yet some of the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration from Him. Jesus wrote no poetry; but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by him.⁴

4. Because of the singularity of His sayings.

Unlike countless false prophets and Messiahs, the teaching of Jesus was (and is) always consistent and never erroneous. His prophecies never failed. He never contradicted Himself, the Father, or any inspired Scripture. He was never guilty of doublespeak. Unlike some teachers, whose message changes from time to time, the sayings of Jesus did not evolve and change over the years. He gave one consistent, unified message.

5. Because of the simplicity of His sayings.

In describing the reaction of the people to the sayings of Jesus, Mark 12:37 reports that "the common people heard him

gladly.” Jesus preached a message that even the poor and uneducated could relate to and understand (Matt. 11:5). The sayings of Jesus were simple enough to be understood by babes, but deep enough to be hidden from those who considered themselves worldly wise and prudent (Matt. 11:25). The chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to “lay hands” on Jesus, but they were intimidated by His popularity with the multitudes (Matt. 21:45-46). Jesus taught daily in the temple, and the religious leaders “sought to destroy him,” but they “could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him” (Luke 19:48). In fact, the people loved the teaching of Jesus so much that they “came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him” (Luke 21:38).

One author aptly noted the following about the relationship between Christ and the multitudes:

He spoke to them as one of themselves. Not from a height of official distance and superiority, but in their own language, with illustrations drawn from their everyday life, and as one who knew them and their ways.⁵

6. Because of the surety of His sayings. Six times in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said...but I say unto you” (Matt. 5:21-44). What men say may or may not be true, but what Jesus said is unquestionably true. He affirmed as much by prefacing so many of His remarks with the word “Verily.” The phrase “Verily I say unto you” fell from the lips of our Lord a combined 77 times in the four Gospel accounts. Interestingly, our Lord’s double use of the word “verily” appears only in the Gospel of John. On 25 occasions, John quotes Jesus as saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.”⁶ Be that as it may, the point is clear—Jesus affirmed that His message was one of total accuracy. The words that Jesus gave His apostles caused them to know “surely” that Jesus

was sent by the Father (John 17:8). After declaring that Jesus possessed the words of life, Peter affirmed, “And we believe and art sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:69). As the song says, “He is the true One, He is the Just One, He hath the words of life.”

7. Because of the significance of His sayings.

The significance of what Jesus said is simply this—our eternal salvation depends upon it. Jesus said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life (John 5:24).

The words of Jesus are significant because “they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The sayings of Jesus are so significant that our love for Him is proven or denied by how we respond to them. Jesus said, “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (John 14:24).

The sayings of Jesus are significant because they will judge men on the last day (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12). Furthermore, in Peter’s sermon at Solomon’s portico, he identified Jesus as “that prophet” prophesied of in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. He also attested to the significance of the sayings of Jesus, when he announced: “it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:23).

How?

How should I let the sayings of Jesus sink down into my ears? Before providing specific answers to this question, it is instructive to survey how people reacted to the sayings of Jesus when He was upon the earth. The sayings of Jesus produced varied reactions among His hearers. There was a division among the Jews regarding the sayings of Jesus (John 10:19). Some adored Him; some despised Him. As

He taught in the synagogue at Capernaum, “many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60). This particular saying was so controversial that “from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66).

When Jesus instructed the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, and take up the cross and come follow Him, the young man “was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:22). When the scribes and Pharisees did not like the message that Jesus was preaching to them, they began “to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him” (Luke 11:53-54). When Jesus gave His sayings about the dangers of covetousness, the Pharisees, who had heard all these things, “derided Him” (Luke 16:14). Some wanted to kill Jesus merely because He told them the truth (John 8:40).

What about you and me? How can we see to it that the sayings of Jesus sink down into our ears?

1. We must demonstrate a willingness to listen.

The wise man said, “My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings” (Prov. 4:20). Again, we read, “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end” (Prov. 19:20). The phrase, “If any man hath ears to ear, let him hear,” is found at least sixteen times in the New Testament. Indeed, we ought to be swift to hear (Jas. 1:19).

Cornelius possessed such an attitude. Upon Peter’s arrival at his house, Cornelius said to him, “Now therefore are we all here present before God, **to hear all things** that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33). The Bereans also teach us, not only to listen, but to listen with a

readiness of mind to accept the truth (Acts 17:11). We must take heed as to what we hear, and how we hear (Mark 4:24; Luke 8:18).

2. We must lay up the words in our hearts. It is not enough to be willing to listen. Jesus told His disciples to let His words sink down into their ears, i.e., lodge within their minds and take up permanent residence. In John 5, Jesus confronted the Jews who wanted to kill Him because of what He did on the Sabbath day. He reminded them that John the Immerser was a witness to His Deity, but that He had an even greater witness than John, namely the seal and approval of the Father. Then Jesus said, “**And ye have not his word abiding in you:** for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not” (John 5:38). On another occasion, Jesus told the Jews, “I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill me, because **my word hath no place in you**” (John 8:37). In both of these passages, it is clear that the Jews had heard the sayings of Jesus, but they did not allow these sayings to sink down into their ears and take up residence.

In order for the sayings of Jesus to sink down into our ears, we must retain what we hear. The concept of hearing something and laying it up, or keeping it in the heart is a familiar one in both Testaments. When Joseph told the family about his dream that they would bow before him, his brothers envied him, “**but his father observed the saying**” (Gen. 37:11). When people began to chant “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands, **David laid up these words in his heart**” (1 Sam. 21:11-12). After receiving a detailed vision about the future of the world, Daniel was much troubled and **kept the matter in his heart** (Dan. 7:28).

In the New Testament, the news of the events surrounding the naming of John, and the loosing of the tongue of Zechariah, was spread far and wide, and the text

says that all that heard these things **“laid them up in their hearts”** (Luke 1:66). When the shepherds relayed to Joseph and Mary the message given to them by the angels, everyone wondered about it at the time, **“but Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart** (Luke 2:14). Likewise, when they found Jesus in the temple and He affirmed that He was about His Father’s business, they did not understand his saying, **“but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart”** (Luke 2:51).

Moses told the children of Israel, **“Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart** and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut. 11:18). We must hide away the Word of God in our hearts that we might not sin against Him (Psa. 119:11). We are to learn God’s Word and then bind it continually upon our hearts and about our necks (Prov. 6:21). The book of Proverbs depicts a father saying to his son, **“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments...Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live”** (Prov. 3:1; Prov. 4:4). John admonished his readers:

Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. **If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you,** ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father (1 John 2:24).

We must hear the sayings of Jesus, and then retain them in our hearts.

3. We must live the words out in our lives. It is not even enough to hear the Word of God, and to hide it away in our hearts. Notice the latter portion of the plea of Moses in the following text: **“And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe**

to do, all the words of this law” (Deut. 32:46). Notice the progression of this passage. It begins with setting our hearts upon the words of God, then knowing the message well enough to transmit it to our children, and commanding them to observe to do all the words of this law. Joshua was told to meditate in the Word both day and night, but, more importantly, to “observe **to do according to all that is written** therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8).

The acid test for whether we have allowed the sayings of Jesus to sink down into our ears is recorded in Matthew 7:24-27:

Therefore whosoever **heareth these sayings** of mine, **and doeth them**, I will liken him unto **a wise man**, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

If we would allow the sayings of Jesus to sink down into our ears, we must hear His words, internalize His words, and live His words. Once we have heard His sayings, “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Heb. 2:1). We must let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16). But it is not enough for truth to dwell in us—we must walk in the truth (2 John 2; 3 John 3; John 18:37).

What?

What are the benefits of letting the sayings of Jesus sink into our ears? It associates us with God (John 8:47).

It makes us His sheep, and, as long as we keep listening to the voice of the shepherd, we are perpetually safe (John 10:27-29). If we keep the sayings of Jesus, God will make His abode with us (John 14:23). Jesus told His apostles that they were clean through the Word spoken unto them (John 15:3). Furthermore, He told them, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). Of course, we are not promised everything that Jesus promised the apostles in John 13-17, but some of the principles still apply. If we let the sayings of Jesus sink down into our ears, and obey those sayings, then our prayers will be heard (1 John 3:22-24; 1 John 5:14-15).

The spoken words of Jesus are designed to bring joy to His followers (John 15:11; John 17:13). The spoken words of Jesus are designed to bring peace to His followers (John 16:33). Perhaps the most comforting benefit of all is seen in John 8:51, wherein Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, **If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.**” The wages of sin is death, the second death which is the lake of fire and brimstone (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8). However, if we will hear His sayings and keep them, we will never have to experience such a death!

When?

When should we let the sayings of Jesus sink down into our ears? Because so much is at stake—the very salvation of our soul—the time to let the sayings of Jesus sink down into our ears is right now. Today is the day of salvation; tomorrow may be too late. Now is the accepted time (2 Cor. 6:2). If we heed the sayings of Jesus, we will heed His message about the certainty and uncertainty of the Second Coming. Jesus said that He would come again (John 14:3), but He did not say when that would be. In fact, He said that no man can know the time of His return

(Matt. 24:42; Matt. 25:13). Furthermore, we cannot boast about what we are going to do tomorrow because we know not what a day may bring forth (Prov. 27:1; Jas. 4:13-14). Therefore, since the sayings of Jesus will judge us in the last day, and since our last day may be today, the time to let the sayings of Jesus sink into our ears is today—right now!

Conclusion

In summary, we should let the sayings of Jesus take up permanent residence within our hearts because they are superior to any other sayings. They are superior because their source is supernatural. They are superior because they are sovereign above all other sayings. The sensation caused by the sayings of Jesus proves how extraordinary they were/are. Furthermore, the singularity and simplicity of His sayings has never been matched. In an uncertain world, the surety of His sayings brings great security and comfort, and the significance of His sayings is incomparable to anything else ever said.

Because the sayings of Jesus are so superior, we must hear them, hide them in our hearts, and demonstrate them in our lives. If we do so, God will live within us while we are here on earth, and we will live with Him someday in heaven!

Endnotes

1 R. C. H. Lenski, **Commentary On The New Testament: The Interpretation Of St. Luke's Gospel** (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 541.

2 Acts 1:4-5; Acts 1:7; Acts 9:4-6; Acts 9:10-12; Acts 9:15-16; Acts 18:9-10; Acts 20:35; Acts 22:18; Acts 22:21; Acts 23:11; Acts 26:14-18; 2 Cor. 12:9; Rev. 1:8; Rev. 1:11; Rev. 2:1-3:22; Rev. 22:7; Rev. 22:12-13; Rev. 22:16; Rev. 22:20.

3 **Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary Of The English Language** (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), p. 1826.

4 Walter B. Knight, **Knight's Master Book of New Illustrations** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 329.

5 **The Pulpit Commentary**, Electronic Database.
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6 John 1:51; John 3:3; John 3:5; John 3:11; John 5:19;
John 5:24; John 5:25; John 6:26; John 6:32; John 6:47; John 6:53;
John 8:34; John 8:51; John 8:58; John 10:1; John 10:7; John 12:24;
John 13:16; John 13:20; John 13:21; John 13:38; John 14:12;
John 16:20; John 16:23; John 21:18.

Part One

What Jesus
Said
At Certain
Events

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CHAPTER 3

What Jesus Said At His Baptism, Temptation, And Transfiguration

Dan Cates

Introduction

I *CONSIDER IT AN HONOR* to have been invited to speak again on the **POWER** lectures. I appreciate the good relationship I enjoy with the fine Southaven congregation, and her ministers. I have long admired brother Clarke and am proud to be the brother-in-law of one of our finest young preachers—and, really, you can eliminate the “young”—in the church today, Wayne Jones.

The study of this endeavor, **The Sayings of Jesus**, is a wonderful one. I thank B. J. for offering a number of subjects along this line from which to choose. I have chosen the subject, “What Jesus Said At His Baptism, Temptation, And Transfiguration.” These three events were important landmarks (events “marking a unique or important historical change or on which important developments depend”)¹ in the earthly ministry of our Lord.

In this study we shall deal with these events in the order in which they took place, noticing their respective Scriptures, contexts, sayings, reactions, and lessons. As we study these things, let us recognize a need for open-mindedness as we view God’s inspired Word.

What Jesus Said At His Baptism

In Matthew 3:13-17, we have this record of the baptism of Jesus (with Jesus' sayings emphasized for easy recognition):

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, **Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.** Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.²

The background for this event is the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. Having been in Nazareth (Matt. 2:23), but not yet having begun His ministry around Galilee (during which His miraculous work would begin—John 2:11), Jesus went, as others from Judaea and the area around the Jordan had (Matt. 3:5), to see John the Baptist (or John the Immerser), and to be baptized by him. John the Baptist had been preaching (Matt. 3:1-2) in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Savior; in doing so, he fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. Likewise, John had been baptizing people. It should be pointed out that his baptism was different from Christian baptism (in the church age), for it required confession of sins (Matt. 3:6), as opposed to confessing of Christ (Acts 8:37), and it was to be temporarily practiced (Acts 19:1-5), as opposed to being the permanent practice of the early church (Luke 24:47). Two similarities, though, might also be noted—first, that both required repentance (Matt. 3:2; Luke 13:3; Luke 13:5), and, second, that both were for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38).

Please notice that, while we do not read such a quote, Jesus evidently told John that He desired to be baptized by him as many others had. This begs one question: why was Jesus baptized? It must be plainly stated that Jesus **was not** baptized for the remission of sins, for He had no sins! 1 Peter 2:22 emphatically refers to Jesus, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” If Jesus was not baptized for the remission of sins, then why was He baptized? There are four possibilities, and any or all could be correct (one certainly is, as Jesus Himself said).

First, Jesus may have been baptized to serve as an example for others. Soldiers long to have leaders who are willing to endure what they have to endure, as do those who serve under any others. Perhaps Jesus then, in being baptized, takes what some refer to as an arbitrary command and makes it practical, as if to say, “You do it, for I have done it.”

Second, it may be the case that Jesus was baptized to introduce Himself to Israel. What better way would there be to do this than to have the One to be introduced go to the New Testament’s Elijah (Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:7-15; Matt. 17:12-13), John the Baptist; have Him be recognized by John as being superior to John (Matt. 3:14); have the Spirit descend like a dove and land upon Him (Matt. 3:16); and, finally, to have the Father say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17)?

Third, Jesus’ baptism may have been for the purpose of bestowing miraculous power upon Him. As has been shown, His miracles did not commence until after His return to the area of Galilee. He turned water to wine in the wedding feast in Cana (John 2:11). It is the case that, at His baptism, the Holy Spirit contacted Him; perhaps that was the equivalent of the church-age laying on of hands to pass on miraculous ability (Acts 8:17-18; Acts 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14). At the very least, the purpose of Jesus’

baptism was, in His own words, to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). It was the right thing to do; it was the holy thing to do. To put this in the form of a syllogism—first, God’s will must be done; second, it was God’s will that Jesus be baptized by John; and, third, Jesus came to do God’s will (John 4:34; John 6:38). Therefore, Jesus was baptized of John. Please note that, in fulfilling all righteousness, Jesus was also fulfilling righteous prophecy.

John actually reacted twice in this passage. First, he reacted to Jesus’ unrecorded statement by forbidding Jesus to be baptized by him, acknowledging that it was he, John, who should be baptized by Jesus. After Jesus said, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15), John’s reaction was to “suffer” (Matt. 3:16), or allow, Jesus to be baptized. How the words of the Lord could quickly turn a question into an action!

Can you imagine how those who were witness to this reacted? How would you have reacted, had you been witness to the scene? What would John’s appraisal of the greatness of Jesus have meant to you? What would Jesus’ own words have meant? How would the Holy Spirit’s descent have affected you? What would you have thought when the voice of God rang through the atmosphere? If you were of sound mind and honest heart (Matt. 13:9), you could only have acknowledged Who this Jesus was: the Savior, the Messiah, the Christ—worthy to be followed, worthy to be praised, worthy to be worshiped! Many would react that very way; however, some would react with envy (Matt. 27:18) and scorn, not wanting to accept **this** Man as Lord. The Jewish leaders would not recognize nor accept Him, and ultimately would kill the Savior (Matt. 27:22), as their fathers had killed God’s righteous servants before them (Matt. 23:32).

There are many practical lessons. First, we learn that Jesus always did that which was right. Second, we learn

the facts concerning the baptism of John. Third, we learn that Jesus pleased the Father. Fourth, we learn that we, personally, must respond, in some way, to the question of Who Jesus was!

What Jesus Said During His Temptation

The second event in the life of Jesus with which this lecture must deal is the temptation of Jesus. Following the baptism of Jesus, when He would have been in a very great state spiritually, He was led into the wilderness to be tempted after a fast of forty days, at which time He would still be in that strong spiritual state, and yet in a very low, weak, physical state. The text of Matthew 4:1-11 records this event (again, with Jesus' sayings emphasized for easy recognition):

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, **It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.** Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, **It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God** [Luke was inspired to pen a fuller response to this particular temptation as recorded in Luke 4:8: **“Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”**—DC]. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world,

and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, **Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.** Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

As has been pointed out, this was a time of great spiritual strength for our Lord, but was also a time of great physical weakness. Satan shows his cunning nature in the trying of Jesus at this particular point in His life, for often men fall to temptation when they feel that they are very strong spiritually (1 Cor. 10:12), or when they are very weak physically (1 Pet. 5:8-9; cf. 2 Cor. 12:7). Temptation has variously been defined as enticement, allurement, the cause of lust (Jas. 1:14-15), or any solicitation to sin. In the case of the temptation of Jesus, Satan used the strongest weapons in his arsenal, including Scripture, to try to cause the Christ to crumble under the weight of sin—which sin would have effectively ended the usefulness of Jesus.

As this lectureship focuses on the sayings of Jesus, and since the event of the temptation has been oft repeated, please consider how Jesus responded to the temptations. 1 John 2:15-17 groups temptation into three categories (the lust of the flesh, that is, what feels good; the lust of the eyes, that is, what looks good; and the pride of life, that is, what makes men look good), and each of the temptations waged against Jesus can be said to fall, respectively, into these categories.

That Jesus should try to turn stones into bread, a temptation especially trying after a forty-day fast, was answered by Jesus, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Jesus, Who had been fasting,

needed physical food, and was no doubt provided with such when the angels ministered to His needs (Matt. 4:11); however, Jesus' desire was not for physical food, but for spiritual—that is, the Word of God.

That Jesus should call for the protection of angels upon making a thrilling leap from the pinnacle of the temple was answered by Jesus, “Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Luke 4:8). This showed that Jesus, Who was in Satan's eyes perhaps overconfident, recognized that such misuse of the power of God would have been blasphemy. The power of God was not simply a toy with which one could play (Acts 8:18-23).

That Jesus should take power over physical kingdoms was answered by Him, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). Jesus had been offered by Satan, who is the ruler of this world (John 12:31), immediate power and an immediate reign. Satan surely felt that Jesus would be impetuous or greedy of power. Satan did not recognize that Jesus would accept nothing out of due season (Matt. 8:4; Matt. 9:30; Matt. 12:16; Matt. 16:20; Matt. 17:9; John 2:4; John 7:30; John 8:20), nor did he see (though he recognized, undoubtedly, that Jesus would rule a spiritual kingdom) that Jesus recognized already that a physical rule was not what He desired (John 18:36), but a spiritual one over a spiritual kingdom—the church (Matt. 16:17-19). Many today, known as premillennialists, make a mistake that would have been made by neither Satan nor Jesus, in that they await a future physical kingdom over which Jesus will rule on a physical throne in physical Jerusalem—and, really, if all Jesus were after had been a physical kingdom, why would Jesus not have jumped at this offer of the immediate fulfillment of such (rather than waiting thousands of

years)? Satan's final temptation was only of strength because it offered Jesus what He did not need—the physical as opposed to the spiritual!

For obvious reasons, particularly the secluded nature of the occasion, there were no men present to react to the sayings Jesus uttered during His temptation, but that does not mean there was no reaction. Satan himself was present on the occasion, as the tempter, and reacted to each of the replies Jesus made. To the first and second, Satan merely moved to more powerful means in his attempt to cause the Savior to stumble. After the third temptation the defeated devil could only depart (perhaps biding his time before tempting Jesus in the hours before His death to remove Himself from Jerusalem or to come down off of the obligatory cross). Satan's exit from the scenes speaks volumes as it shows the triumph of the Christ on that occasion.

Satan was not alone in the reaction department. In the years following the birth and early growth of the church, the inspired writer of the letter of Hebrews would react by presenting two passages held dear by those who are tempted as Jesus was:

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 2:17-18).

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

Such reaction on the part of the inspired penman gives hope to all and ties men ever closer to the One Who was tempted and suffered for them.

The lessons from Jesus' temptation are many. First, men truly learn of Satan when they study the temptation of Jesus. They see that Satan, fueling men's lusts, is the source of temptations (Jas. 1:14), and God is not (Jas. 1:13). They see that Satan is never far away, and that he will attack when men are strong or weak. They see that Satan knows what men want and will offer men those very things. They see that Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31), and that he even knows such spiritual things as Scripture itself. They see that Satan will cause men to doubt themselves, others, and even God. And they see that Satan can be resisted and overcome (Jas. 4:7).

Second, men truly learn of temptation. They see that temptation, when it is overcome, can make men stronger, for the temptation of Jesus vaulted Him into His earthly ministry. They also learn that temptation is not unbearable (1 Cor. 12:13).

Third, men truly learn about Jesus. They learn that He was tempted like they are (Heb. 4:15). They learn that Jesus can be a just and righteous judge, for He not only faced the temptations that men face, but He overcame them as well (Heb. 2:18). Too, they learn that Jesus, as One Who was tempted, is able to comfort them as they are tempted.

Fourth, men learn from the temptation of Jesus about the power of God's Word. They learn that what worked for Jesus can work for them. Satan cannot fight God's Word! In all of His replies, Jesus quoted Scripture, and man can do the same when facing temptations. As James wrote, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (Jas. 4:8).

Fifth, men learn that the spiritual is far superior to the physical. Spiritual food is greater than physical food. The spiritual kingdom, the church, surpasses in greatness any and all physical kingdoms this world might bring forth.

What Jesus Said During The Transfiguration

Sometime after Jesus' baptism and temptation came another great event in the life of Jesus that speaks to His Divine being. This event is called the transfiguration, and is spoken of in great detail in Matthew 17:1-13 (again, with Jesus' sayings emphasized for easy recognition):

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, **Arise, and be not afraid.** And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, **Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.** And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, **Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things** [Mark 9:12 adds, "and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought."—DC]. **But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed** (Mark 9:13 adds, "as it is written of him"—DC). **Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.** Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Shortly after Peter made the confession that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son, of the living God” (Matt. 16:18), and after Peter had rebuked Jesus (Matt. 16:22), and vice versa (Matt. 16:23), Peter, James, John, and Jesus went into a high mountain (perhaps Mount Hermon) to separate themselves from the multitudes that followed Jesus (Matt. 17:1). There Jesus was transfigured. The actual appearance of Jesus was changed so that His face shone and His robe was bright as light. Such appearance had been seen in Moses (Exod. 34:29-25) and would be seen in Stephen (Acts 6:15). The appearance is also seen with reference to Jesus as He appeared before John on Patmos in a vision (Rev. 1:14). To be transfigured means to, in some way, be metamorphosed, or changed, in form or nature. Here Jesus, being transfigured, began to talk with Moses and Elias (Elijah), who had been brought forth for a special purpose on this occasion.

It is not known what, exactly, Jesus said to Moses and Elias, and it apparently was not deemed important on the part of the Holy Spirit to reveal anything about that conversation, other than what is recorded in Luke 9:31: they “spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

The order of happenings on this occasion proceeded during the reaction of Peter to that which was taking place. Peter suggested that there be three tabernacles, or tents, erected for Jesus and those with whom He was speaking. Peter recognized the greatness and the importance of this occasion (Matt. 17:4), but did not yet understand its true meaning and significance. It is apparent that, before Peter could finish making his suggestion, there was an interruption not unlike the events following the baptism of Jesus. There was, overshadowing them, a bright cloud, and out of the cloud again the Father spoke, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”

Please pay close attention to that last clause, “Hear ye him.” An appropriate reaction on the part of Peter, James, and John followed. They were fearful (Matt. 17:6). Jesus’ first words that are recorded offer comfort for their fear (Matt. 17:7). Looking up, they saw only Jesus (Matt. 17:8).

As they began to descend, Jesus spoke again. Please remember that Jesus did nothing, and allowed nothing to be done, before it was time (Matt. 8:4; Matt. 9:30; Matt. 12:16; Matt. 16:20; John 2:4; John 7:30; John 8:20). He told the disciples not to tell what they had seen until the resurrection had been accomplished (Matt. 17:9).

The disciples, brimming with curiosity about the spectacle they had just witnessed, asked Jesus why the scribes said Elias must first come (Matt. 17:10). It is probable that they felt that they had just witnessed the fulfillment of the aforementioned prophecy of Malachi 4:5. Jesus spoke again, saying that the prophecy was correct—Elias must first come (Matt. 17:11). He then added, “But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them” (Matt. 17:12). As has been shown, the New Testament Elijah came in the person of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:7-15), which thing the disciples finally understood (Matt. 17:13). Jesus was pointing out that, just as they [His disciples] had not recognized John the Baptist, neither had those who did to the New Testament Elijah as they desired [Please remember that Herodias had him killed for his revealing of her adulterous relationship with Herod (Mark 6:16-28)]. Likewise, Jesus pointed out that He would be so treated (Matt. 27:22).

The transfiguration made the disciples ask many “Why?” questions, and it still causes the same. First, why did the transfiguration occur when it did? Simply, Jesus had just been identified (Matt. 16:16) and yet misunderstood

(Matt. 16:20-21); God therefore thought it necessary to show beyond a doubt Who this Jesus was. Second, why did the transfiguration occur at all? God wanted to show that Jesus would have to face the cross, but that He, likewise, would be raised from the dead. Furthermore, God wanted to show that the kingdom, or church, was, as had been alluded to in Matthew 16:18-19 and Matthew 16:28, certainly close to being established, since Jesus was soon to make the sacrifice by which the price would be paid to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). Third, why did the transfiguration occur as it did? Moses' appearance would have represented the Law, which marked the soon-to-be-abolished Mosaical system, while Elias' appearance would have represented the prophecies that had pointed to the coming of the One Who walked with the disciples. God wanted for these men to recognize that Jesus was the One Who would take out of the way the old system, the temporary law (Gal. 3:19; Col. 2:14; Heb. 8-10), and that He was the One Who would fulfill the prophecies that had been made concerning the Messiah (Isa. 52:13-53:12; John 4:25).

The above questions all point out lessons to be gleaned from the transfiguration, and it might be worthy to point out that the transfiguration was later spoken of by the one who was so moved on that occasion, Peter:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

Some have also averred that the transfiguration was referred to by John, "And the Word was made flesh, and

dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). What wonderful acclamations of the Deity of Jesus are these!

Conclusion

In studying the Scriptures, contexts, sayings, reactions, and lessons of these three great events from the life of our Savior, we learn many great lessons. Perhaps three shine above all. The baptism of Jesus shows His place as the pleasing Son of the Father, Jesus being Deity Himself. The temptation of Jesus shows that man can call upon God’s Word for help when facing even the most serious of temptations. The transfiguration of Jesus shows the superiority of Jesus over God’s older system. May each Christian who reads of these events find in them such uplifting lessons and be edified by them.

Endnotes

1 “Landmark,” **WordNet** database (Princeton University, 2001), available online at www.wordweb.co.uk.

2 All Bible references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER 4

What Jesus Said At The Last Supper And Garden Of Gethsemane

Michael McDaniel

Introduction

I AM GRATEFUL TO SPEAK at the **POWER** Lectures again and to have the opportunity to write a chapter for the lectureship book. Attending this lectureship is one of the highlights of the year. The elders are to be commended for having revived this lectureship some ten years ago, and for the good that it and the **POWER** periodical have done. B. J. Clarke is an outstanding Gospel preacher whom I count as a dear friend. I am grateful that he publishes my articles from time to time.

I cannot hope to cover this assignment as thoroughly as I desire, given my time and space limitations. Several years ago, while preaching for the good church in Greenfield, TN, I preached a series of **fourteen sermons** entitled “In the Upper Room.” It was an expository series based on John chapters thirteen through seventeen. Chapters thirteen and fourteen took place while our Lord and His apostles sat at a table. At the end of chapter fourteen, they arose from the table, and Jesus gave a discourse that covers chapters fifteen and sixteen. There is the prayer of our Lord in chapter seventeen. Then there is the departure for the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1).

What I endeavor to do in this study is to take you to the upper room and to the Garden of Gethsemane. We need to experience, with the mind's eye, the sights and sounds of what occurred therein. Words are the vehicles on which thoughts ride. We can use the words of our Lord to allow us to see His thoughts. What was on our Lord's mind that dreadful night? What frustrations did He experience? What were His concerns? What were His sorrows?

One does not read any chapter of the Bible, in which Jesus is found, without seeing and sensing His deep concern. Seeing His concerns helps us better to understand the Son of God and to more clearly see our responsibilities as His followers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in those chapters immediately preceding our Lord's sacrificial death on the cross. Such a study instills a greater appreciation and a deeper love for our blessed Savior.

What We See At The Last Supper

(1) We See His Concern About The Quarreling Among His Disciples

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth (Luke 22:24-27).

The accounts of the Passover supper are recorded in Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; and John 13. We read of the preparation for the Passover in Luke 22:7-13 and the

opening of the Passover by Jesus in Luke 22:14-18. From looking at the other accounts, it appears that Luke's account is not necessarily in chronological order. In his account, he mentions the Lord's Supper immediately following the Passover meal. Also, he appears incidentally to introduce the account of a quarrel that night among the disciples over who would be the greatest among them. In Luke 22:24, the word "also" bears out the idea that he is now telling something else that happened without arranging it in order of time.¹

Understanding how the disciples, on the very eve of the death of our Lord, could have possibly engaged in such a quarrel is hard. However, they were all feeling the intense pressure, emotional stress, and impending danger that would make them anxious and create the atmosphere for such a quarrel.

Jesus sought to humble the entire group by rendering them a humble service:

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded (John 13:4-5).

Traveling the dusty Palestinian roads wearing sandals caused the feet to be dirty. When one entered someone's home, it was usually the duty of a servant to wash his master's and visitor's feet (cf. 1 Sam. 25:40-41; Luke 7:36-46). When it became obvious that none of His disciples would perform this humble task of washing their feet, the only begotten Son of God took the towel, girded Himself, and performed the task Himself! If He followed the usual procedure, Jesus poured water over the feet into a basin, the feet not being put in the water. The stream of falling water washed the feet. Then the Savior dried them with a

towel about His waist. Here is the Son of God, Deity, on His knees, serving sinful man. It was a well-deserved rebuke to this group of proud men. Can you imagine their shame and astonishment?

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head (John 13:6-9).

Jesus had hoped that they would later accept and understand His purpose and come to recognize that their pride and selfish ambition had to give way to humility and service to others. While Peter protested initially, he surrendered in total submission to the will of Christ. If allowing washing was the condition of acceptance, then Jesus could wash all of him.

Luke reveals that Jesus stopped their quarreling by reminding His disciples that He was in the midst of them as a servant and that they should imitate Him. The road to greatness begins in service. If these disciples pridefully refused to serve their brethren, how could they possibly achieve greatness in the kingdom in the service of the Lord and of others? Are we imitating the ambitious, prideful, quarreling characteristic of the disciples on that fearful night? Or, are we imitating the wonderful example of humble service displayed so movingly by our Lord?

(2) We See His Concern About The Betrayer

The Lord took His place at the table, and the feast resumed. Jesus assured His disciples of great blessing if they obeyed His teachings. However, Jesus knew that one of them would not:

I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me (John 13:18-20).

The Scripture that Jesus quoted is Psalm 41:9. When David wrote this Psalm by inspiration, he was probably thinking of Ahithophel, who turned traitor against David and joined Absalom's rebellion. He would later commit suicide. However, Jesus makes this passage a prophecy of what Judas would also do. Judas was not a victim of this prophecy. This was prophesied and predicted, but that did not destroy his free moral agency, his freedom to choose. God does not make anyone sin (Jas. 1:13-15). God gives everyone the right to choose to obey His will or to sin and refuse to obey: "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11). Judas betrayed Jesus because he allowed the Devil to influence him to sin (John 13:2). When the Devil came, Judas did not resist him (Jas. 4:7). Instead, he gave him place (Eph. 4:27). God is omniscient. He could see down the line the choice that Judas would freely choose to make. Just because God knows something will happen does not cause it to occur.²

The awareness that one of His own apostles would betray Him greatly troubled the Savior. Upon revealing this to His apostles, it troubled them as well: "And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?" (Matt. 26:22). Peter gestured to John to ask Jesus who it was: "Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon" (John 13:26). The sop was a piece of unleavened bread. In the festivities of the Passover, it was

customary for the head of the house to dip the bread in a sauce of bitter herbs and pass it to each person at the table (Exod. 12:8). Jesus dipped the bread and handed it to Judas: “Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said” (Matt. 26:25). His exposure as the traitor only seemed to harden Judas even more as he submitted himself more fully to the influence of the Devil.

Jesus told him to do quickly what he had totally committed himself to do. Judas immediately went out to do the Devil’s work. He would miss the institution of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus’ final discourses, and His prayer in John chapter seventeen. He chose to leave the light of the world and to go out into the night (John 13:30).

In Judas, we see the progression of sin. Despite all that the Lord had said about money and covetousness (Luke 12:15; Matt. 6:24), Judas continued to be a thief, to steal from the treasury (John 12:6). His covetousness grew until he sold out His Lord for thirty pieces of silver. He fell by transgression and went to his own place (Acts 1:25).³

Are we traveling the road of Judas? Is our sin growing progressively worse? When a child of God partakes in the works of the flesh and fails to produce the fruit of the Spirit, when he habitually forsakes the assembling of the saints for worldly pursuits and recreational activities, when he refuses to study the Bible and treats prayer as a spare tire to be relied on in emergencies, he is on the road to selling out Jesus for a lot less than thirty pieces of silver. How does this make Jesus feel? Does it not grieve Jesus, just as it grieved Him to see Judas go out into the night? Should we not share our Lord’s concern for those of His disciples whom sin has hardened?

(3) We See His Concern That We Would Remember His Sacrifice

The apostle John does not record the giving of the Lord's Supper. It is recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and by Paul in 1 Corinthians. It would appear that it occurred after John 13:35 and before John 13:36. The Lord's Supper was instituted "as they were eating" the Passover meal (Matt. 26:26), or, more specifically, "after supper" (Luke 22:20).⁴ The Passover was a memorial feast that God had instituted in the Old Testament to commemorate the deliverance of the firstborn of Israel through the blood of the lamb. The blood was spread upon the side-posts and lintel of their doors so that the destroyer would pass over their houses (Exod. 12:23). It is interesting that the Passover meal was instituted **before** the event it commemorated and not **after**. Likewise, for us to remember His sacrifice for us, Jesus instituted a feast **before** His crucifixion that was to be observed **after** His death. This feast was similar to but simpler than the Passover. Jesus was finished with the old Jewish Passover because it was "fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16), and because He was to become "our passover" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Passover pointed **forward** in time to the Christ of Calvary. The Lord's Supper would point **backward** in time to the Christ of Calvary.

The Passover meal that they had just observed consisted of a male lamb, one year old and without blemish; bitter herbs; unleavened bread; and the fruit of the grapevine. Jesus took the two simple elements of this supper, the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, and gave them special significance. The bread would represent His body, and the fruit of the vine would represent His blood:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the

disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:26-29).

In Luke 22:19-20, and in Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, we are informed that both after He took the bread and after He took the cup, He said, "This do in remembrance of me." The Lord's Supper was to be a time of remembrance. The design of the Lord's Supper is to keep alive the precious memory of Christ and what He has done for us. So the table upon which the Supper is often spread before us has written across the front, "this do in remembrance of me."

Human beings are prone to forget. Myriads of tombstones and multitudes of buildings and statues attest to the fact that people want to be remembered after death. High atop Mount Corcovado overlooking Rio De Janeiro stands a huge statue of Jesus Christ. The stone monument has stood for more than sixty years, but now it is beginning to crumble. According to **Veja**, a São Paulo news magazine, "The greatest risk is that a piece of the statue may fall on some tourists. Two million people a year visit Christ the Redeemer."⁵ It is not possible to honor Jesus adequately as we would a famous patriot by building a statue of Him. The memorial He has chosen is not of stone but of a supper. The Lord's Supper is a period of several minutes each Lord's Day in which we as Christians look back to the life of our Lord and contemplate His love and sacrifice for us.

Jesus blessed the bread. This means that He gave thanks to God for the bread. Matthew and Mark have "blessed" in regard to the bread and "gave thanks" for the cup. Luke has "gave thanks" for both.⁶ Since Christ, our

great example, offered prayer in instituting the Supper, we should also offer prayers of thanksgiving. Our prayers should be addressed to God the Father in praising Him for His Son Who died on the cross for us.

The early Christians understood that the Lord's Supper was an item of regular worship, and it was observed upon the first day of every week in their regular meetings. Remember, the church at Corinth was commanded to lay by in store upon the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Paul also says that it was their practice to come together in one place to eat the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:33-34). Therefore, the early Christians assembled upon the first day of every week for the purpose of eating the Lord's Supper as well as to worship God through His other divinely appointed avenues. How tragic it is that many religious groups come together on Sundays, sing, pray, give, and listen to a sermon. They then go home without doing the very thing the disciples in the New Testament came together to do! How do you think Jesus feels about that?

Sacred history bears out the fact that the early Christians ate the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Pliny, and others tell us that they so ate the supper during the second century. It is a wise and safe course to do it each Lord's day, as the early Christians did it, and not annually, quarterly, monthly, or on weekdays.

Sometimes our denominational friends will argue that partaking of the Supper every Sunday makes it mundane and causes it to lose its meaningfulness. This is not so. On November 11, 1921, they buried the unknown soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac from the nation's capital. Ten years later the tomb was completed. The inscription on the marble sarcophagus announces, "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God." Part of that honored glory is the ceremony of the honor guard from Fort Myer, Virginia.

A sentry is always on duty at the tomb. During each hour the guard walks his post exactly forty-two times. They precisely time every move. During the day they change the sentry each hour in a polished military ceremony before hundreds of tourists. At night they make the change every two hours. For decades the honor guards have marched, but has anyone suggested that the continuity has robbed the ceremony of its meaning? Why then should one charge that the weekly observance of the Lord's death makes that time of communion mundane? Taking the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day does not require its becoming an unfeeling routine, any more than praying everyday makes prayer an unfeeling routine. It is not the indispensable frequency, but individual flippancy that often destroys the meaning of sacred things. Paul warns against that very thing in 1 Corinthians 11:29. It must be done thoughtfully and reverently. Each week, let the living Christ be remembered in honored glory just as He wished us to do.⁷

(4) We See His Concern About Peter

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me (Luke 22:31-34).

Peter thought that his courage was strong enough to meet any tests that might lie ahead, no matter how difficult. He thought he was ready for any crisis that might come—even prison or death. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself (cf. John 2:25). He also knew that Peter would face a formidable foe in the Devil. Satan wanted to

test Peter, shake his faith, and sift him like wheat. Sifting is not a single shake; it is a constant shaking. Satan is relentless in his pursuits.

Jesus foreknew that Peter would need to repent. He knew that Peter would deny Him. He knew that Peter would need to be converted, that he would need to turn again. Jesus also knew that Peter needed somebody to pray for him. He knew that Peter's faith was the only thing that could help Peter overcome the Devil in the end (1 John 5:4; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).⁸ If Peter allowed his faith to fail completely, he would be overcome. So Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Why pray for this if it were an impossibility? Friends, it is possible for our faith to fail. Consequently, we should pray for others as they face dangers and temptations at home, at school, at college, at work, at places of business, in the military, in our social lives, yea, everywhere. Oh, how we need the prayers of others that our faith will not fail when it is tested!

Roman Catholic theologians attempt to argue for the primacy of Peter from this passage. But our Lord's prayer for Peter was not to indicate Peter's **primacy**. Instead, it acknowledged his **weakness** and intimated Peter's denial later that night.

When Peter later succumbed to temptation and denied his Lord, one thing that surely moved him to repentance was the fact that Jesus was praying for Him. He knew that the Lord still loved him enough to pray for him in spite of his faults, in spite of his lack of loyalty. Peter knew that the Lord expected him to be faithful to the end and to strengthen others who would be weak as he once was. Despite Catholic theology, strengthening the church would not be Peter's exclusive role (cf. 1 Thess. 3:2; 2 Pet. 1:12). The same Greek word (*sterizo*) occurs concerning Paul's projected work in Rome, **the very city over which they allege that Peter held papal control!**

Like Jonathan, who went to David and “strengthened his hand in God” (1 Sam. 23:16), we need to strengthen our brethren. We should support the weak (1 Thess. 5:14), pray for the wayward, and let them know that we are concerned about them even as Jesus expressed His concern about Peter.

(5) We See His Concern For The Troubled Hearts Of The Disciples

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

In these gloomy hours preceding Calvary, is it not remarkable that His thoughts were most often focused upon the welfare of others rather than Himself? Jesus commanded them to stop being troubled in their hearts. Surely, they were troubled by the uncertainties that faced them, by the betrayal of Judas foretold, and by the denial of Peter predicted. But the fact that Jesus had said in John 13:33 that He was going to leave them especially troubled them. Comprehending their mental distress within the upper room is impossible for us.

How would they be comforted? First, they were to derive their comfort through their faith in the Father and the Son. They could know that there was a peace promised unto them unlike any that the world has to offer (John 14:27). They could know that there was a place provided for them—a mansion in the Father’s house. The house of God is God’s entire habitation, the whole domain of God. The many mansions there are descriptive of the grandeur of the places where Christians will abide for eternity. The

word “mansions” is inclusive of everything that the human mind can conceive in a place to live. God will supply every need (Rev. 7:17).

Jesus assured them by telling them there would be a place prepared for them. He has gone to prepare it. Obviously, this place that He is preparing is not a renovated earth (cf. Matt. 24:35; 2 Pet. 3:7). The place that He is preparing is in Heaven, to which He ascended and from which He will return to take us there. At Christ’s Second Coming, the Hadean realm will be opened, the graves will be opened, and the sea will give up her dead. We will be resurrected with a new, incorruptible body. At the judgment, the saved will be granted their eternal home in the place that Jesus has prepared.

Christians are constantly faced with troubles of death, temptation, fear, doubt, and discouragement. How are we to deal with such crises in our life? Let us take the Lord’s advice. We should develop an unwavering and sustaining Biblical faith (John 14:1). We should have hope of life after death in a mansion above (John 14:2). And we should look forward to His Second Coming when He comes to take the saved home (John 14:3). How wonderful it is that the Lord sought to give this remedy for troubled hearts when His own heart must have been deeply troubled!

(7) We See His Concern For Christians Today

In John 17 we have the real Lord’s prayer. It is the longest of our Lord’s recorded prayers and is quite possibly the greatest prayer ever recorded in Scripture and ever prayed on the Earth. Jesus was concerned about others and did not want to end the warm and close association that He had enjoyed that evening with His disciples without a prayer to the Father.

Jesus first prayed for Himself. Then He prayed for His disciples that the Father would keep and sanctify them.

Finally, He closed His prayer by praying that all of us to come might be unified in Him and one day share His glory. What an encouragement this prayer should have been for them!

In this prayer, our Lord declared four wonderful privileges that we have as His children. First, we share His life (John 17:1-5). Second, we know His name (John 17:6-12). Third, we have His Word (John 17:13-19). Fourth, we share His glory (John 17:20-26).⁹ It is in this last portion of our Lord's prayer that He focuses especially on us, on those believers yet future: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). Our Lord looked across the years and breathed a prayer for all those who would believe and obey the Gospel. It ought to thrill our hearts to know that our Lord prayed for you and me when death for Him was but a few short hours away! Can we not see His concern for the church, which He was about to purchase with His own precious blood?

Jesus prayed that we might share His glory in this life (John 17:22). Christ was glorified in this life as the Son of God. He has bestowed that same glory to us, that we might be united as the sons of God in one family. We attain the unity for which Jesus prayed when we become one in Christ at baptism (Gal. 3:27). Then, to maintain that unity with God and one another, we must continue to walk in the light (1 John 1:7). In the midst of denominationalism, which is foreign to this prayer of Jesus, we must strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace within the church (Eph. 4:3).

We must also remember that we share His glory in this life, so that we might behold Christ's glory in the next (John 17:24-26). Jesus was praying in John 17:24 not only that we might be with Him in glory, but that we might see the restoration of the glory that was His before He came

into the world (John 17:5). The ultimate glory awaiting the children of God has yet to be fully revealed (1 John 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:10). Nevertheless, it is certain that Jesus wants us to appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). We can see His concerns as we see the thoughts of His heart poured out in prayer to His Heavenly Father, just hours before He died for us: the glory of God, the sanctity of God's people, the unity of the church, and the mission of preaching the Gospel to a lost world. When we see what occurred in the upper room, it makes us more aware than ever of the selfless mind of Christ: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:4-5).

What We See In The Garden Of Gethsemane

As we journey now with our Lord and His eleven disciples from Jerusalem, we travel across the Kidron River and up the slope of Mount Olivet to the place called Gethsemane. The name Gethsemane means a place of olive oil presses. This is the place where Jesus would prepare for the ordeal of the cross. This would also be the place of His betrayal. What do we see there?

(1) You Will See His Friends Sleeping

Eight disciples are left at the gate while three others are selected to go further into the garden in the shadows of its ancient olive trees. Those three were Peter, James, and John (Matt. 26:37). We call them the inner three. They were His closest disciples and the three most capable of sympathizing and comforting Him. In Matthew 26:38, He told them to watch with Him. Jesus moved away about a stone's cast (Luke 22:41), where He fell on His face and poured out His breaking heart to the Father:

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matt. 26:40-41).

The Lord was disappointed to find them asleep instead of watching and waiting, and He rebuked them. Jesus went back and prayed again. When He returned, Matthew 26:43 says, “And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.” This sounds strange to us. We think that surely they could have watched for one hour. However, we need to look at what Luke says about it. Luke 22:45 says, “And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them **sleeping for sorrow**” (emp. mine, MM). So we learn that there were some extenuating circumstances. It was not due to indifference, but it was caused by their own sorrow at the words Jesus had spoken unto them. They were willing in spirit, but they were weak according to the flesh. They were physically and emotionally spent. Nevertheless, those circumstances were not sufficient to excuse them from being more actively involved. Had they fully comprehended how much the Lord needed their sympathy and comfort as He came repeatedly seeking it, they probably would have kept awake: “And he said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Luke 22:46).

Jesus returned to pray for a third time. Upon returning from His final prayer, He apparently found the three apostles asleep the third time:

Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me (Matt. 26:45-46).

You may wonder why these instructions seem contradictory. When Jesus returned the third time to His sleeping friends, the time for comfort was now over. An angel had appeared to strengthen Him, according to Luke 22:43. The time when they could have given Him some moral support was now past. So He says, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." But at that precise moment, Jesus could see the soldiers approaching in the distance and, knowing what was about to occur, said, "behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me" (Matt. 26:45-46).¹⁰

"Smitten for offenses, Which were not His own, He, for our transgressions, Had to weep alone; No friend with words to comfort, Nor hand to help was there, When the Meek and Lowly Humbly bowed in prayer."¹¹ Can we not see the loneliness of our Lord? Our Lord knew what loneliness was. He was wanting the sympathy of His friends, but they were sleeping. Do you not think that our Lord is often disappointed with us because we fail to do that which He wants from us? Is the life that I am living a disappointment to God? If you would answer "yes" to that question, then you need to change. Watch and pray, for we know not when our Lord shall come (Mark 13:32-37).

(2) You Will See His Feelings Of Sorrow

Gethsemane means "olive press," and here the heart of Jesus was pressed beyond measure: "Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Matt. 26:38). Isaiah described the Lord as the "man of sorrows" in Isaiah 53:3. "Night, with ebon pinion, Brooded o'er the vale; All around was silent, Save the night-wind's wail; When Christ, the Man of Sorrows, In tears and sweat and blood, Prostrate in the garden, Raised His voice to God."¹²

“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Luke, the physician, says that the Lord was in an agony. This is a medical term used to describe a severe inner conflict, a mental or emotional battle.¹³ The original says, “His sweat became as great drops of blood.” In 1874, William Stroud, a London physician, wrote a book entitled **The Physical Cause of the Death of Christ**. Therein the doctor argued that bloody sweat is indeed possible under extreme emotional exertion.¹⁴ Then, in 1986, an article titled “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ” appeared in the prestigious **Journal of the American Medical Association**. Three men wrote it, two of whom are associated with the Mayo Clinic. They suggested that Luke’s description of our Lord’s sweat in the garden is consistent with a condition known as hematomidrosis, in which there can be hemorrhaging into the sweat ducts during periods of acute emotional distress. Subcutaneous capillaries can burst, causing this kind of phenomenon pictured by Luke.¹⁵ Whether this is what occurred or not, this language conveys to us the extreme emotional distress that Jesus suffered in the place called Gethsemane.

The writer of Hebrews spoke of this very occasion when he wrote in Hebrews 5:7, “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.” Why did Christ so pray? He did not want to be separated from His Heavenly Father, and He did not want to endure the ridicule and the death of the cross. He despised the shame of it, according to Hebrews 12:2. So He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears. Yes, He had feelings too. He could grow tired and hungry just as we do. Because of this, He can be in touch with our

feelings today (Heb. 2:17-18). We can see His feelings in this place called Gethsemane and know that He was made like us, that He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15), and that, as a result, He is a merciful and faithful High Priest for us today. Because of His work, we can come boldly before God's throne of grace in prayer and obtain mercy and find the favor of God that can help us in our time of need.

(3) You Will See The Fear Of His Supplication

The Hebrews writer mentions this in Hebrews 5:7 when he says Jesus "was heard in that he feared." This does not mean that He was afraid of God. Rather, it refers to the fact that He had respect for what God had said. He would not carelessly handle the Word of God. Just a little later that night, Jesus would say: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53-54). Jesus would not approach His responsibility to that Word flippantly, and neither should we. When we see Jesus in the place called Gethsemane, we see One involved in a struggle. There was His foreknowledge of what would happen. There was His freedom of will that would cause it to happen. There were His feelings of emotion that overwhelmed Him, but there were also His fear and His respect for the Word and will of the Father.

How important it is that we walk in the fear of the Lord each day (Acts 9:31), have the type of respect that we ought to have for the Word of God, and seek to do His will at every time and in every place.

(4) You Will See His Faithfulness In Submission

Abba, Father, Father, If indeed it may, Let this
cup of anguish Pass from Me, I pray; Yet, if it

must be suffered, By Me, Thine only Son, Abba, Father, Father, Let Thy will be done.¹⁶

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matt. 26:39).

He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done (Matt. 26:42).

And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words (Matt. 26:44).

In the first prayer, He said, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” The cup of which Jesus spake was the cup of suffering which He foreknew would be His to drink upon the cross to execute God’s eternal plan for the redemption of humanity. Into that cup were poured loneliness, ingratitude, betrayal, humiliation, suffering, and death. Jesus prayed that the cup might be removed if it were possible. In John 12:27, Jesus had said, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.” He said this about a week before the ordeal of Gethsemane (John 12:1). Jesus was already under great emotional strain at the time. Already the thought had occurred to Him to pray for deliverance. However, He knew not how that could be reconciled with God’s eternal purpose.¹⁷

In the garden, Jesus expressed His heart’s desire to God to remove the cup of suffering. Yet, it was not possible. There was no other way. He then said, “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” There were two wills—His and the Father’s. Which would He follow? Oh, how the Devil must have tempted Him on this occasion to turn from the awful task before Him! The conflict was real. Yet He prayed, “not my will, but thine be done.”

In the second and third prayers, the words are slightly different. Jesus knew what the Father's will was. He had surrendered His will to the Father's will. So in the second prayer He said, "O Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." See His faithfulness? He would be faithful to do God's will. He would submit, perfectly and totally, to the will of God. God's intentions were clear. Jesus submitted His will to the will of Father.

Again, the words of Hebrews 5:8-9 have application to this event: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." The Lord learned obedience. This does not imply that He was ever disobedient. Rather, He submitted Himself and His will to the will of the Father: "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). Christ learned obedience through suffering. Why did Jesus suffer? Jesus suffered to fulfill the message of the prophets (Isa. 53:1-12). He suffered to qualify Himself as a merciful High Priest (Heb. 2:17-18). He suffered because there was no other way to atone for the sin of lost humanity (1 Pet. 2:21-25). But what would that cost? It would cost Him His very life. He would have to go from Gethsemane to Golgotha, and then to the grave. That was an awful journey, but His faithfulness would require it.

Jesus learned obedience by the things which He suffered. If Christ needed to learn obedience, to submit to the Father's will humbly, what about us? Would the "faith only" people say Christ was faithful without obedience? How could they?

The Garden of Gethsemane was a painful place, but visiting there by faith from time to time can be a most

profitable thing for us to do. Studying about it and singing good hymns concerning it should refresh our minds with the mental as well as physical suffering that our Lord endured for us. He obeyed, so that we might obey and be saved. Is the Lord disappointed in your weakness to serve Him as He desires?

When my love to Christ grows weak, when for deeper faith I seek, then in thought I go to thee, Garden of Gethsemane...Then to life I turn again, Learning all the worth of pain. Learning all the might that lies, in a full self-sacrifice.¹⁸

He gave His life for you. The selfless Savior remains concerned about you. He is as concerned about people now as He was in the upper room. Give your life, your all to Him today.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 5

What Jesus Said At His Arrest And Trials

Paul Meacham, Jr.

Introduction

I *WOULD BE REMISS IF* I did not take a moment to say thank you to the elders of the Southaven congregation and to B. J. Clarke for the kind invitation to be a part of this great lectureship and to have a small part in this volume. You brethren are very near to my heart. You have been a supportive and loving blessing to my family and me since we placed our membership with you in 1987. Although we moved away in the summer of 1999, you have never been out of our thoughts and prayers. I thank God for you wonderful brethren, expecting the influence of your good works to be felt in this world for many years and among the redeemed for eternity.

I can think of no greater pursuit than a study of the words that issued from our Savior's lips. We know His words to be truth (1 Sam. 15:29; John 17:17; Heb. 6:17-18; Tit. 1:2).¹ We know His words to show the path to life (John 6:33; John 6:68; John 12:49-50). We know His words will always prevail (Luke 21:33; 1 Pet. 1:23-25). We know His words will be our standard of judgment on the last day (John 12:48; Rom. 2:16). Knowing these things, it behooves us to dedicate ourselves to a study of His words so that we might know the truth, follow the path to life, and thereby

be able to stand before Him approved in judgment as a faithful servant. While all that Jesus said is important, in this chapter we will limit ourselves to His words from the time that He was arrested in the garden until He was hanged on the cross to die.

Jesus Arrested In The Garden

“He That Betrayeth Me Is At Hand”

On the same evening in which He was betrayed, Jesus ate what we commonly refer to as the Last Supper. He and His disciples retired to the Garden of Gethsemane for a period of prayer. Mark records that, after Jesus had, a third time, prayed that the cup of suffering might pass from Him, He, for the third time, found the disciples asleep. Knowing all that He was about to endure, Jesus stirred His followers by saying, “the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand” (Mark 14:41-42). With these words Jesus both accentuated His humanity and demonstrated His Deity.

Notice that He referred to Himself as “the Son of man.” The writer of Hebrews commented on the events of this night as occurring “in the days of his flesh” (Heb. 5:7). When He had existed in the form of God (Phil. 2:6), He was spirit only and had no flesh to be assailed. But now, by referring to Himself as “the Son of man,” He accentuates the fact that He had been made flesh (John 1:14). It is important for us that Jesus endured His suffering **as a man**. Peter tells us, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). That example is all the more powerful because it was given by the suffering “Son of man,” Who was subject to all the same physical pains and weaknesses as we.

Jesus demonstrated His Deity by expressing His foreknowledge of the role that Judas would play in His betrayal. Jesus knew what was ahead of Him because all these things were done “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). Jesus had earlier told Judas that He knew he would betray Him (John 13:21-27), but the other disciples did not know (John 13:28-29). Jesus now informs them that Judas is coming for the express purpose of betraying Him.

We also see how easy it would have been for our Lord to simply avoid those who came for Him. However, Jesus knew that the “fulness of time” had come (Gal. 4:4-5). He had prayed that this cup might pass from Him, but He had also prayed that the Father’s will be done (Matt. 26:42). Our Savior’s actions show that this was no idle prayer. He was fully committed to the path that the Father laid before Him.

“Whom Seek Ye?”

Since the place in the garden where Jesus chose to pray was well known to Judas (John 18:2), the arresting party easily found the Master. Matthew tells us that Judas led a “great multitude with swords and staves” (Matt. 26:47) to confront the Messiah. I imagine that most of us would think first of running from such a scene. Jesus, however, “knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?” (John 18:4).

The next time some skeptic refers to Genesis 3:9 and asks, “If God knows everything why did He have to ask the hidden Adam where he was?” remember John 18:4. John tells us that Jesus asked the question, “Whom seek ye?” even though He knew “all things that should come upon him.” When Jesus asked, “Whom seek ye?” it was for the benefit of the men around Him, not because He needed

information. The question protected His disciples because it made it possible for Jesus to clearly identify Himself to the mob. Since He was their prey, and He was not trying to evade them, He could reason with them that the disciples should be left with both freedom and safety (John 18:8-9). The question should have benefited the mob as well by causing those pursuing Him to think about what they were doing and why they were doing it. Were they seeking a murderer or a thief? Were they in pursuit of a vicious and violent man? Clearly the answer was no! They were in pursuit of the Lamb (John 1:29).

While on the earth, the Lord was often pursued. He was sought by those who would worship Him (Matt. 2:2), those who wanted to kill Him (Matt. 2:13-15), those who desired healing for themselves or their loved ones (Matt. 15:22), those who desired eternal life (Matt. 19:16), and some who just wanted a free meal (John 6:26). The pursuit of our Lord on this night shows that some sought Him for the purpose of harming Him. Today we face an ever-growing population whose only interest in God's Word and His church is to demean and belittle them.

"I Am He"

Before we leave this garden scene, let us be sure that we are not fooled into forgetting the power of the Son of God. If we are not careful, we might mistakenly see Jesus as their prisoner, one who was swept away by overpowering forces. By advancing on the mob and initiating contact with them, Jesus shows that He was in charge. In John 10:11, Jesus proclaimed, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd **giveth** his life for the sheep" (emp. mine throughout, PM). Just a few verses later, Jesus said,

Therefore doth my Father love me, because **I lay down my life**, that I might take it again.
No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down

of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again (John 10:17-18).

If we see Jesus as a helpless captive, we are wrong.

Jesus' great power and His absolute control of the situation are clearly seen in the mob's reaction to His identifying Himself to them. In response to His question, "Whom seek ye?" they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth" (John 18:5). When Jesus then identified Himself by saying, "I am he," John records that "they went backward, and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). Some believe they were struck down miraculously by "the glorious effulgence of the majesty of Christ which overpowered them."² Others attribute their reaction to purely natural causes, such as the combination of Christ's "bold exhibition of innocence" and their "fear and awe,"³ concluding that "There is no proof that there was here any miraculous power, any mere physical force, and to suppose that there was greatly detracts from the moral sublimity of the scene."⁴ While the text does not emphatically tell us whether this was miraculous, what is beyond debate is that Jesus was the One in control. If He chose not to go, they could not take Him. All that He endured, He suffered willingly.

"Do That For Which Thou Art Come"

While being arrested, Jesus addressed two men personally. As Judas approached to deliver his poisonous kiss, Jesus asked him, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). The wise man had long ago written by inspiration, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:6). Judas here forever binds his name to all that is deceitful and dishonest. Matthew tells us that Jesus told Judas to "do that for which thou art come" (Matt. 26:50, ASV). I find it ironic that, just a few hours earlier, Jesus told His Father in prayer that He had finished the work He had

been sent to do (John 17:4), and, therefore, He expected the Father to glorify Him (John 17:5). Jesus came with a mission, and man rejected Him (John 5:43). Judas came with a mission, and a great multitude followed to help him.

“Shall I Not Drink It?”

The other man whom Jesus addressed personally was Peter. Always ready to speak when others were silent, to act when others waited, Peter drew his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. However good intentioned this act may have been, Jesus told Peter, “Put up again thy sword into his place” (Matt. 26:52).

Jesus then gave Peter three reasons that he should not have drawn his sword: “all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matt. 26:52). There is an inherent danger in living a life of violence. Those who serve our country in the armed forces and those who protect our communities by enforcing their laws take upon themselves countless dangers. While we thank and praise those who thus serve, that is not the life to which Peter was called. Second, Jesus said, “the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Jesus had prayed that the Father’s will should be done, and now He proves the fidelity of His humility by willingly taking the cup that could not pass from Him. As the great old Crosby and Kirkpatrick hymn proclaims, “A wonderful savior is Jesus my Lord, a wonderful savior to me.” Finally, Jesus reminded Peter of the protection that was His if He should but call for it: “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Matt. 26:53-54). Peter did not have the power to stop them from taking Jesus, but he was

willing to kill some of them in a futile attempt. Jesus had the power to deliver Himself and kill all of them, but He was not willing that they should die, physically or spiritually. His desire for man has not changed. This same Peter later wrote:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Our Savior's great love for His Father and for lost man caused Him to submit to this band. Properly identifying that night as belonging to them and to the power of darkness (Luke 22:53), Jesus went as a sheep to the shearers (Isa. 53:7). To satisfy Isaiah's prophecy, it was necessary that Jesus be both arrested and tried (Isa. 53:8). When "the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him" (John 18:12), they satisfied the first part of that prophecy, making Him their prisoner. When they "led him away to Annas" (John 18:13), they began the first of six trials that fulfilled the second part of Isaiah's prophecy. On that dark night our Lord received judgment, but He did not receive justice.

Trial Before Annas

"Ask Them That Have Heard Me"

God ordained the office of the high priest and anointed Aaron as the first (Exod. 29:1-7). When it was time for Aaron to die, his office, by Jehovah's instruction, was passed to his son Eleazar. Eleazar's son, Phinehas, distinguished himself as a zealous follower of God's commands, and, as a result, God chose him to succeed Eleazar and established the high priesthood perpetually in his family (Num. 25:1-13).

According to the Mosaic Covenant, Annas was the rightful high priest of the Jews. However, the high priest's office, like all other parts of Judaism, had come under Roman control. Annas served as high priest from about 7 AD until about 15 AD, when Valerius Gratus, the Roman procurator, deposed him.⁵ Annas was powerful enough and politically astute enough to bring five sons and one son-in-law, Caiaphas, to this lofty position.

The Jews, however, continued to respect and honor Annas as the high priest. When Peter and John were brought before the council the first time, we see that **“Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem”** (Acts 4:6). It was because of this high respect and the authority that Annas still wielded as the rightful high priest that Jesus was brought first to him.

Annas used this time of pre-trial examination to question Jesus about “his disciples, and of his doctrine” (John 18:19). Jesus answered these queries by saying:

I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said (John 18:20-21).

It is true that Jesus did sometimes speak in private (Luke 9:10), but not for the purpose of concealing His doctrine (Matt. 10:27).⁶ His message was widely known and was ultimately for the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 5:20). However, there is more to Jesus' answer than just telling Annas where he could get the information he desired.

It was not lawful to try a Jew at night.⁷ It was not lawful to question the accused before the trial. It was not even lawful to question the accused during the trial!

Witnesses, who also acted as prosecutors, were to present the charges and bring the evidence. Those sitting in judgment were to ensure that the testimony of the witnesses agreed and that the accused was treated fairly. By telling Annas that he should ask those who heard Him preach, Jesus was, with powerful subtlety, chastising the high priest for these violations.

That Jesus' rebuke was clearly understood is seen in the actions of one of the officers standing by. This man struck Jesus for His answer. Physical abuse of the accused was also unlawful, but Annas took no steps to fulfill his duty and protect the accused. Instead, Jesus speaks to this officer and chastises him as well. Jesus told him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John 18:23). If Jesus had done wrong by offering such a reply to the high priest, the officer should have brought that charge against Him and offered testimony to that effect. Instead, we find servant and master both guilty of the same crime. Whether lowly servant or lofty high priest, Jesus dealt with each man's error the same way. He pointed out to both what they did wrong and what they should have done. Receiving no satisfaction for his efforts, Annas sends Jesus to Caiaphas, the *de facto* high priest.

Trial Before Caiaphas

"Coming On The Clouds Of Heaven"

Caiaphas, the man in whose hands our Lord's fate apparently rested, had already concluded that Jesus should die. As many believed on Jesus following the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the council convened to discuss the political ramifications of Jesus' making disciples *en masse*. Caiaphas had advised, "it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). It is into these prejudiced hands that our Master now falls.

In addition to Caiaphas, we find that the “chief priests and the elders and the scribes” (Mark 14:53) had also gathered. This is Mark’s way of saying that the Sanhedrin Council had come together, as he explicitly states in Mark 14:55. The Great Sanhedrin was comprised of twenty-three each: priests (religious leaders), scribes (legal experts), and elders (respected men of the community). The addition of two presiding officers, one of whom was the high priest who served as the council’s president, completed the seventy-one-member council. By gathering at night, this council came together in violation of the law. The lesser Sanhedrin councils could conduct business only after the morning sacrifice and until noon. The Greater Sanhedrin, which presided in Jerusalem, could only hear a matter after the morning sacrifice and had to cease before the evening sacrifice. Acts 4:3 tells us that, when Peter and John were taken in the temple, “they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: **for it was now eventide.**” In the case of our Lord, they were so eager, and the Sabbath day was so near, that they illegally gathered at night.

The council’s chosen gathering time well suited their evil intentions. They did not come together to administer justice swiftly. They did not convene to ensure fairness. Rather, they “sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death” (Matt. 26:59). The keepers of justice had come to administer murder.

As one false witness after another was paraded before the council, “Jesus held His peace” (Matt. 26:63). In fact, Jesus did not address this body in any way until Caiaphas, the high priest, compelled Him by the living God to answer under oath (Matt. 26:63). Placing one under oath accomplished two things. It required the person to speak the truth, and it forbade him from remaining silent if he had information germane to the issue at hand (Lev. 5:1). I

imagine Caiaphas thought he had placed Jesus in the perfect dilemma:

If he CONFESSED that he was the Son of God, they stood ready to condemn him for 'blasphemy;' if he denied it, they were prepared to condemn him for being an impostor, and for deluding the people under the pretence of being the Messiah.⁸

Jesus replied, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). That the phrase "thou hast said" is an affirmative answer is easily demonstrated. First, it is the exact same answer that Jesus gave Judas when Judas had asked if he was the one who would betray Him (Matt. 26:25). Furthermore, Mark records His answer as simply, "I am" (Mark 14:62). But Jesus did much more than just affirm that He was the Messiah. By announcing that He would be seated on the right hand of power and that he would come in the clouds of heaven, He tied Himself to the prophecies of Psalms 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14. To this Jewish council, the message was clear. Jesus was claiming that he would one day be both King and Judge. At this point Caiaphas rent his clothes, a violation of Leviticus 21:10; pronounced Jesus guilty of blasphemy; and called for a guilty verdict against Him (Matt. 26:65-66).

"And The Lord Turned And Looked On Peter"

It might seem strange to include in a volume entitled "The **Sayings** of Jesus" an event in which Jesus did not speak. However, I believe we can learn a powerful lesson regarding the things Jesus has said and how we should regard them. During the trial at Caiaphas' house, Peter was in the courtyard sitting among the servants and officers of the high priest (John 18:18). Three times on that

dark night Peter was asked if he was a disciple of Jesus. Three times he lied and denied the Savior. Luke tells us that, when he had fulfilled the Lord's prophecy by denying Him a third time, Jesus "turned, and looked upon" him (Luke 22:61). Without speaking a single word, our Master brought to Peter's mind the warning that He had given earlier and thereby convicted Peter of his sin. Mark tells us that, because of this look, "Peter **called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him**, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mark 14:72).

Many today want to hear the Lord speak to them in some direct, personal, mysterious way. They find the words of the Christ, as revealed in the Bible, insufficient. They constantly go about searching for some special sign, vision, or nudge from Jesus or the Holy Spirit. On this occasion Jesus spoke no new words to Peter. There was no need. Jesus had already said everything to Peter that needed to be said on the matter. Peter's reaction shows us that, even without additional revelation, the words that Jesus had already spoken were powerful. The words that Jesus has given to us in the Bible are powerful. Let us all pray that every vain search for additional Divine guidance will be abandoned and that those efforts will be exerted in the noble pursuit of searching the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

Formal Trial Before The Sanhedrin

"If I Tell You, Ye Will Not Believe And If I Ask You, Ye Will Not Answer"

Having elicited a unanimous declaration of guilt, the officers and servants of the council began to mock, beat, and spit upon our loving Lord. As sport, they blindfolded Him and slapped him, "Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" (Matt. 26:68). Denying

His Deity, they believed that He could not see them and would not know them. Sometimes we live our lives under the same misconception. We wrongly conclude that, since man cannot see the evil we have done, God must also be blind to it. Jesus knows who struck Him on that night, and He knows everything I do. There is a day coming when all deeds will be made known (1 Tim. 5:24-25).

This physical abuse apparently continued until dawn: “And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council” (Luke 22:66). This marks the official, formal trial of our Lord before the Jews. All that had come before it was unlawful and should have assured His acquittal. Now, to provide an appearance of propriety, Jesus is again brought before the council: “The Talmudic tradition names ‘the hall of hewn stone,’ which, according to Middoth 5:4, was on the south side of the great court, as the seat of the Great Sanhedrin.”⁹ Into this hall Jesus is ushered, even as they “took counsel against Jesus to put him to death” (Matt. 27:1).

In this trial no witnesses were called, as the judges took on themselves the additional roles of accusers and prosecutors. They questioned Jesus by saying, “Art thou the Christ? tell us” (Luke 22:67). Jesus, knowing they had already determined what they were going to do, replied, “If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go” (Luke 22:67-68). It was not necessary that a judge believe everything an accused said before him. However, when Jesus said, “And if I ask you, ye will not answer me,” He was accusing them of being unfair, unreasonable, and prejudiced. Witnesses should have been present to bring the charges and present the evidence against Him. If the testimony given was not firsthand knowledge of the charge in question, it should have been legally considered “vain testimony” and deemed

“wholly immaterial and irrelevant.” If the testimony claimed to be firsthand knowledge of the wrong for which Jesus stood accused, it should have been legally considered “standing testimony” which would “have been conditionally admitted and to have been allowed to remain in evidence until it was properly confirmed by and joined to other evidence which the law required.” Only after corroborating testimony had been offered could the witness’ assertions be considered “adequate testimony.”¹⁰

At any point in the testimony, Jesus should have had the right to answer, either pointing out inaccuracies in the testimony or explaining what the witnesses saw and the import of it. When Jesus said, “if I ask you, ye will not answer me,” He was publicly confronting the Sanhedrin with their unwillingness to consider the charges and evidence and come to a fair and impartial decision.

Having thus charged the council, Jesus again acknowledged that He is the Son of God. To which the council replied, “What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth” (Luke 22:71). In this statement the council admits that they have no evidence except Jesus’ own statement.

In America a confession of guilt is considered sufficient to condemn a man. However, under Jewish law, an accused man’s “confession of guilt was accepted in evidence and considered in connection with other facts of the case, but was never permitted, standing alone, to form the basis of a conviction.”¹¹

Ignoring this rule of evidence, as they had others, the council condemned Jesus of being a blasphemer, a crime punishable by death. Being subjugated to the Romans and therefore unable to carry out such a sentence on their own, “the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate” (Luke 23:1).

First Appearance Before Pilate

“Sayest Thou This Of Thyself, Or Did Others Tell It Thee Concerning Me?”

Pilate was no friend of the Jews. Tiberius appointed him Procurator of Judea in 27 AD, making him the most powerful representative of the Jews’ oppressors in all the Promised Land. Additionally, Pilate had offended the Jews by “moving the headquarters of his army from Caesarea to Jerusalem,” by hanging “in his palace on Mt. Zion golden shields inscribed with the names of deities,” and by taking “the revenue of the Temple, arising from the redemption of vows, for the building of an aqueduct.”¹² Additionally, we must consider the report that was given to Jesus “of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices” (Luke 13:1). We know that the Galilaeans had the reputation of being troublemakers and that there was strife between Pilate and Herod, who was Tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1; Luke 23:12). Apparently these Galilaeans were in Jerusalem and in the very act of offering their sacrifices when, for some unreported reason, Pilate slaughtered them. For them to have been so struck down that their own blood mixed with the blood of their sacrifices was an act of desecration and a great offense to the Jews. Yet, as they say, politics makes strange bedfellows.

Jesus was taken to the Praetorium to be judged by Pilate. The Jews, however, refused to enter, lest they defile themselves when the Passover was at hand. Therefore, Pilate comes out to determine from the Jews what accusation they were bringing against Jesus. The Jews leveled a threefold charge “saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King” (Luke 23:2). The first of these charges was highly subjective, as some might judge one’s actions to be subversive while

others would find in them salvation. The second charge was an outright lie. Jesus had directly addressed that very matter in His public teaching and had instructed, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21; cf. Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25). The third charge was true in a sense, but not in the sense they conveyed: “This third charge, coupled with the other two, was intended to convey a sense which was maliciously false.”¹³

After hearing the charges leveled, Pilate entered the hall and addressed Jesus by asking Him, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” (Luke 23:3). Jesus gave Pilate a two-pronged answer. First, He directly answered, “Thou sayest” (Luke 23:3). Pilate apparently knew this Hebrew idiom meaning, “you have said it because it is true.” Jesus then appealed to Pilate’s reasoning by asking, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?” (John 18:34). It was impossible for Jesus to have been a king in the sense the Jews intimated and for Pilate to have been unaware of Him. If Pilate had to be told that the beaten, wretched man before him was a king, it was certain that this king was no threat to himself or his emperor.

“My Kingdom Is Not Of This World”

Jesus then explained:

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:36-37).

Here, Jesus concisely explained the nature of His kingdom; offered proof that it was no military threat; and identified

His subjects as those who are of the Truth, those who hear His voice. How tragic it is that, with this great mystery unveiled before him, Pilate could only blindly reply, "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

Pilate then took Jesus out of the hall and declared to the Jews that Jesus was innocent. The Jews, fearing He might yet slip through their fingers, became "the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place" (Luke 23:5). Upon learning that Jesus was a Galilaean, Pilate sent Him to stand before Herod, who had also come to Jerusalem for the feast days.

Jesus Before Herod

"Not A Word"

This is the second time in our study of things Jesus said that we consider an event in which Jesus did not speak at all. Herod was not interested in judging Jesus. Herod was not interested in doing what was right. In fact, every time that Herod is mentioned in the Bible, it is because of some evil he did. Not once is he even mentioned in a neutral way. Herod had heard about Jesus, and he wanted Him to perform for him. Jesus would not. Therefore, Herod returned him to Pilate.

Before Pilate Again

"He That Delivered Me Unto Thee Hath Greater Sin"

Pilate already knew and had declared that Jesus was innocent. Therefore, upon Jesus' return to him, Pilate tries to convince the Jews to accept something less than death. Pilate pointed out a second time that he found no fault in Jesus and that Herod had found nothing worthy of death in Him (Luke 23:14-15). Pilate tried to appeal to their sense

of right by offering to release either Jesus, an innocent man, or Barabbas, a subversive, thieving murderer. The Jews wanted Jesus killed and Barabbas released. Pilate then sent Jesus to the soldiers who scourged Him, beat Him with their hands, put a crown of thorns on Him, and, for spite, dressed Him in a purple robe. Pilate then tried to appeal to the Jews' sense of compassion by bringing out the bloody and beaten Jesus, saying in effect, Is this not enough punishment for an innocent man to bear? The Jews had no compassion and renewed their demands that Jesus should be put to death, amending their original charges to include blasphemy (John 19:7). Through all this torture Jesus spoke not a word.

When Pilate heard that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, he became afraid (John 19:8). This time when he questioned, Jesus would not answer. There was no reason to answer. Pilate knew He was innocent and had so declared three times already. It was clear that Pilate was not going to do the right thing and release Jesus. Pilate, however, did not like being ignored and said:

Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin (John 19:10-11).

All sin is equally great in the sense that any sin will separate us from the Father and cause us to be lost. However, Jesus tells Pilate not that he is blameless, but that those who had delivered Him were committing the greater sin. It is a case of much being given and therefore much being expected (Luke 12:47-48). Jehovah had singled out and made a covenant with the Jews. He gave to them His Law and was at this very time fulfilling to them His

promise of bringing through them a Savior. Truly, God had given them much: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1-2). Israel abandoned this great trust, leaving themselves without excuse (Rom. 2:1).

Pilate knew that it was wrong to kill the man before him (Matt. 27:18). He had been warned by his wife not to have anything to do with Jesus (Matt. 27:19). The Jews, however, would not be swayed:

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it (Matt. 27:24).

This is the fourth time that Pilate declared Jesus' innocence. In doing so he also declared himself to be innocent, but he was not. He had the power to release Jesus, but, "willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified" (Mark 15:15).

So ends the trials of our Lord. Through all that He endured He spoke not a single word of anger, hatred, malice, or revenge. Though He could have, He neither defended nor delivered Himself. Knowing all that He endured, consider the warning Jesus gave as He was being led to Calvary:

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? (Luke 23:28-31)

As bad as the things were that they were seeing, Jesus warned that there was coming a day of even greater calamity for them. Because this warning was issued to the “daughters of Jerusalem,” and because these warnings were of the same nature as those given in Matthew 24, and because the Romans, those who were marching Him to Golgotha, were identified as the ones who will “do these things,” I believe this was a final warning of the destruction that came upon the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The Romans were likened to a fire that devours, and the Jewish economy was likened to a tree. As Jesus, the Branch of Jesse, walked to Calvary, the Jews were God’s chosen people with a Covenant and a Law. Yet the Romans were destroying Jewish freedoms and devouring Israel’s children, even the Prince of Glory. How much greater would the consuming fire of Rome be when the church had been established and physical Israel was no longer a lithe and green tree but one that was withered and dry!

A Few Lessons

God Expects Me To Use My Brain

When Jesus commanded Peter to put away his sword, He gave him three logical reasons why they should not attempt to fight off the mob. When Annas began to question Him, Jesus logically pointed out that what Annas was doing was unlawful. When before the Sanhedrin, Jesus chastised them for being unwilling to logically consider whether there was sufficient evidence to substantiate the charges against Him, and His claim that He was the Christ. When Pilate questioned Him, Jesus appealed to Pilate’s reasoning to prove that He was not a political king, as the Jews had implied.

God expects us to deal with Him rationally. To apostate Israel the invitation was offered: “Come now, and

let us reason together, saith the LORD” (Isa. 1:18). Jesus, in teaching repentance, began the parable of the two sons by asking, “But **what think ye?**” (Matt. 21:28). While among the Jews in Thessalonica, “Paul, as his manner was...**reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging...**that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:2-3). Paul reasoned with the men of Athens that, based on what we can observe in mankind, “**we ought not to think** that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (Acts 17:29). The writer of the book of Hebrews proves that Jesus is superior to the angels of heaven in Hebrews 1:4-14. He then opens chapter two by reasoning:

[W]e ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation (Heb. 2:1-3).

James pointed out that “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing,” and then reasoned:

My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh (Jas. 3:10-12).

Clearly God has always persuaded man by appealing to his intellect and requiring him to make rational choices based on evidence. It was in this very spirit that Peter described to us the total destruction that awaits this world, and then, appealing to our reason, asked, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and

godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11). Those who approach religion by abandoning logic, reasoning, and rational conclusions, in favor of the warm, fuzzy feelings of pseudo-spirituality, are casting aside the very avenue through which God calls them (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14).

The Devil Made Me Do It—God Made Me Do It

In the 1960’s, the comedian Flip Wilson created a character named Geraldine. This character was constantly doing something she should not, and when confronted would invariably defend herself by saying, “The devil made me do it.” Today, perpetrators of evil have come full circle and are blaming God for their perversions and deviances. Those who have chosen the vile life of homosexuality sometimes defend themselves by claiming that God made them the way they are. Therefore, it is God’s fault. To prove this assertion, some have pointed to the Scriptures, claiming that the Bible offers one of the oldest records of homosexual practices, and God’s ancient knowledge of these passions shows He is their originator. In effect they are saying, “God made me do it.”

From the Bible we learn that God did not originate homosexuality; He condemned it. Paul wrote to the Romans concerning those who had “changed the truth of God into a lie” (Rom. 1:25). That they had done so was manifested in their deeds:

for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

God calls homosexuality unseemly and unnatural.

God's knowledge of an event does not mean that God approves of it or caused it to happen. In the garden, Jesus awakened His disciples by saying, "the Son of man is betrayed into **the hands of sinners**" (Mark 14:41). The events of that night were foreknown and foreordered by God (Acts 2:23). Yet the ones committing those acts were judged by our Master to be sinners. Yes, it was necessary that Jesus be betrayed, arrested, tried, and crucified, "but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born" (Mark 14:21).

Those who came for Jesus on that night were sinners—not because the devil made them do it, and not because God made them do it. They were sinners because they chose to do that which was wrong. Today, it is certain that there will be evil and wrong in the world. God knows that is the case: "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matt. 18:7). The devil cannot make you do wrong, and God will not make you do wrong. The choice is yours alone.

Twelve Legions Of Angels

Often, especially during times of temptation, we draw great assurance from the fact that we have a High Priest in heaven Who knows how we feel, One Who was tempted in every way we are tempted, and yet He overcame, never having sinned (Heb. 4:14-15). But did you ever consider that Jesus was tempted in ways that you and I are not (and cannot be) tempted?

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted (Matt. 4; Mark 1; Luke 4). One of the temptations came to Jesus as the devil quoted Scripture to Him:

If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone (Matt. 4:6).

Notice, Jesus did not correct the devil's quotation of the passage, only his application of it. The angels were at hand and ready to protect the Christ. Jesus knew that, and even reminded Peter of the fact, as He was submitting to arrest. How strong would the temptation be for us, if we knew we could call down twelve legions of angels to protect and defend us? That is a question I cannot answer, but it is a temptation that was always with the Messiah.

Conclusion

For the greater part of Jesus' life of earth, we have no record of His actions or words. Yet these approximately twelve hours leading to the cross are recorded for us in minute detail. The Almighty clearly wanted us to know and remember what was done for us. Our sin cost a great price. Let us keep ever before us the great price that was paid and the tremendous love that paid it:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

2 **Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary**, PC Study Bible, Version 3.0 (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft, 1997).

3 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary On The Gospel According To John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989), p. 371.

4 Albert Barnes, **Barnes' Notes**, PC Study Bible, Version 3.0, (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1997), comments on John 18:6.

5 **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, PC Study Bible, Version 3.0, (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1996), article on Annas.

6 J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth), pp. 694-695.

7 Walter M. Chandler, **The Trial of Jesus** (Atlanta: Harrison Company, 1908), p. 137.

8 Barnes, comments on Matt. 26:63.

9 **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, article on the Sanhedrin.

10 Chandler, p. 79.

11 Ibid, p. 76.

12 **The New Unger's Bible Dictionary**, PC Study Bible, Version 3.0, (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 1996), article on Pilate.

13 McGarvey and Pendleton, p. 705.

CHAPTER 6

What Jesus Said From The Cross (Part One)

Billy Bland

Introduction

M*Y APPRECIATION IS EXTENDED* to the elders of the Southaven congregation, brethren Larry Everson, Con Lambert, and Bill Pierce, and also to the Director of the **POWER** Lectures, brother B. J. Clarke, for the invitation to be a part of this, the 10th Annual **POWER** Lectureship. The books from this lectureship and the previous lectureships are a worthy addition to any library.

Jesus Christ was (and is) the Master Teacher. Since Jesus Christ is God, and “never man spake like this man” (John 7:46), we should listen closely to every word stated by Him! Let us remember that only He has “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). What Jesus said is vitally important!

The cross of Christ is the center of the Bible. Ever since man sinned at the dawn of creation, the Bible started pointing toward the cross of Christ for man’s redemption (Gen. 3:15). Jesus’ blood that was shed on the cross reaches backward to Adam and Eve, and forward until the end of time:

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were

under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15).

Jesus Christ tasted death for every man: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the cross of Christ. The Hebrews writer noted: “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). Since the cross of Christ is the center or focal point of the Bible, what Jesus said while He was on the cross is extremely noteworthy.

The Cross Of Christ

In one sense the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the saddest event that has ever transpired; yet, in another sense, it is the greatest blessing that has ever been given to fallen man. One should be struck with awe by the tremendous courage that Jesus displayed by enduring the cross. Imagine if it were **you** that was about to be abused and then nailed to the cross and left there until you were dead. Imagine also that you had the ability to avoid the awful suffering and shame that you would have to endure if you allowed men to transfix you to the cross. Then imagine also that, as you were hanging there, nailed to the cross, your dear mother was there beholding your agony. Would you go through with it? Jesus knew what He was facing, yet courageously went forward to the cross: “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).

The suffering and the death of Jesus Christ on the cross were real. He was 100% Deity, but He was also 100%

human. Jesus would feel pain and suffering just as any other human. One cannot imagine the intensity of the suffering that must have been associated with the cross. Also, Jesus' death on the cross was abnormal in that He did not deserve to die. He never had sinned, yet He was treated as though He were a vile criminal. As Isaiah noted, "He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Isa. 53:8). Jesus' judgment was taken away from Him. The whole ordeal of a mock trial, etc., was a sham. Even Pilate acknowledged that he found no fault in Him: "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him" (John 19:6). Although men were trying to accomplish their evil deed in killing Jesus, unwittingly, they were fulfilling the Scriptures. Jesus' death was predetermined! It was according to the **foreknowledge of God**. On Pentecost, Peter proclaimed, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). And, though man was attempting to kill Jesus, in reality, He Himself laid down His own life:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:17-18).

**Father, Forgive Them;
For They Know Not What They Do**

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). It is amazing that the first recorded

statement from Jesus on the cross was a prayer for those that were crucifying Him. It is important to note the word **“then”** in the above text. The word “then” shows Jesus’ reaction to man’s horrible deed. Note the previous verse in this connection: “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left” (Luke 23:33). Think about what all had just happened. Christ had been falsely arrested, tried, mocked, scourged, spit upon, and crucified. “Then” (after man had done his worst), Christ prayed for their forgiveness! Jesus did not call fire down from heaven to devour the miserable murderers. He didn’t even pray for angels to come and aid Him in some way. He prayed, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The Messianic prophet Isaiah had prophesied that Jesus would make intercession for the transgressor:

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:12).

Jesus’ suffering and dying on the cross show the enormity of sin and its consequences. If sin were just a small matter, Jesus would not have had to die on the cross. However, God, knowing the consequence of sin, sent Jesus to this earth to die on the cross to meet the justice of His law. God didn’t simply overlook sin. Someone had to pay the penalty, and that someone was Jesus. At the cross is where God’s justice and mercy met. Paul explains:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:23-26).

Jesus' prayer for those who crucified Him clearly demonstrates **how much** God desires to forgive us. This is a most encouraging thought! Sometimes Christians (even those who are among the most dedicated) seem to doubt whether or not they are saved. How often do we sing "Blessed Assurance," only to secretly wonder whether or not we are saved? This statement from the cross shows that God wants us to go to heaven even more than we want to go to heaven! God would not send His Son to the cross and then make it impossible for us to be saved. Christians can know that they are saved. Paul wrote, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). Likewise John stated:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:3-4).

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13).

God desires each one of us to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), and has made salvation possible for every man (Heb. 2:9). All we have to do is be obedient to His will so that His grace and mercy may affect our salvation. Christ is the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

This statement from the cross shows that Jesus personally practiced what He taught. Jesus taught:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:43-45).

Here at the cross, Jesus put into practice what He had previously taught. All of Jesus' works were in complete harmony with His Words (cf. Acts 1:1).

Jesus stated that those crucifying Him did not know what they were doing. Later, Peter said, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17). It is obvious that these people knew that they were crucifying someone. However, in their ignorance, they did not know that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God. They did not realize the enormity of their sin.

Although they were ignorant, they were not innocent. Spiritual ignorance is not bliss. Though ignorant, they still needed forgiveness. Some people sin ignorantly, not knowing their sin, and others sin with their eyes wide open. Both, however, need forgiveness. One might drink deadly poison ignorantly and another may drink it intentionally. However, the end result is the same if they don't seek the remedy.

Did God immediately forgive all these who crucified Jesus? Did He forgive them even if they did not repent? The answer is found in Acts chapter 2. On the Day of Pentecost, some 50 days after this event, Peter preached to the very ones who were guilty of crucifying Jesus. He proclaimed, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know

assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The record continues by stating:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:37-38).

They were told to repent and be baptized. Obviously, they were in sin and now had opportunity to obtain the forgiveness of sins in Christ. The text reveals, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Mankind has to be a willing participant in his salvation. While God desires our salvation, He doesn’t save us against our will.

Another encouraging characteristic of forgiveness is that sin, any sin, when it is forgiven, is forgotten! Some may feel as though their sin is such that God will not forgive it. However, God forgave the murderers of His Son, and He will forgive any sin of which we repent. Once this sin is forgiven it is forgotten. The Hebrews writer penned these words, first spoken by the inspired prophet Jeremiah: “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12). How great a statement: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

**Verily I Say Unto Thee,
Today Shalt Thou Be With Me In Paradise**

The second recorded statement from Jesus is found in the context of Jesus’ being crucified between two thieves.

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise (Luke 23:39-43).

Some 700 years before this event, Isaiah had prophesied, “he was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). Jesus fulfilled prophecy by being crucified between two thieves. These two thieves represent two distinct attitudes toward the Christ and salvation. One had a hardened heart that reviled against Christ even in death, and the other a penitent heart looking to Christ for salvation. The penitent thief could see his hopeless and terrible spiritual condition. He fully recognized that he was receiving just punishment for his crimes. He also recognized his need of salvation from sin. He threw himself completely upon the mercy of Jesus. He obviously knew that Jesus was the Christ, and he knew something about the kingdom of Christ. This shows that he, in some way, had come into contact with the teachings of the Messiah. He was most likely an erring Jew. Believing in the saviorhood and Kingship of Jesus, he humbled himself and simply said to Jesus; “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Jesus’ comforting reply was, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” These words not only gave comfort to the penitent thief, but offered hope to mankind today. Here one sees Christ’s willingness to save one, even if it is in the last moments of one’s life. This man, at this point, could do nothing but repent of his transgressions and ask Christ to pardon him.

Some misuse this account of salvation in an attempt to detour around the Bible teaching of baptism “for the

remission of sins” (cf. Acts 2:38). Does this account teach that one does not have to be baptized in order to be saved? One must note what Jesus Himself taught relative to water baptism. Jesus stated, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Later, the very ones guilty of crucifying Jesus will be informed to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). The Word of God plainly reveals that baptism is in order to obtain remission of sins. Then what about the thief on the cross?

First, it is assumed by those that affirm that the thief was saved without being baptized, **that he was not baptized**. How does the one **affirming** such **know** this? He doesn't know it; it is assumed. We have already seen that the thief knew something of Christ's power to save and that Jesus has a kingdom! Would he have known anything relative to John's and Jesus' teaching on baptism? He very well could have: “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:5-6). Whether the thief had been baptized or not, one cannot know. However, one should not affirm that which he cannot know. Also, one must take into consideration the time period in which the thief was saved. He was saved while Jesus was still alive and before the old law had been taken away. Jesus Christ had power on earth to take away sin:

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house (Mark 2:10-11).

A person may exercise his power how he wishes as long as he is alive. He may choose to give his children their inheritance while he is alive. However, after he dies and leaves a will, people must comply with the conditions of the will in order to receive the inheritance. Jesus Christ forgave people while He was upon the earth; however, He also left a “will” or “testament” which came into effect after His death. The Hebrews writer stated:

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth (Heb. 9:15-17).

The thief, being saved while Jesus was on earth, and before the old Law was done away, was not subject to New Testament baptism. Isn't it ironic that, while some want to be saved like the thief on the cross, no one says he wants to be saved like the rich ruler, who was told to sell whatsoever he had and give to the poor? Other people than the thief were saved while Jesus was on earth, but none today is under the same system; we must comply with the conditions of the will which Jesus set forth. Rather than this being an example of an alien sinner being saved without being baptized, it serves as an example of an erring child of God being saved upon repentance and prayer, even if it is at the point of death. However, not knowing the day or circumstances of our death, we should not wait until that occasion.

From the statement of Jesus, one learns the destiny of the soul at death for the saved. Jesus told the thief that he would be with Him that day “in paradise.” Likewise,

other Scriptures state that, at death, the saved go to be with Christ. Paul wrote, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). Paul knew that, when he departed this life, he would "be with Christ." The souls of departed saints go into the hadean realm that Jesus called "paradise." The souls of the unrighteous go into the part of the hadean realm of "torment" (cf. the rich man of Luke 16:23-24). The Bible knows nothing of the Roman Catholic false doctrine of "purgatory." Neither does it teach "soul sleeping" until the time of the resurrection. Both the righteous and the unrighteous are conscious after death. What a joy to know that Christians are only one heartbeat away from paradise!

**Woman, Behold Thy Son!
Then Saith He To The Disciple,
Behold Thy Mother**

The third statement of Jesus from the cross concerns His mother's welfare:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home (John 19:25-27).

Although there was great joy in Mary's life due to her having the privilege of giving birth and raising Jesus Christ, there was also much anguish. Jesus, being God, existed from all eternity (Psm. 90:2, John 1:1-3). He came in the flesh and lived upon the earth some 33 years. Mary was honored of God to give birth to Jesus and to be his

earthly mother. Yet, she would be acquainted with grief, as she would see her Son rejected, hated, abused, and ultimately slain. Simeon had foretold Mary of the grief that she would experience:

And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:34-35).

Indeed, what a sword must have gone through the heart of Mary as her Son was mocked, despised, beaten, and crucified! She was the dying man's mother! She did not flee nor run away. There she stood by the cross of her Son! She was not ashamed of Him. She knew He was indeed the Son of God and that all His claims were true. She stood by His cross! As Jesus looked down from the cross, He saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by. He said unto His mother; "Woman, behold thy son," and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother." He was always in subjection to His parents and was now making sure that His mother would be in good care (Luke 2:48-51). He was providing for His mother, even at the time of His death (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8).

The sacred text is silent relative to the whereabouts of Joseph. Was he dead by this time? Again the Word of God is silent regarding this matter. However, Jesus, even in facing death, is concerned about His mother. He commits the safekeeping of His beloved mother to the disciple whom He loved (the apostle John). Although all the disciples had forsaken Jesus and had fled (Matt. 26:31), John is now back with Jesus at the cross. Perhaps one has forsaken Christ at some point. There is hope yet, if he, like John, will return to the side of Christ. Jesus loved His mother

and she loved Him. The next (and the last) time we read of Mary, she is still steadfast in serving the Lord: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14). Although a sword pierced through her soul, she never lost hope! Neither should we.

Conclusion

All the words of Jesus are important. We have taken special notice of three of the last sayings of Jesus from His cross. These were the words He spoke just prior to His death. They are encouraging words of forgiveness, salvation, and care. Truly, “never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). All of us should find consolation in words that Jesus spoke regarding the forgiveness of those that crucified Him, to the penitent thief, and concerning the welfare of His mother. Even on the cross, Jesus was concerned about others!

CHAPTER 7

What Jesus Said From The Cross (Part Two)

Paul Sain

Introduction

WHEN THE MASTER TEACHER was on earth (John 1:1-3; John 1: 14) and He spoke, people listened, earnestly desiring to hear His words of instruction and wisdom. At times the multitudes would follow Him, even to the point of going without meals and becoming faint. But in our technological day, do we need to seek Him, hear Him, and listen to His words? He came to earth and spoke these things almost 2,000 years ago! Do they really mean anything today? We offer these foundational words of encouragement to hear Christ.

Because Of Who He Is!

All mankind should sincerely “hear” (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7) His words today. As the precious woman uttered the profound words of admonition, “whatsoever he saith, do it” (John 2:5), so likewise our attitude should be throughout our lives. Every sermon, sentence, and word which proceeded from the Savior’s lips should be of utmost interest to us. As we hear (by Divine inspiration) His words from the mount (Matt. 5-6-7), we are (with those of that day) astonished at His doctrine (Matt. 7:28). When we watch (with our mind’s eye) Him create the mental pictures

of the types of soil and draw practical lessons which were easily understood by all, we are amazed at His wisdom. When we read of His tenderness and compassion time after time with ones in the first century, we are drawn to the True and Living Son of God, the Savior of all mankind.

Without hesitation, nor fear of contradiction, we declare the words of our Savior, especially the seven utterances from His lips as He hung on the old rugged cross that are foremost in our minds. To hear Him cry out in agony is equivalent to a figurative dagger in the Christian's heart. To view (from the Scriptural account) once again His profound love for all humans is beyond what we can fully appreciate. To listen to His passionate words seeking forgiveness for their heinous deeds, even as His blood seeps from His wilting body, is more than our minds can grasp or evaluate.

Because Of Who We Are And What We Need!

We are human, sinful creatures. Having reached the stage of accountability, we are without hope. We are lost in sin (Rom. 3:10,23). Our sins have separated us from Jehovah (Isa. 59:1-2).

We are incapable of providing for our vital needs spiritually. Money, power, popularity, sensual pleasure, recreation, or whatever else cannot obtain the forgiveness of our sins which we so desperately need. Animal sacrifices, burning of incense, performing great deeds for others, etc. will likewise not obtain the salvation we desire.

Jehovah, before the foundation of the world, laid the plans for the redemption of man. According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:11), in the fulness of time (Gal. 4:4), this plan was revealed to man. The old covenant was revealed and then removed, taken away (Col. 2:14-17). God spoke in the long ago in various ways, but now speaks unto us by His Son (by the written Word—2 Tim. 3:16-17):

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb 1:1-2).

A song often sung by youth, conveys this thought in a powerful and precious way:

He paid a debt He did not owe,
I owed a debt I could not pay;
I needed someone to wash my sins away.
And now I sing a brand new song: Amazing Grace!
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay!

We should “hear ye Him” because of what every human needs. We need a Savior, the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16).

Because Of What He Offers And Can Provide!

God gave man “free moral agency” (the power of choice). God did not want man to sin, to reject His way, or to follow after Satan. Yet when man rejected the plain instruction of the Heavenly Father, sin entered the world. But God wanted all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4), and thus the plan of God (redemption) was unfolded, at the time deemed best by Jehovah (Gal. 4:4). This scheme of redemption involved our Father in heaven loving man (even while he was in such a sinful condition—Rom. 5:8-9) so much that He gave His Only Begotten Son (John 3:16; John 15:13). Jesus died that we might live eternally. He shed His blood for all (Heb. 9:22; Eph. 5:25).

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). It (and it alone) has the power to save (Jas. 1:21-25). It is powerful (Heb. 4:12). It must be heard, believed, and obeyed (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Heb. 11:6; Matt. 7:21).

Our Lord and Master invites **all** to come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30). The offer is to **all**. “Whosoever will” (Rev.

22:17) implies that **all** can come to Him, but we are impressed with the emphatic declarations that only those who obey Him will be saved (Heb. 5:8-9; Matt. 7:21-23; Acts 5:29).

From the cross, with a nail-pierced body, He beckons all to take up His offer of pardon for sins, His invitation to live with Him forever in glory, to escape the horrors of torment throughout eternity—but only those who obey Him will actually receive the crown of life.

The Last Four Utterances Of Christ From The Cross

The cross of Christ is the pivotal point of time and the history of mankind. It (without fear of successful contradiction) is the world's most important, most significant, and monumental landmark. In the cross we see the theme of every Biblical book. The cross is at the heart of the Gospel of Christ, enabling all mankind to be separated from the Law and made free in Christ: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

All promises of God are hinged on the cross (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 12:1-3). Take the reality of the cross away and all facts, commands, promises, etc. collapse.

The crucifixion of Christ is recorded in all four accounts of the gospel: Matthew 27:22-50; Mark 15:12-37; Luke 23:20-46; and John 19:15-30. As discussed in the previous chapter of this lectureship volume (by our esteemed brother Billy Bland), the Lord has already said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), and "Woman, behold thy son" (John 19:26).

Of the seven powerful, penetrating, and passionate sayings of Christ from the cross, let us now examine the remaining four.

“My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?”

As found in Matthew 27:46, the exact words are recorded here: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**” (Matt 27:46, emp. mine throughout, PS).

Mark’s account of the gospel of Christ contains the following:

And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias (Mark 15:33-35).

Many have expressed their thoughts and questions regarding this passage. Some have asked: “Did God turn His back on His Son, Jesus Christ while He was on the cross?” “Did God actually forsake His Son?” “In what way did Christ feel that His Father had forsaken Him?”

Likely we have spent far too much time on this matter. Likely we read into it far more than what is intended in Holy Writ. Whether we view the agony of the Father viewing His Son on the cross, or visualize Him turning His back because He could not stand to see the horrid view, the facts remain the same. God gave His only begotten Son to come to earth, to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; Matt. 1:21). Our Lord was paying the ransom price for the sins of the whole world (Acts 20:28; Heb. 9:22). The scene is **the** most heinous event of injustice (the perfect, sinless One dying for the sins of the world) that has ever been viewed by all mankind.

Why did my Savior come to earth
And then to glory go?

Why did He choose a lowly birth
Because He loved me so!

The loving Son of God was willing to leave the glory of heaven so that our redemption can be available. He was willing to suffer and die so that we might live forever. He was willing to be all alone, without the support of the Father, without the acknowledgments that were evident previously, to obtain the needed reconciliation for man.

“I Thirst.”

From His capture in the Garden of Gethsemane, many hours earlier, to the time of hanging on the cross, the physical body of the Son of God had been ravaged, beaten, and nails driven into it. Without doubt, the brutal, torturous scourging alone had ripped His physical body to shreds. Carrying the 75-100 pound cross to Calvary (beyond the city gate—Heb. 13:12) had further exhausted Him. The long hours of torture, without rest, even before being nailed to the cross, had weakened Him greatly. Hanging on the wooden cross for a total of six hours is unfathomable to even our imaginations. He had obviously gone without food or drink. The physical yearnings erupted in the pleas of “I thirst”: “After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, **I thirst**” (John 19:28).

“After this” refers to the actions which have just occurred—specifically, taking care of His mother. Thus, after this, He knew all that He needed to do was accomplished. It was finished.

Christ was in the flesh, human, suffering as a human being. From the medical vantage point, we can understand the thirst of the Lord. His need was great due to thirst, which further intensified His agony.

Long before the Lord came to earth, we find His thirst at this time prophetically foretold:

They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink (Psm. 69:21).

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death (Psm. 22:15).

John 19:29 records the action of a soldier to put a sponge full of vinegar, on hyssop (stalks up to three-four feet in length) to His mouth. The vinegar (mixture of sour wine and water, likely owned by the soldiers and used to quench their own thirst) was not the same that the Lord had refused before the crucifixion (Mark 15:23; Matt. 27:34). The vinegar on a sponge to His mouth was accepted by the Lord. The act of mercy by one or more of the soldiers was refreshing. Some of the Jews attempted to stop the soldier (Matt. 27:49), but we learn in Mark's account of the Gospel that the soldier answered them with almost their own words (Mark 15:36) and did not allow them to stop this act of mercy.

Lenski suggests the reason why the Lord asked for a drink was that He was rallying His last strength, in order to die with a victorious shout.¹ The condemned would hardly be able to speak, having been without a drink for so long, and hanging on the cross for hours.

“It Is Finished.”

During the time our Lord was on earth, He was determined to do the will of His Father (John 6:38). He came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Pause for a few moments and reflect on the earthly ministry of Christ, beginning at about age thirty and covering approximately three years.

Baptized by John the Immerser....Matt. 3:13-16
Selection of His chosen twelve.....Mark 3:14
Taught powerful lessons to a few.....John 4:7-27
Taught lessons to multitudes.....Matt. 5-7

Taught from the mount.....	Matt. 5-7
Performed miracles.....	John 12:37
Cured the sick.....	Luke 7:21
Enabled the lame to walk.....	Matt. 21:14
Raised the dead.....	John 11:35-39
Rulers plotted to kill Him.....	Luke 24:20
Prayed in Gethsemane.....	Mark 14:32ff
Suffered great affliction.....	Isa. 53:1-5
Endured the shame.....	Heb. 12:2
Mother watched Him on cross.....	John 19:25-27
Horrible deed accomplished.....	John 19:30

After all these occurrences, in such a brief time, and hanging from the cruel cross, the Savior of all mankind declared, “It is finished”: “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished**: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” (John 19:30). That which He came to do was done! It was finished! It was completed! The redemption of man, the provisions which would make it possible for man to be forgiven of his transgressions, and come back to God, be reconciled to God, were accomplished!

Brother Guy N. Woods, regarding this phrase, observes:

The words “It is finished,” sum up all that he came to do; the redemption of mankind was now being achieved and the course which had been laid out for him from the beginning, had been completed. His life and work, his suffering and death, the shame and agony of the cross, are all viewed as behind him and in triumph he shouts, It is finished!²

Jesus was willing to come into the world and ultimately to die (1 Tim. 1:15; Matt. 20:28) that we might live forever in the prepared mansion (2 Cor. 5:1; John 14:1-3). He was willing to be put to death (Matt. 16:21; Luke 24:46) that we may be made alive (Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:1; Eph. 2:4-6). It was the **only** way by which the justice of

God would allow sinful man to be redeemed, made pure, and one day enter the glory of heaven.

The Lord became the Son of man (Phil. 2:5-8; Luke 19:10) that we may become the sons of God (1 John 3:1-2; Gal. 4:6).

Jesus Christ was willing to be hated and rejected of men (John 1:11-12; Isa. 53:3) that we may (upon our obedience to His will) be accepted of Almighty God (Eph. 1:6; Acts 10:34).

“Father, Into Thy Hands I Commend My Spirit.”

It is interesting that Matthew, Mark and Luke recorded this final utterance of Christ: “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46).

We should add that Christ “gave up the ghost,” which indicates that, even in death, Christ controlled His life, dying willingly, voluntarily.

The death of the Son of God concluded His work of coming to “seek and save the lost,” the work of reconciliation and atonement. The ransom price had been paid.

Note the Scriptures declaring this wonderful fact:

Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Heb. 7:27).

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb. 9:12).

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb. 9:26).

For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God (Rom. 6:10).

John adds the phrase “he bowed his head” at the time of His death. Upon the completion of all that needed to be done, He relaxes. His head drops forward, indicating death, giving up His spirit: “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:30).

The Lord gives us a glimpse of where He was going and what the future holds for God’s faithful, as recorded in John 14:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Jesus Christ has gone to prepare an eternal mansion. He further works in our behalf as an intercessor (Heb. 7:25). He is our High Priest, Who certainly is understanding of our trials on earth:

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

The faithful child of God awaits the crown of life (Rev. 2:10), the prepared home of the soul (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:50-57), the glory which is to come (Rom. 6:16-17). Our Lord came to earth to do the will of His Father (John 6:38). We must likewise do the will of the Father:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:8-9).

When we “do the will of the Father,” we can expect and confidently know that heaven awaits us after our earthly sojourn: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 10:22).

What a wonderful place heaven will be! The precious words of Revelation 21:4 comfort and lift the weary soldier, and bring joy to the diligent worker, as each presses toward the eternal home (Phil. 3:12-14). One day, it will be a reality. One day, we will be “gathered to our fathers” as those of long ago. One day—the beginning of eternity in heaven—and it is all possible because of the cross!

Endnotes

1 R. C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation Of St. John’s Gospel** (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943).

2 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary On The Gospel According To John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987).

Additional References

James Burton Coffman, **Commentary On John** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1974).

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CHAPTER 8

What Jesus Said After His Resurrection And At His Ascension

Tom Bright

Introduction

THE THEME OF THIS lectureship, “The Sayings of Jesus,” is extremely important. The “sayings of Jesus” refer to the words of Jesus, and the words of Jesus should never be lightly considered. Jesus said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Thus, the “sayings of Jesus” are not trivial, unimportant, or immaterial.

My assignment is to deal with the “sayings of Jesus” from the time of His resurrection to His ascension, the only exception being His appearance to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18). The time and place of some of His post-resurrection appearances are easily determined. Others are more difficult. In fact, some of them cannot be established with any certainty relative to time and place.

However, the exact time and place of the post-resurrection sayings of Jesus are not as important as **what** He said. If they were absolutely essential, God would have revealed them to us. Let us now turn our attention to the post-resurrection “Sayings of Jesus.”

Resurrection Day

On The Road To Emmaus

Following Jesus' conversation with Mary in the garden, His next recorded words are found in Luke 24. A disciple named Cleopas and an unnamed companion were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The topic of their conversation was the empty tomb of Jesus. The Lord approached them, "But their eyes were holden that they should not know him" (Luke 24:16). Jesus asked them, "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" (Luke 24:17). Cleopas responded, asking Jesus if He was the only stranger in Jerusalem that did not know the things which had come to pass that day. Jesus asked him, "What things?" (Luke 24:19). Cleopas responded:

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not (Luke 24:19-24).

The thought "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" is better understood if we grasp the mindset of the Jew at this time. They believed that the Messiah would establish the long awaited "Messianic Kingdom." However, in their view, this kingdom

would be temporal and mundane in nature. They anticipated a Christ Who would re-establish the old Davidic kingdom, and restore the physical borders Israel enjoyed under the reigns of David and Solomon.

This gross misunderstanding of the nature of the Messianic kingdom was one of the main reasons that the religious leaders were constantly at odds with Jesus. If He had advocated the “kind” of kingdom that they expected, the Jews would have accepted Him immediately.

Jesus’ response was simple, yet fraught with implications and ramifications that His disciples had not yet grasped. He said, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25-26). Here, Jesus referred to something near to the heart of the Jew, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

It is obvious that the disciples of Christ did not understand that He was to die and be raised from the dead. For instance, while descending from the mount after His transfiguration, Jesus told His three companions that they should tell no man what they had seen until He had been raised from the dead. Mark says, “And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean” (Mark 9:9-10). In Mark 9:31-32, we read:

For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.

After Peter and John examined the empty tomb, John tells us, “For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead” (John 20:9).

Notice that Luke affirms, “he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). However, the two disciples affirmed that “he opened” to them the Scriptures (Luke 24:32). Jesus “expounded” by “opening.” This was not a miraculous “opening” of the Scriptures. Jesus simply explained various Old Testament prophecies as they related to Him.

The Evening Of The Resurrection Day

The next account of the sayings of the Lord is found in Luke 24:38-49 and John 20:19-23. That the two accounts are parallel is seen in the fact that both writers reveal that Jesus showed the apostles the nail prints in His hands (Luke 24:39; John 20:20). Luke adds that He also showed them “his feet,” while John said that Jesus showed them “his side.”

The Lord then asked, “Have ye here any meat?” (Luke 24:41). After receiving a piece of broiled fish and some honey, He ate it before them. This action proved that He was not a “spirit,” as they first supposed (Luke 24:37), but was truly the resurrected Jesus.

Jesus then said, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). Here He referred to the three divisions of the Old Testament recognized by the Jews. Thus, His statement included **all** of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Lord basically repeated the same things that He had explained to Cleopas and his companion—the events surrounding His death and resurrection were according to Old Testament prophecy.

A Miraculous Element In Bible Prophecy

Biblical prophecy was more than a suggestion or a statement of possibility relative to the future. It exceeded

the **probable**, and surpassed a mere **prediction** of the future. Man makes a prognosis based on existing circumstances and current trends. For instance, the liberalism existing in the church today was predicted forty years ago, based solely on the then-current philosophy some were advocating. But Biblical prophecy is very different from man's projections.

There is a **miraculous element** in Biblical prophecy not found in the predictions of man. In order for an utterance to qualify as Biblical prophecy, there could be no circumstances existing, at the time that the prophet wrote, upon which he could base his statements. For instance, what circumstances existed in Zechariah's time whereby he could predict the thirty pieces of silver Judas received for his betrayal of Jesus (Zech. 11:12)? How could Isaiah name Cyrus two hundred years before he was born and cite his proclamation freeing the Jews from Babylonian captivity, even telling of his benevolence in furnishing the money and material with which they would lay the foundation of the temple in Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28-45:1)? What circumstances existed which would cause Isaiah and Jeremiah to write of the destruction of Babylon (Isa. 13:19-22; Isa. 14:22-23; Jer. 50:12-13; Jer. 50:26; Jer. 50:38-39; Jer. 51:25-26; and Jer. 51:36-37), or allow Ezekiel to prophesy the complete destruction of Tyre in such minute detail (Ezek. 26:3-5; Ezek. 26:7-9; Ezek. 26:12-14; cf. Joel 3:5-8; Zech. 9:3-4)?

How could some forty different men, separated by centuries, predict so many seemingly small and insignificant things (as man might view them) relative to the Christ? They wrote in detail of His coming, the time of it, the place of His birth, genealogy, and character. Other than the miraculous element of Biblical prophecy, how could man accurately predict Jesus' betrayal, crucifixion,

resurrection, ascension, and coronation? This is the miraculous element of which we speak.

Paul wrote:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

The assertion that Christ was appointed “heir of all things” refers to the fact that He was the centerpiece of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus Christ was the “heir” of all things that the prophets spoke to the fathers.

Thus, in our passage (Luke 24:44), Jesus affirmed that all things written “in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” must, of necessity, be fulfilled. If they were not fulfilled in, by, and through Him, He was not the promised Messiah.

In Luke 24:45, we are told that He opened “their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.” Just as Jesus opened the understanding of the two as they journeyed to Emmaus, so He did here. This was **not a miraculous opening of their understanding**. The Lord opened their understanding by explaining and applying Old Testament prophecies concerning Himself. This was an amazing thing indeed—an infallible interpretation of Old Testament prophecy!

In Luke 24:46, Jesus continues his explanation of the Old Testament prophecies. The prophets of old foretold that the Christ would die and rise again. He went to the cross because “Thus it is written.” God raised Him from the dead, because “Thus it is written.” If the events surrounding Him did not meet the criteria, He **was not** the long-awaited Messiah.

Prophecies Of Repentance And Remission Of Sins To Be Preached In His Name

The Lord said that other things must be accomplished because “It is written.” He told them that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). This, of course, was realized on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41), a notable feast day of the Jews.

Jesus said that it would be done “among all nations.” Luke lists fifteen different nations that were represented in Jerusalem on that day (Acts 2:9-11). It cannot be successfully denied; it was “among all nations.” The Lord said, “beginning at Jerusalem.” Based on what is stated in Acts 1, there is no doubt that this great event transpired in that city of which the prophets spoke.

They would be “witnesses of these things.” One only needs to read Acts 2 to see that they did that very thing. When the twelve were immersed in power from the Holy Spirit, the subsequent events elicited from the people the charge of drunkenness. Peter explained that this was not the case, but was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy from almost eight centuries past. The apostle charged the Jews of taking Jesus of Nazareth, “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you...ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:22-24). He argued that, according to prophecy, it was not possible for Christ to remain in the grave. Peter affirmed that He was resurrected by the power of God and was now at the right hand of God exalted (Acts 2:24-35).

The next words of Peter surely created a stir among the people. He said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The realization that the long-awaited Messiah had come

and been rejected by them elicited the imploring question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The apostle answered, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). The Lord said, “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). These events on Pentecost fulfilled this in every detail.

John’s Account Of This Event

The reader will remember that, in a previous section, I stated that John 20:19-23 transpired at the same time as the events in Luke 24:36-49. Even though Luke and John do not record the same words, I am convinced that both writers record the same event. Based upon the flow of the conversation, it is my judgment that the words of Jesus recorded by John (John 20:21-23) should be injected at this point.

In John 20:19, we read of the first of two times that Jesus used the term, “Peace be unto you.” This was the common greeting used in that day. He then showed them His hands, feet, and side, and then ate a piece of broiled fish and some honey. In John 20:21, Jesus again says, “Peace be unto you.” Even though these were the same words, there was certainly a different meaning here than in John 20:19. This statement is an expression of His desire for peace upon them as they go about fulfilling the Great Commission. Also couched here is the thought of their mission in establishing peace between man and God through the Gospel. He was the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). At His birth, the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). The peace here is more than merely sending cards with “Peace on earth” printed on them. It refers to the peace that man can enjoy with his God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Immediately after expressing “Peace be unto you,” He said, “as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). Jesus then breathed upon them and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:22-23).

The reception of the Holy Spirit was not instantaneous. Neither was it realized in the next few minutes or hours. It was fulfilled some fifty days later when the twelve apostles (and only the twelve) were baptized by the Holy Spirit. Here they were commanded to “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” They were instructed to tarry in the city of Jerusalem, “until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49), which was equal to being “baptized with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 1:4). The fulfillment is recorded in Acts 2.

This remitting or retaining of sins is inseparably linked to the “Receive ye the Holy Ghost” in this passage. This retention or remission of sins would not be based on an arbitrary choice of any of the apostles. Instead, it would be determined by an absolute and objective standard, the Gospel that they would preach to the whole world.

The “retaining” or “remission” of sins is directly connected to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in fulfillment of the Great Commission. The apostles were the human element in God’s revelation of the scheme of redemption. When they preached the Gospel, those who heard it would either accept it or reject it. When a person heard, believed, and obeyed the message of salvation, their sins were “remitted.”

On the other hand, the sins of those who rejected the Gospel were “retained.” Jesus made no reference whatsoever to that which was mystical or magical. The responsibility of the apostles was to preach the Gospel. The burden then fell upon the hearers to accept or reject the only means of salvation that God offers.

This is the very thing Jesus had referred to when Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). The Lord promised to build His church, predicated upon the truth which Peter had just confessed, and then said:

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:19).

The “keys” of this passage represent authority to open the doors of, to allow entrance into the kingdom of heaven, the New Testament church. The “binding” and “loosing” are realized in the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they would bind on earth that which God had bound in heaven, and loose on earth that which God had loosed in heaven. Thus, this was another affirmation of the mission of the apostles, as the human channels through which Deity had determined to make known the Divine will.

After Eight Days

When the previously considered post-resurrection appearance occurred, Thomas was not present. The apostles told Thomas that they had seen the Lord. He responded, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

Eight days later (the following first day of the week), Thomas and the disciples were together, and the doors were shut. Jesus appeared and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be unto you” (John 20:26). He then tells Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not

faithless, but believing” (John 20:27). Jesus knew “what was in man” (John 2:25). He realized that Thomas did not believe that He had risen from the dead, and was aware of what Thomas demanded as proof of His resurrection.

It was at this instant that Thomas changed from being a doubter to one who willingly and unashamedly confessed the Deity of Jesus. In the most simple, yet most profound terms, this doubter-turned-believer exclaimed, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). He now saw and was absolutely convinced that Jesus was the Christ.

In John 20:29, our Lord said, “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” Our belief in the resurrection of Christ derives from the testimony of eyewitnesses. There were many eyewitnesses of His resurrection. But millions have crossed the stage of life since that time who did not have the same privilege that Thomas enjoyed, yet have believed. Jesus pronounced a blessing upon them, which certainly included the forgiveness of sins.

In order to create faith in the heart of man, God knew that there must be incontrovertible proof of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. No man alive today has seen this with his physical eyes, yet many today believe. Why? Because of the irrefutable proof of that great event. John directs our attention to this very thing in the next two verses. He wrote:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

Far too many people look upon faith as nothing more than a “good chance,” a reasonable “possibility” or “probability” that the things promised in the Bible are true.

Most people view “faith” as a gigantic leap in the dark. I have used the illustration of a person walking up to the elevator door, the door opens, and they see nothing but a black chasm. By “faith,” they step off into this blackness, hoping an elevator is there. Biblical faith **is not** of this nature.

Because of the absolute and undeniable proof of what God has done, man can enjoy the assurance and conviction that the things revealed in the Bible are from God. The faithful Christian does not say, “I assume this is true,” but with confidence says, “I know this is true.” Paul said, “for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). There was no doubt or hesitancy in his pen when he wrote these words. Likewise, we should have no hesitancy or doubt.

In the same letter, this grand old soldier of the cross exudes confidence and assurance as he speaks of that which was his when it came his time to quit this life. He wrote, “there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). This confidence was his from the day he said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6), until he put aside the sword of the Spirit because of death. We should have this same assurance.

Just as Thomas cried, “My Lord and my God” with absolute assurance, so can we. We can possess the same confidence that he enjoyed. This assurance is not ours because we have seen Jesus with our physical eyes, but because we have seen Him through the eye of faith. We should constantly offer our praises and adoration to our Father for the undeniable proof that He has given us in the Bible. Surely, we should be guilty of holding it up as the “very word of God.”

At The Sea Of Galilee

In John 21, we have another instance of the “sayings of Jesus.” Simon, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two others were together. They determined to go fishing. Of course, we understand that this was not for pleasure and recreation; this was their livelihood.

When morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore and called to them, “Children, have ye any meat,” to which they responded “No” (John 21:4-5). Jesus told them, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.” They did so and caught such a multitude of fish that they were unable to draw in the net (John 21:6). When told by John, “It is the Lord,” Peter girded himself with his father’s coat, jumped into the sea, and swam to shore. The other disciples came in a little ship, dragging the net full of fish. Upon arriving at the shore, they saw a fire of coals and fish laid on it. Jesus said, “Bring of the fish which ye have now caught” (John 21:7-10). After they had pulled the net to shore, Jesus said, “Come and dine” (John 21:12).

Lovest Thou Me?

John records a very interesting conversation between Jesus and Peter (John 21:15-22). Much has been written about this discussion and the possible implications of it. In this lesson, I will deal with what I am convinced is the heart of the matter. For other views, the reader needs only to read the various commentaries.

When addressing Peter in the three questions, Jesus did not use the name “Peter,” but, rather, “Simon, son of Jonas.” There is a message here we must not overlook. When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16), the Lord gave him the name “Peter” (Matt. 16:18), which means “stone.” The name “Peter” is equal to “Cephas” (John 1:42), an Aramaic word also meaning “stone.”

The first question was, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” There is much discussion in the religious world revolving around what the word “these” refers to on this occasion. Based upon the context, I am convinced that it has reference to the other disciples gathered on this occasion. We remember that, just a few hours before Jesus was arrested, he (Peter) said unto Jesus, “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I” (Mark 14:29). In a few short hours, Peter denied Him three times. Thus, in making a play upon his name (using “Simon,” not “Peter), the Lord asked him if he loved Him more than these other disciples loved Him. Peter certainly had not shown such on that fateful night.

For Peter and all faithful followers of the Christ, something demanding and dangerous was looming on the horizon—the task of taking the Gospel to the whole creation. It would demand passion, courage, and strength. The question for Peter was, “Do you truly love me more than these other disciples do? You once affirmed you did. Do you?”

Three times Jesus asked Peter the same basic question. Peter responded with the same basic answer. However, it is noteworthy that, in the first two questions, the word translated “love” is from the Greek word *agapaoo*, but Peter responded with the Greek word *phileoo*. There is an important distinction between the two words which teaches a valuable lesson concerning our duties to Christ.

Brother Woods said:

When Jesus said, “Lovest thou me...?” he used for the word “love” the Greek verb *agapaoo*, a term indicating strong devotion of a high order, but, when Peter replied with the words, “Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,” the disciple used the verb *phileoo*, a word denoting the humbler, warmer emotion growing out of kinship or close association. The former word clearly

suggests a high order of reverence and respect; it can be exercised by the will of another, it is subject to command and a choice may be made whether it will be indulged in or not. It is this type of love we are commanded to exercise for our enemies. The second word, however, results from a relationship that promotes warmth of affection and is not subject to command. To affirm that *agapaoo* is a stronger word than *phileoo* and that Peter chose the weaker one in his reply is to lose the significance of the variation. The difference between them is in their meaning—not in their relative strength.¹

That which is needed in fulfilling the Great Commission is *agapaoo*, not *phileoo*. The latter is based on affection and can be described as “tender affection.” According to J. Noel Merideth, the former word

is the love that has its basis in preciousness, a love called out of one’s heart by an awakened sense of value in the object loved that causes one to prize it...It is the noble love of value and worth, standing above all other words for love. It is the love that seeks the highest good.²

The word (*agapaoo*) is a determination of the mind, a victory of the will over the natural inclinations of man. It has to do with that which is opposed to our natural feelings and wants. We have to will ourselves into doing it.

When a proper distinction is made between the two words, we see a definite and distinct reference to that which Peter and those in the first century (and every subsequent generation) would need to fulfill the Great Commission. I do things for my wife, children, and grandchildren based upon the concept of natural affection (*phileoo*). For me to do right toward those that are opposed to everything godly, even those I have never seen, I must will myself into doing it (*agapaoo*). The demands of the Gospel toward those I have tender affection (*phileoo*) for are much easier than a

concern for the lost state of those I have never seen, or those who hate me and oppose me (*agapao*). Jesus said, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44).

This is the basic thrust of the exchange between Jesus and Peter in their use of the two different Greek words. Another important lesson is here taught. As New Testament Christians, we realize that devotion is easy while in the presence of those of like precious faith. But when we are faced with physical opposition, even death, there is always the threat of denying the Christ, just as Peter did.

In the third question, the Master used the same word as Peter. However, inspiration reveals:

Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:17).

Woods has this impressive statement:

This time, the Lord used the same word for love that Peter did, saying, in effect, “Do you really have the warm, close, personal and abiding affection for me that you claim? Have you forgotten that you stood afar off when I was being reviled and even denied that you knew me?” Peter was cut to the heart, and grief overwhelmed him, as he recalled that awful night and he now acknowledges that the Lord does indeed know all things and thus knows that he deeply loves his Saviour. The Lord’s foreknowledge which Peter denied when he controverted his prediction, “verily I say unto thee, that thou to-day, even this night, before the cock crow twice, shall deny me thrice” (Mark 14:30), he now conceded and he appeals to this same foreknowledge to establish his claim of

deep devotion. Three times Peter denied the Lord; three times the Lord required him to reaffirm his love; the process, though extremely painful, was a healing one, and it brought the embattled disciple back to a commitment that was to remain with him the remnant of his days and to prompt him to become one of the most courageous and faithful disciples the Lord ever had.³

In my judgment, brother Woods has said all that needs to be said. For me to say more about this would only detract from these discerning words.

After Peter's first answer, Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." In response to Peter's next two answers, Christ said "Feed my sheep." This covers the Lord's disciples of all ages and of all stages of maturity; none were overlooked.

In the next two verses, we read:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me (John 21:18-19).

While young, he would do as He desired, signifying that he would be busy in doing the Lord's will. However, this would change when he was older. Another would carry him where "thou wouldest not" (against his will). Here, the Son of God referenced the death by which Peter "would glorify God." This surely refers to martyrdom. However, the form of his death is not revealed.

Tradition says that Peter was crucified in Rome, but, because he felt himself not worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord, he requested to be crucified head downward. We will never know this side of eternity if this

was the manner of Peter's death. However, one thing seems certain: Jesus prophesied that Peter would live to be old and die because of his faith in Christ.

Jesus then commanded him to "Follow me." This Peter did from that time forward. Certainly included within the scope of this exhortation is his death, by which he would glorify God. However, also included here are the subsequent years in which this great apostle would follow the Lord regardless of the consequences. Never again would he openly deny Jesus. That he would make mistakes in the future, there can be no doubt; the events at Antioch (Gal. 2:11) prove this. Even though this was serious enough that Paul withstood Peter to his face, this was not an open avowal that he did not know the Lord. With the one exception just noted, inspiration speaks only of the faithfulness and dedication of this man. One only needs to read the two epistles that bear Peter's name to see this. Jesus said, "Follow me." Peter did follow Him unto death.

Peter then asked Jesus, concerning the disciple whom Jesus loved (universally accepted to be John the apostle), "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Jesus responded, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (John 21:22). Based on this statement, John reveals that the saying went abroad among the brethren that he (John) would not die (John 21:23). The apostle makes it very clear that this was not what Jesus said.

In essence, the Lord simply stated that John's future was not involved in that which was before Peter. He was to follow Christ in spite of what might or might not happen to John. The same principle applies to us today. No matter what happens to others, we are to follow the Master until we quit the walks of this life.

Matthew's Account Of The Great Commission

We now come to what is commonly referred to as the Great Commission. It is "great" in the sense of its scope

and magnitude. It is a message knowing no territorial, societal, or cultural boundaries. It is for kings and paupers, for rich and poor, for the scholar and the uneducated, regardless of race or color. There are no fleshly distinctions recognized whatsoever. Every accountable human being is amenable to the Gospel of Christ.

The “Great Commission” is the command to preach the Gospel of Christ to every creature. Matthew says:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

The apostle declares that this transpired on a mountain in Galilee; other than that, nothing is known concerning the time or place of this event. However, the time and place are not critical to the validity or the application of these words. Regardless of the chronology, the statement has implications and ramifications extending into eternity.

Man was separated from God because of his sin in the garden (Gen. 3:1-7). However, Deity was not disinterested in the plight of fallen man, and immediately instituted the plan to redeem mankind (Gen. 3:15). The Gospel tells of this unmatched love of God and His desire for the redemption of mankind.

The “good news” tells us that the Lord Jesus died for the sins of the world (Rom. 5:6-8); was buried; rose again the third day according to the Scriptures; and was seen of credible witnesses (1 Cor. 15:1-9), with God bearing witness to their testimony by the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:20). But this Good News had to be told to the whole creation—thus, the Divine charge to go

and proclaim this message of salvation to every creature, in every clime, and to every subsequent generation.

Jesus had **all authority**. The authority to act on behalf of the risen Christ is here delegated to His specially chosen ambassadors. By this power, they would unlock the doors of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19). They would soon understand the process of retaining or remitting sins (John 20:22-23); they would soon proclaim the peace that “passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7).

The command was to go into all nations and make disciples. This was done by teaching and baptizing those who believed the Gospel. They were then to teach the disciples to observe everything Jesus had commanded, and the promise was, “lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

One becomes a Christian by following the instructions revealed in the Gospel. But the race is only beginning when one renders primary obedience to the Gospel. He must continue steadfastly in the doctrine of Christ. One must worship as the Lord has instructed, with no additions or subtractions. They must teach only what the Lord authorizes in His Word. Therefore, we see the need of man’s being taught to observe all things that Jesus has commanded.

Mark’s Account Of The Great Commission

As in Matthew’s account of the Great Commission, we are not absolutely sure of the exact time and place that this transpired. However, some suggest the “upbraiding” in Mark 16:14 occurred on resurrection day when He appeared to the eleven, whereas the events in Mark 16:15-18 happened just prior to His ascension. I believe that this is the correct view.

Mark’s account reads, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and

is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). Here we see that the scope is the same as Matthew’s account—worldwide and to every succeeding generation because “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Paul said that the Gospel of Christ is **the** power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16-17). It is not **a** power (one of many) of God unto salvation; it is the only power given by God which offers salvation to man. Anything less than this is not enough; anything more is too much. The gospel **only** makes Christians **only** and the **only** Christians.

Further Thoughts On Mark’s Account Of The Great Commission

A great controversy exists today relative to the necessity of baptism. Some argue that one is saved at the point of faith and then should be baptized, but baptism is not essential to salvation. Let us see if this agrees with Mark’s account of the Great Commission.

First of all, the words “believeth” and “is baptized” are linked by a coordinating conjunction. Chamberlain says, “There are two general classes of conjunctions: those that unite elements of equal prominence in the sentence, called...coordinating conjunctions.”⁴ The word translated “and” in this passage is a coordinating conjunction. It links “believeth” and “is baptized,” thus making them **of equal prominence**. Whatever one of these “elements of equal prominence” is for, so is the other! If one is essential, so is the other. If one is unnecessary, so is its companion.

Jesus said, “shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). He also said, “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Peter fulfilled this when he preached **repentance and remission of sins** (Acts 2:38). If “remission of sins” is not the same as “shall be saved”

(Mark 16:16), then we are in a quandary. Can one believe that a person receives “remission of sins” at one point in the salvation process, and “shall be saved” at another point? This idea is preposterous. Surely all will agree that these are not separate events, but refer to the same thing.

There is an incontrovertible link between Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts of the Great Commission and Peter’s statement in Acts 2:38. All three point to “making disciples,” “shall be saved,” and “remission of sins.” There is no difference! Each of the three emphasizes the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins.

However, we are told that the phrase “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38) actually means **because of the remission of sins**. If this is true, then it would mean the same thing in other passages where the same phrase is found. An example would be at the institution of the Lord’s Supper. In reference to the fruit of the vine, Jesus said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

If the above argument is valid, this means that the Lord affirmed that His blood was shed **because man’s sins were already remitted!** But we must ask: before He shed His precious blood, what was sufficient to provide “remission of sins”? This conclusively shows that baptism is essential for one to be saved, just as the Lord said.

Another example would be John’s baptism. It was a “baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). If the term “for the remission of sins” in Acts 2:38 means “because of the remission of sins,” it also means the same thing in Mark 1:4. Therefore, this means that John was baptizing people **because their sins were already remitted**. If that be the case, we must ask: what offering was sufficient for the “remission of sins” before the blood of Christ was shed?

Mark’s account of the Great Commission is conclusive. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized

shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Man says, “He that believeth is saved at the point of faith, and should be baptized, but baptism is not essential to salvation.” Which will we accept?

Furthermore, the verbs “believeth” and “is baptized” are aorist participles. Summers says, “The aorist participle indicates action which is antecedent to the action of the main verb.”⁵ The main verb is “shall be saved.” The action of the verbs “believeth” and “is baptized” (since they are aorist participles) occurs **before** the action of the main verb “shall be saved.” Sectarians argue that baptism comes after salvation. The Lord said that baptism comes **before** salvation. Which are we to believe?

After giving the Great Commission, Jesus promised the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in confirming the message that they would soon proclaim to the whole world (Mark 16:17-18). The first-century Christians enjoyed something that no other generation of Christians has seen since—the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit. However, my assignment in this chapter is not whether miracles exist today or not. Let it suffice to say that **such does not happen today**.

The Events Recorded In Acts 1

Luke records that Jesus commanded His disciples:

that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:4-5).

I am convinced that these words were spoken at a different time from the words recorded in Acts 1:6-8. Whether this is true does not negate the importance of the words that Jesus spoke. I remind the reader that I previously suggested that this is the same event as Luke 24:49.

Regardless of the time that they were spoken, the import of His words are still applicable.

The disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus had been with them about forty days, “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Evidently they thought that the time was right for the establishment of His kingdom. But why did they ask such a strange question? What was behind it?

Earlier, I mentioned the gross misunderstanding that the Jews had relative to the Messianic kingdom. They looked for a totally materialistic kingdom, such as existed under the reign of David. In their view, the Messiah would re-establish the kingdom of Israel and rule from the throne in Jerusalem. In accord with this view, it is evident that some of his disciples had not yet grasped the spiritual significance of the coming kingdom.

Jesus replied:

It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

The Lord simply told them that there were some things they had no need of knowing at this time. However, He promised that, after the Holy Spirit had come upon them, they would bear witness from Jerusalem to the whole world.

The fulfillment of “Ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8) began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It is interesting how the words of Acts 1:8 happened in the exact sequence that Jesus mentioned. It began in Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 2-7), went next to Samaria (Acts 8), and then

to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Beginning in Acts 13, we read of the start of Paul's evangelistic tours which carried the Gospel throughout the world. Paul wrote from the Roman prison that the Gospel had been "preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (Col. 1:23).

Conclusion

From a seemingly small and unimportant event on the stage of time (the crucifixion of Christ), there arose a firestorm which ultimately engulfed the known world. This crucified One was alive! He had been resurrected by the power of the one God, never to die again! For some forty days after this magnificent event, He was seen by many of His disciples. He spoke many words during that period of time, a few of which Deity has chosen to reveal to us. These recorded words are extremely important, pointing His hearers to the fact that the prophets of old had spoken of all that had transpired since that fateful Friday.

These "sayings of Jesus" also spoke of something that was on the horizon: the establishment of the New Testament church, that long-awaited Messianic kingdom, and the spread of the Gospel to a lost and dying world.

The "sayings of Jesus" are so very important. Never underestimate them or view them as inconsequential. Always remember that this resurrected One once said, "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Endnotes

1 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary On The Gospel According To John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1981), p. 442.

2 J. Noel Merideth, **A Commentary On The Book of Galatians** (Lawrenceburg, TN: Merideth Publishing, 1981), p. 210.

3 Woods, p. 443.

4 William Douglas Chamberlain, **An Exegetical Grammar Of The Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), p. 148.

5 Ray Summers, **Essentials Of New Testament Greek** (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), p. 89.

Part Two

What Jesus
Said
To Certain
People

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CHAPTER 9

What Jesus Said To Nicodemus

Gary McDade

The Text

IN THE THIRD CHAPTER of John's Gospel account, Jesus received a visitor at night named Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews and a Pharisee. John wrote:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:1-2).

The miracles of Jesus had their designed effect on him, for he was convinced that Jesus enjoyed the favor of God. Nicodemus was an important man, he was an industrious man, and he was an inquisitive man. He took time to inquire of Jesus about matters of eternal weight. The value he placed on the answers he received from Jesus may be seen by looking ahead three-and-a-half years to the burial of the Savior. John wrote:

And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first

came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand (John 19:38-42).

Today all people need to take whatever time is necessary to study, understand, and obey the Savior's words in John 3:1-21.

The Truth

John concluded the previous chapter by informing the reader of Jesus' ability to know what was in man (John 2:25). He next made an application of that principle by relating the insightful reply of Jesus to Nicodemus' question. John wrote that "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus demonstrated Himself to be the Master Teacher by taking Nicodemus where he was and further revealing the truth to him. Jesus' statement to Nicodemus reflected the primary mission for which Jesus had come into the world, which was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "Verily, verily" means "Truly, truly." The repetition of the word reinforces the strength of the statement as the truth.

The Timing

Although Jesus clearly mentioned being born again, Nicodemus had a problem with the timing because, until now, he knew nothing of being born again; all he had to go on was what he knew of birth. So, he presented two interrogatory statements to Jesus. John wrote, "Nicodemus

saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4).

Jesus was not speaking about a grown man experiencing physical birth again. So, He drew the picture in greater detail to allow Nicodemus to understand better that about which He was talking. John continued to write, "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Observe that Jesus said, "Except a **man** be born" (emp. mine throughout, GM). He was not talking about anything associated with an infant's physical birth. He said, "Except a **man** be born." Also, the word "again" places distance from the man's physical birth. Jesus had said, "Except a man be born **again**" in John 3:3.

The reason for this emphasis is due to the widespread view that the water of the passage refers to the embryonic fluid that surrounds a pre-born child, which is expelled prior to birth. The position of those holding this view is that this "water" at physical birth is the water under consideration. If this were the case, then there would be no reason for the Lord to mention it at all, since everyone comes into the world the same way.

Yet, some of the most highly regarded denominational preachers, educators, and commentators believe this absurd view. Those advancing this view teach that the reference to the Spirit means an endowment of the Holy Spirit. They make the effect of Jesus' words to say, "Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." What Jesus actually said was, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The viewpoint is self-defeating because they usually insist on immersing the convert in water at some point subsequent to his believing.

The Transformation

Jesus was teaching Nicodemus what he needed to do in order to “enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The new birth was a spiritual transformation through the element of water and the instrument of the Spirit. Jesus explained:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:6-8).

The transformation through the water and the Spirit is essential because Jesus used the word “except,” which carries the force of “unless” in reference to a person’s entering the kingdom of God. Except or unless a person is born again, he cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God. And in John 3:8 He said, “Ye **must** be born again,” thereby indicating the imperative nature of the command.

The transformation is spiritual. The new birth is a spiritual birth, which takes place upon baptism. The contrast Jesus made was between the result of physical birth being fleshly or physical, and the result of spiritual birth being of the Spirit or spiritual. The illustration Jesus gave of the wind blowing called attention to the unseen reality in nature. The spirit of man is the unseen reality in man, and that is the part of man that is born again. Also, although the wind cannot be seen, it can be heard. The effect of the wind moving through other items of nature such as trees and grass is audible.

Similarly, the Spirit of God is not seen, but the effect of the Spirit is brought to bear on the spirit of man through hearing the words of the Spirit. Later, Jesus would say, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing:

the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

The Trepidation

In John 3:9, “Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?” Nicodemus seems perturbed that he cannot readily understand Jesus’ teaching. Jesus’ lengthy response is next.

The Testimony

Jesus implied that Nicodemus should have had knowledge of spiritual things, due to his position as a teacher among the Jews: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3:10). Jesus came down from heaven as an expression of the love of God to save mankind, but men loved to abide in darkness rather than come unto the light of the truth of God’s Word and be saved. In John 3:11-21 Jesus spoke of His testimony which bore witness to His Deity:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

This selection of Scripture contains one of the best-known and loved verses in the entire Bible, John 3:16. Jesus' closing admonition to Nicodemus was for him to obey the truth: "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:21).

The Twisting

The Bible says, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:6). The wise man cautioned against a perennial tendency of mankind to add to God's words. An exposure of the creeds of men sometimes yields statements of denial of their existence from their perhaps unwitting adherents. While some preachers hoist high the catechism or the discipline, other preachers do not open their creed books to read from them before the congregation. They obviously wish to convey that the Bible alone is the standard rule of faith and practice. Certainly, the Bible should be just that, as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and other passages clearly teach, but distinctive doctrines consistently taught which are not found in the Bible suggest a common source. Many times that source is a creed book.

One example recently presented will serve as proof that a prominent Baptist preacher preaches right out of

the Baptist manual and not the Bible. Again, he did not inform the membership that he was; he wanted to convey to them the idea that his material was from the Bible. Here is what Adrian Rogers, former president and chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention, from the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis wrote: "Baptism isn't necessary for salvation, but it is necessary for obedience."¹ Now, here is what **The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches** by Edward T. Hiscox, D.D. says: "Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of 'baptismal regeneration'; but it is essential to obedience, since Christ has commanded it."² Perhaps placing the abbreviated statements side by side will help to emphasize the point:

Rogers

Baptism isn't necessary for salvation, but it is necessary for obedience.

Baptist Manual

Baptism is not essential to salvation,.... but it is essential to obedience.

Many have been the times when Baptists have argued, "We do not use a manual. I have never heard of **The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches.**" This example proves that their preachers have heard of it and, in fact, at least on occasion preach right out of it. The manual itself states:

Members, on being received to fellowship, are not required to subscribe or pledge conformity to any creed-form, but are expected to yield substantial agreement to that which the church with which they unite has adopted.³

From where do the name "Baptist" and the particular practices unique to them come, if not from the manual or those who know it so well they can recite it without ever acknowledging its existence? The new name that the

mouth of the Lord would name is “Christian,” not “Baptist” (Isa. 62:2; Acts 11:26).

It takes the manual to evade the force of Jesus’ teaching on the essentiality of baptism for both salvation and obedience: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Belief, number one, plus baptism, number two, yields salvation, number three. Why did Jesus say, “But he that believeth not shall be damned,” instead of, “But he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned”? Because if a person does not believe in Christ, he is “condemned already” (John 3:18). The true believer will be baptized; the unbeliever will not be baptized. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” but someone says, “Well, I don’t believe that!” Jesus answers, “He that believeth not shall be damned.”

The Bible has a timeless relevance, and all who heed it will be simply and only Christians. The Baptists do not believe this truth because of what the manual says on page 22:

It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism” and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense baptism was the “door into the church.” Now, it is different; and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their “experience,” and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members.”

The church does not belong to the members; it belongs to Christ (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28). The Baptist church may belong to the members, but the church of Christ belongs

to Christ (Eph. 5:24-27). And those who repent and are baptized for the remission of their sins are added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:38; Acts 2:47). Jesus Christ has the ability to search the hearts; men do not (Rev. 2:23).

The Testing

A writer from Connecticut who is not a member of the church responded to the foregoing proof of the well-known Baptist preacher Adrian Rogers preaching out of the Baptist manual instead of the Bible.⁴ The writer set out to prove that since **nations** were to be baptized, then the element in which they were to be baptized could not be water. He wrote, “It is impossible to baptize (or to immerse, or to dip, or to cleanse, or to wash) nations **with water**, this baptizing cannot be understood as a reference to baptism with water.” After a discussion of the Greek grammar of Matthew’s account of the Great Commission, he asks which of the KJV, “**teach** all nations, baptizing them” or the ASV, “**make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them” is guilty of “adding unto his words”? The answer in short is “neither.”

The Greek verb supporting the translations given above is *matheteusate*, which, according to the lexicon of Arndt and Gingrich, means “make a disciple of, teach (*tina*) someone **Mt 28:19**.”⁵ The noun form of the word means “learner, pupil, disciple.”⁶ Therefore, neither English translation is wrong or “adding unto his words.” Both renderings, the KJV and ASV, correctly translate the passage. It is the effort to set aside water from the baptism of the Great Commission that is the problem.

The assumed premise of the questioner, “It is impossible to baptize...nations **with water**,” simply cannot be sustained. Concerning Jacob, “And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come

out of thy loins” (Gen. 35:11). In the singular and plural, Jacob’s descendents were referred to as “nation” and “nations.” Upon their release from Egyptian bondage, how many of the fathers were baptized in water? Paul wrote:

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

The waters were a wall on their right hand and on their left, and the cloud covered them (Exod. 14:22; 1 Cor. 10:1-2). How many of the nation of Israel were baptized? Five times Paul answers “All.”

All disputation is laid to rest about who is to be baptized, whether “nations” or “individuals,” by comparing the parallel text of Mark 16:15-16, which reads, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The Gospel is to be preached to “every creature.” How are the “nations” to be baptized? One person at a time—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

The first recorded Gospel sermon was given on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. It was preached to “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Toward the conclusion of the sermon, Luke recorded, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Who out of all the nation of the Jews was baptized? Luke answers, “Then they that

gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). The baptism of the Great Commission is water baptism because the same speaker wrote:

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:21).

Additionally, when the Gentiles were brought into the body of Christ, they were added at the point of water baptism. Peter questioned:

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days (Acts 10:47-48).

Incidentally, the word translated “Gentiles” in Acts 10:45 is the same word translated “nations” in Matthew 28:19: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Now, knowing this, how can any conscientious person stand with Rogers and the Baptists, who preach, “Baptism isn’t necessary for salvation”? Disciples are made by baptizing them. If a disciple is a learner or follower, and Jesus said, “Go...teach...baptize,” that is what a disciple will do; otherwise, he is not a disciple. There are more reasons to believe water is the element of the baptism of the Great Commission, but the ones studied here answer the letter from Connecticut.

The Terminus

Jesus' words to Nicodemus were "heavenly things" (John 3:12). The credibility of Christ was unassailable. He came down from heaven to bring salvation to the world (John 3:13). His words in John 3:14-16 gave the goal to all mankind of developing the faith that saves:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The illustration of "the serpent in the wilderness" from Numbers 21 shows that the faith that saves is the faith that obeys. When the people became very "discouraged because of the way" that they were traveling to the Promised Land was hard, they began to complain. They complained about eating only manna from heaven, "angels' food" (Psm. 78:25), and spoke against God (Num. 21:4-5). God sent poisonous snakes among the people, and "much people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6). When they repented, Moses prayed to the Lord, and the Lord instructed him to make the likeness of a serpent of brass and erect it on a pole. The ones who would look upon it would live, and it was so (Num. 21:7-9). Jesus said, "And **as** Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, **even so** must the Son of man be lifted up." Those who would be saved from the deadly consequences of sin today must obey the Lord. He must hear the Spirit's Word (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:29; Rev. 3:6; Rev. 3:13; Rev. 3:22); believe Jesus is the Christ, the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16); repent of the love and practice of sin (Luke 13:3; Luke 13:5); confess Christ (Matt. 10:32-33; John 12:42-43); and be born again of water and of the Spirit

(John 3:3-5; Mark 16:16). The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Jesus said, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

Endnotes

1 Lennie Reagan, “Inspiration’s View of Baptism,” **The Messenger** (July 16, 2000), p. 3.

2 Edward T. Hiscox, **The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches** (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1943 reprint), pp. 20-21. The **Baptist Faith and Message** is the writing of “doctrinal accountability” for the 15 million member Southern Baptist Convention today. In a report to the SBC adopted June 14, 2000, Chairman Adrian Rogers stated, “We are not embarrassed to state before the world that these are doctrines we hold precious and as essential to the Baptist tradition of faith and practice” <http://sbc.net/2000-bf_m.html, p. 2>. Here is what the **Baptist Faith and Message** says about baptism:

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and the Lord’s Supper <http://sbc.net/2000-bf_m.html, p. 5>.

3 Ibid, p. 56.

4 The writer from Connecticut responded to the article “Add Thou Not Unto His Words” by Gary McDade, which originally appeared in the **Good News from Getwell** and may be seen at <<http://www.getwellchurchofchrist.org/articles>>.

5 William Arndt & W. F. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature** (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), p. 486.

6 Ibid.

CHAPTER 10

What Jesus Said To The Woman At The Well

Mark Lindley

Introduction

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

THESE WORDS REVEAL THAT the book of John was written to prove the Deity of Christ. The signs Jesus did, seven of which are recorded in John, establish that He is the Son of God.

Not only did Jesus use outward signs to substantiate His claims, but He also proved Himself by revealing that He has infinite knowledge. John affirmed that Jesus knows the hearts and lives of all men: “And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (John 2:25). During the discourse Jesus had with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42), the woman became convinced that Jesus was no ordinary man when He revealed that He knew about the “five husbands” of her past and the man whom she had at the time of the discourse. When the woman realized that Jesus knew these details, she said, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (John 4:19). Though the account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is

primarily recorded to show the Deity of Christ, many other great spiritual treasures are contained therein. The theme for this lecture will be developed by noting relevant background information, what Jesus said to the woman at the well, reactions to what Jesus said, and practical lessons learned from this account.

Background Information

Origin Of The Samaritans

When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, she responded, “How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9). Who were the Samaritans? And why did the Jews “have no dealings” with them?

The animosity that existed between the Jews and Samaritans can be traced back to the origin of the Samaritan people. When Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, refused to lighten the taxation of the Israelites, ten of the twelve tribes rebelled and began following Jeroboam (1 Kings 12). These ten tribes are often identified as the Northern Kingdom. The capital of the northern tribes, Samaria, was conquered in 721 B.C. by Sargon, king of Assyria. Many of the inhabitants were taken into captivity, and were replaced by colonists from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim (2 Kings 17:24). These newcomers “amalgamated with the Jews remaining in the land, and gradually abandoned idolatry and adopted partly the Jewish religion.”¹ The woman at the well referred to Jacob as the “father” of the Samaritans (John 4:12). But the Samaritans were not fully the children of Jacob and the Jewish fathers; they were composed partly of the remnant of the ten tribes and partly of foreigners.² Throughout their history, they tried to use this fact to their

advantage. When the Jews prospered, the Samaritans claimed a relation to them. But when the Jews faced adversity, the Samaritans claimed to be descendants of Assyrian immigrants.³

As mentioned earlier, the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, also fell in 586 B.C. to the Babylonians. During this siege, the temple was destroyed, and the people were taken into captivity (2 Kings 24-25). A remnant, however, later returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and began rebuilding the temple. The Samaritans offered to help the Jews complete this project, but the Jews steadfastly rejected their offer. This caused the Samaritans to have a very hostile attitude, and they vigorously tried to hinder the work the Jews were doing (Ezra 3-4). When there remained no hope for these two groups to be reconciled, the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim.⁴

The bad blood between the Jews and Samaritans was still a problem in the time of Christ. All of this history was in the background when the Samaritan lady said, “the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”

The Place Where The Conversation Occurred

After Jesus left Judaea, the text says that He went through Samaria on His way to Galilee (John 4:3-4). Traveling through Samaria, Jesus came to a city “called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph” (John 4:5). **Smith’s Bible Dictionary** says, “Sychar was either a name applied to the town of Shechem or it was an independent place. The first of these alternatives is now almost universally accepted.”⁵ So, it is believed that the Sychar of John 4 was the Shechem of Genesis 33:18, also called Sichem or Sychem (Gen. 12:6; Acts 7:16).

Shechem was located in central Palestine between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It was thirty-four miles

north of Jerusalem, seven miles southeast of Samaria, and was located in the tribe of Ephraim (Josh. 21:21). The many allusions to Shechem throughout the Bible show that it had an important place in Jewish history. It was here that Abraham pitched his tent, built his first altar in the Promised Land, and received the first Divine promise (Gen. 12:6-7). Later, Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, bought a piece of land near Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver and gave it to his son Joseph (Gen. 33:19; Josh. 24:32). This is that “parcel of ground” to which John referred (John 4:5). Jacob also dug a well there which bears his name (John 4:6). This is the well on which Jesus sat when he met the Samaritan woman:

The well of Jacob lies about a mile and a half east of the city...The well is deep—75 feet when last measured—and there was probably a considerable accumulation of rubbish at the bottom. Sometimes it contains a few feet of water, but at others it is quite dry. It is entirely excavated in the solid rock, perfectly round, 9 feet in diameter, with the sides hewn smooth and regular. Of all the special localities of our Lord’s life, this is almost the only one absolutely undisputed.⁶

The Time And Occasion Of The Conversation

The author of the **1960 Annual Lesson Commentary** wrote concerning the time of the occasion:

We learn from the first part of the chapter from which our lesson is taken that Jesus was leaving Judaea, and was going to Galilee. Jesus had probably spent several months in Judaea. He went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, which was probably during the early part of April; and from his reference to the time of harvest in 4:35 [i.e., John 4:35—ML] it appears that he was making the trip through Samaria about the middle of December of that year. The harvest came about the middle of April, and counting

back four months from that time would be about the middle of December.⁷

So it seems likely that Jesus was traveling through the country of Samaria about the middle of December. It should be noted that the reference in John 4:4 is to the country of Samaria and not to the city of that name, which was about six miles northwest of Sychar.⁸

As Jesus was traveling, He became tired and sat on Jacob's well. The text says that it was "about the sixth hour" (John 4:6). If Jewish time is meant, it was about noon; but, if Roman time is meant, it was about six o'clock in the evening. Commentators are not in agreement as to which time is under consideration. Though the method of computing the time is uncertain, it is stated that Jesus was weary and stopped to rest at Jacob's well. His disciples were gone into the city to buy food. This provided the opportunity for Jesus to converse with the woman at the well.

What Jesus Said To The Woman At The Well

Jesus, the Master Teacher and Evangelist, was always alert to opportunities to seek and save the lost. He was never too busy or too tired to do His Father's will (cf. John 4:34). When the Samaritan woman came to the well where Jesus was resting, He asked her for a drink of water. John explains the reason why Jesus asked for a drink: "For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat" (John 4:8). It seems that Jesus was hoping to get enough water for Himself and the disciples so that, when the disciples returned with food, there would be sufficient water to drink with their meal. Though the Lord was cognizant of these physical necessities (food and drink), it is clear from the account that He was more concerned about spiritual needs (John 4:31-34). So even though Jesus asked for water to meet physical needs, He knew that His asking

would open the door of opportunity to meet the lady's spiritual needs.

The woman's response indicates that she was surprised that Jesus had asked her for water. She inquired, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" (John 4:9). Obviously, she recognized Jesus as a Jew, either by His manner of dress or speech, and, aware of the strife that had been between Jews and Samaritans for so long, she wondered why Jesus would condescend to speak to her.

Jesus Spoke To The Woman At The Well About Living Water

It is at this juncture in the conversation that Jesus began conversing with the lady about spiritual matters. He said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee **living water**" (John 4:10, emp. mine, ML). The term "living water" is used metaphorically throughout the Old Testament to refer to spiritual blessings (especially salvation) which only God can provide (Psm. 36:8-9; Isa. 58:11; Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8). Here, the term is used in the same manner and is synonymous with "the gift of God" and "everlasting life" (John 4:14).

The expression "gift of God" is found several times in the New Testament and has different meanings, depending on the context in which it is found. For example, when Paul exhorted Timothy to "stir up the gift of God" which was in him, he had reference to some spiritual gift Timothy had received by the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Tim. 1:6). But when Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," he did not use the expression to refer to spiritual gifts; rather, in this passage "gift of God" denotes "eternal

life” (Rom. 6:23). So the context determines how the expression should be interpreted.

Had the woman at the well realized to Whom she was speaking and the spiritual life He provided, she would have asked Him for a spiritual blessing. Unquestionably, Jesus had aroused the curiosity of the lady, and she wanted to know more about this living water. The passage at hand suggests two important points: (1) Jesus viewed this lowly Samaritan lady as being worthy of everlasting life, and (2) He suggested that He was able to provide such life. Guy N. Woods succinctly stated concerning this occurrence:

Actually, the positions of the two were reversed. Though he was weary with travel and in need of a drink, it was she who was really famished—near the Well of Living Water yet without present means of drawing from it.⁹

Jesus Spoke To The Woman At The Well About Everlasting Life

Because Jesus had taken advantage of the opportunity to talk to the woman about living water, she asked:

Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?” (John 4:11-12).

It is evident that the woman, like Nicodemus, did not comprehend that Jesus was using figurative language to teach spiritual Truth. Since interpreting figurative language was a problem in that day, it should not be surprising that many today are unable to understand God’s Word for the same reason—they place a literal interpretation on figurative language! The entire system of premillennialism is built upon a literal interpretation of figurative language. For example, dispensational

premillennialists are expecting a material kingdom to be established one day in fulfillment of passages referring to the kingdom of Christ. But they fail to recognize the **spiritual** nature of the kingdom (cf. Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36; Rev. 1:4-7).

The woman did not understand where Jesus would find the living water of which He spoke, since the well was deep and He had nothing with which to draw water. Jacob had dug a well in that place so that there would be a water source. He, his children, and his cattle all drank from the well, but the well did not produce “living water.” In view of these facts, the woman did not understand how Jesus could provide living water. Did He know of **another** well nearby that provided living water? Did He know more than Jacob knew about wells and water? It seems the woman was pondering such questions.

In response to her inquiries, Jesus said:

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:13-14).

Jesus did not deny that He was greater than Jacob. In fact, just as He had explicitly stated on another occasion that He was greater than Jonah (Matt. 12:41-42), He implied by His statement to the woman that He was, indeed, greater than Jacob. The water Jacob provided could slake one’s physical thirst **temporarily**. But the water Jesus provides will slake one’s spiritual thirst **eternally**. There are five important affirmations with reference to the water Jesus promised the woman: (1) it is abundant—Jesus referred to it as a “well” of water; (2) it satisfies the longings of the soul—those who drink will “never thirst”; (3) this water “springs up”—unlike a stagnant pool, it is a

fountain ever-flowing and will not fail; (4) it is eternal—it springs up into “everlasting life”; and (5) Jesus is the source of it. How blessed, indeed, are those who drink of this water!

The woman, still without an understanding of the spiritual nature of this water, said, “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” (John 4:15). Even though she had not comprehended what Christ was teaching, she was interested and asked for the water of which He spoke.

Jesus Spoke To The Woman About Her Husbands

Until one in sin realizes that he is lost, he will have no desire to change. Jesus knew the woman at the well was sinful and in need of salvation, but she needed to become aware of her condition. Not only did Jesus want the woman to realize her need for salvation, but He also wanted her to recognize Him as the Messiah. It was for these two reasons that Jesus told the woman to go and call her husband (John 4:16). The woman responded, saying, “I have no husband” (John 4:17). Jesus then said, “Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly” (John 4:17-18). Realizing that the woman could have lied about her marital status, Jesus commended her for her honesty. He then revealed that He knew all about her husbands of the past and the man with whom she was currently living. The Lord said to the church of Ephesus, “I know thy works” (Rev. 2:2). Jesus knew the works of the Ephesians, the Samaritan woman, and He knows the works of all men today! Such knowledge is not characteristic of ordinary men. But, of course, Jesus was not ordinary. When Nicodemus came to Jesus he said, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). Like Nicodemus,

the woman at the well was beginning to realize that the One with Whom she was speaking was special. She said, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet” (John 4:19).

Jesus Spoke To The Woman At The Well About Worship

The woman changed the topic of conversation because she apparently felt uncomfortable talking with Jesus about her marital status. She raised an old theological controversy concerning the acceptable place of worship in order to direct Jesus’ attention away from her personal life. The Samaritans believed that Mount Gerizim was the appropriate place of worship. They had built a temple on this mountain, as noted earlier, and, even though the temple was destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 129 B.C., the Samaritans still considered the mountain to be holy.¹⁰ The Jews, on the other hand, held that Jerusalem was the God-ordained place of worship.

Rather than getting involved in the Mount Gerizim/Jerusalem controversy, Jesus chose to focus on the **kind** of worship (in contrast to the place) that would be acceptable in the Christian dispensation. He said:

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24).

Jesus used the term “hour” to refer to the time when worship would not be acceptable merely because it was performed in Jerusalem. Rather, when Jesus spoke these

words, there was a time at hand in which the place of worship would have no significance. That time is now—in the Christian dispensation.

Jesus then affirmed that the Jews had a greater knowledge of God than did the Samaritans. The reason the Samaritans were ignorant of God and His requirements for worship was because they accepted only the Pentateuch and rejected the rest of the Old Testament.¹¹ This caused them to be uninformed. Salvation, then, did not come through the Samaritans but through the Jews. The Old Testament was produced by the Jews, and they were the people through whom the Messiah came.

Jesus told the woman that true worship (i.e., worship that is acceptable to God) is worship done in spirit and in truth. This is a “must.” Worship done “in spirit” is worship that is sincere and from the heart. Since God is the object of true worship and He “is a spirit,” man’s worship must be spiritual—it must be commensurate with the nature of God Who is spirit. God never has been pleased with cold, formalistic worship. All five avenues of worship authorized by the New Testament must be done in spirit (Col. 3:16; Matt. 6:5-6; 2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Cor. 11:20-22; 2 Cor. 2:17; Luke 8:18).

One would be as well off staying at home engaging in no worship at all, as to perform worship acts ritualistically and insincerely in an assembly. The person who balances his checkbook, daydreams, habitually sleeps, walks around in the foyer of the church building, or plays with babies during worship needs to realize that the worship he offers is vain! The words of Psalm 89:7 need to be written in the hearts of all who want to worship God acceptably: “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.” God demands reverence. The true worshiper will make a conscious effort to involve his heart in worship.

But not only must worship be done in spirit, it must also be “in truth.” To worship in truth is to engage in worship acts prescribed by the Word of God. The Psalmist wrote, “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth” (Psm. 119:142). Since worship must be in truth, and God’s Law is truth, worship must be in keeping with God’s Law. Jesus stated, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Again, since worship must be in truth and God’s Word is truth, worship must be in keeping with God’s Word. To engage in worship acts unauthorized by God will certainly cause one’s worship to be rejected. The examples of Cain and Abel, Nadab and Abihu, et al. prove that worship must be in truth; otherwise, it will be rejected (Gen. 4:1-5; Lev. 10:1-2). But many today are more concerned with what draws the crowds than they are about a “thus saith the Lord.”

Much of the so-called “worship” today is nothing more than a shallow, unauthorized attempt to cater to the culture. “What the people want” seems to be of extreme importance to many, and “what God wants” is not even considered. Carnally minded baby boomers are demanding a jazzed-up, entertaining type of worship service that satisfies them. Short and sweet sermonettes, baby dedications, praise teams, special singing, and theatrical performances in worship are all in vogue today.

But where is the Scriptural authority for these practices? There is none! God has specified how He wants to be approached in worship. Therefore, men should be content to do only what is authorized, never taking unwarranted liberties with God’s Word.

Jesus Spoke To The Woman At The Well About His Identity

When Jesus had given the Samaritan woman instruction about true worship, she said, “I know that

Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things” (John 4:25). She still had not understood His true identity. But her statement shows that she was expecting a Messiah to come, and she believed that He (the Messiah) would settle the dispute between Samaritans and Jews concerning the proper place of worship.

Then Jesus revealed His identity to the woman. He said, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26). This revelation excited the woman so much that she left her water pot, went into the city, and encouraged others to come to see Jesus. Now the woman knew His real identity; she said to the people of the city, “Is this not the Christ?” Others came from the city to see Jesus, and the text says “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman” (John 4:39). When the people asked Jesus to tarry with them, He abode there two days and many more believed on Him.

Practical Lessons For Today

1. Jesus was always soul-conscious and seized opportunities to teach others (John 4:6-7; Luke 19:10). He was never too busy or too tired to talk with others about spiritual matters. Jesus had time for one immoral Samaritan woman (cf. Matt. 16:26).

2. Simple conversations can be turned into golden opportunities to teach the lost. Jesus turned an everyday conversation about water into a spiritual dialogue about everlasting life (John 4:7-14). We should follow His example.

3. Jesus did not allow racial barriers to get in the way of evangelism (John 4:9). Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus made it clear that He is no respecter of persons (cf. Luke 10:25-37; Luke 17:11-19).

4. People often love to talk about what their ancestors have done. The Samaritan woman spoke about “father

Jacob” and the “fathers” who had worshiped at Mount Gerizim (John 4:12; John 4:20). Some today will not obey the Gospel because they cling to their parents’ beliefs and will not be disloyal to the family denomination.

5. Sinners often want to talk about religion, but do not want to talk about their need for the Gospel. The woman wanted to talk about the place of worship, but she did not want to talk about the “five husbands” of her past (John 4:16-20).

6. We should live in such a way that we would not be ashamed to talk to Jesus about our past (cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 John 2:28). Sins committed should be repented of (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

7. Worship to God must be done in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

8. When the Samaritan woman found the Savior, she brought others to Him (John 4:28-30; John 4:39). We have the responsibility to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; Mark 16:15; Prov. 11:30).

9. The spiritual should be far more important to us than the material. When the disciples asked Jesus to eat, He said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:31-34). We should always put the spiritual before the material (Matt. 4:4; 2 Cor. 4:16-18).

Conclusion

The words Jesus spoke to the woman at the well are of great spiritual depth. The conversation He had with the woman is rich, indeed, with a plethora of spiritual applications. The primary reason, however, that Jesus conversed with her was to persuade her of His Divinity. During the discourse, the woman realized that Jesus is the Messiah, and she told others about Him. When others from Samaria heard the Lord speak, they believed also.

Let's share the Good News with others that they might have an opportunity to examine the evidence and believe that Jesus is the Christ. The Word will convince those who have good and honest hearts. When the Samaritans had heard the Lord speak, they said, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42).

Endnotes

1 "Samaritans," **Easton's Bible Dictionary**, The Bible Library Special Edition, Version 4.0 (ValuSoft & Ellis Enterprises).

2 Albert Barnes, **John**, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1966), p. 215.

3 "Samaritan," **The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible** (1970), p. 824.

4 **Easton's Bible Dictionary**.

5 "Sychar," **Smith's Bible Dictionary**, eds. F. N. & M. A. Peloubet, p. 656.

6 "Shechem," **Smith's Bible Dictionary**, p. 612.

7 **Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary**, Volume 39, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1960), p. 240.

8 "Samaria," **Smith's Bible Dictionary**, p. 582.

9 Guy N. Woods, **John**, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989), p. 79.

10 Archibald Thomas Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Volume 5, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), p. 65.

11 **Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary**, Volume 36 (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1957), p. 168.

CHAPTER 11

What Jesus Said To The Woman Taken In Adultery

Gary Summers

Introduction

DIDN'T JESUS SAY, 'LET him who is without sin cast the first stone?'" people ask when trying to discredit anyone who has called sin by its rightful name. Although they have given the sense of what Jesus said, His actual words were, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7).¹ Most people who appeal to this verse, however, have not considered the context of the Lord's rebuke upon the people. They also abuse and misapply the verse in an attempt to legitimize evil behavior.

If there are two Scriptures that worldly, ungodly, sin-practicing people know, they are this one and "Judge not" (Matt. 7:1). Resorting to these two passages, they suppose, is a way of justifying the evil that they enjoy. They mistakenly believe that Jesus did not want us to condemn sin.

While it is true that we should not be hypocritical and condemn another if we are committing the same sin (Rom. 2:1), nevertheless, flawlessness is not a requirement to decry a public sin. If it were, Paul could never have

admonished the imperfect Corinthians to withdraw fellowship from the man living with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5).

Our purpose here will be to go beyond lifting an idea out of its context upon the pretext of justifying the wicked (Prov. 17:15). Jesus did not say these words so that the ungodly could seize upon them and attempt to batter, browbeat, and bully the righteous with them. When He invited sinful men to cast the first stone, it was to expose their hypocrisy. These were not men who were outraged about an immoral woman's actions; they were vulgar and profane men trying to entrap an innocent Man. Those who latch onto this verse today are equally profane; they want those guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors to go free because darkness (regardless of its shade) hates the light (John 3:19-21; John 8:12). Sins are not removed by obscuring or attempting to excuse them; only exposure brings out their ugliness and provides us the opportunity for repentance.

The Text

The text under consideration, John 7:53-8:11, is a very controversial one, whose validity has been debated for centuries. These verses, referred to at times as the *pericope de adultera* (the passage concerning adultery), are absent from many of the ancient manuscripts and versions. Foster points out that a "few manuscripts put it at the close of the Gospel. Four inferior manuscripts put it in the Gospel of Luke at the end of chapter 21."² The vast majority of manuscripts contain the passage where we find it located today.

Erasmus, Calvin, Beza, A. T. Robertson, and others think that John did not write these words, but they do believe that the event probably did occur (which would mean that some unknown individual added it to John's

book).³ Metzger, an authority on Greek texts, states positively that “the evidence for the non-Johannine origin of the *pericope* of the adulteress is overwhelming”; Westcott and Hort argue that the passage “first came into St. John’s Gospel as an insertion.”⁴

Zane Hodges, however, points out that it is improbable (due to the frequent and quite early quotations taken from it) that anyone could have inserted it after A.D. 200.⁵ Many of the Old Latin versions omit the text, but Hodges points out that the number of “manuscripts which contain it are far more numerous than those omitting it.”⁶ J. W. McGarvey, in his well-known classic **The Fourfold Gospel**, summarized the matter succinctly:

This section is wanting in nearly all older manuscripts, but Jerome (A.D. 346-420) says that in his time it was contained “in many Greek and Latin manuscripts,” and these must have been as good or better than the best manuscripts we now possess.⁷

In fact, Jerome “had at his disposal the rich fruits of Origen’s lifetime of study in the field of textual criticism, and the manuscripts Origen had collected.”⁸ Foster adds, “John 7:53-8:11 is not found merely in the Old Latin, and the Vulgate, but the Ethiopic, the Persic, Boharic, Gothic, and Anglo-Saxon.”⁹

So, very early on, due to ambivalent evidence, someone either added this text—or removed it. Why would anyone put it in the book of John when it was not originally there? Possibly, someone wrote it in because it did actually occur, and they deemed the account too valuable to be forgotten—even though none of Jesus’ biographers had included it. The problem with that idea is that it demonstrates a lack of trust in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If, on the other hand, someone invented the account, we must ask, “Why? What did they expect to gain by

inserting an apocryphal story into a legitimate Gospel?” The text contains no false doctrine; it disagrees with no other passage of Scripture.

It seems far more likely that the passage was removed—either deliberately or unintentionally. The evidence certainly indicates that Mark 16:9-20 was omitted; this could be another instance. What is there in the *pericope* that someone might want removed? Could it be that it was already being misapplied to justify sin, as it is commonly done today? Did someone consider it a sin-friendly passage? Augustine thought that a copyist removed it because (in his mind) it excused adultery. Foster agreed: “A copyist at an early date misunderstood the teaching of the passage and omitted it.”¹⁰ But how could someone with respect for the Word want to exclude what the Holy Spirit put in?

Intentional inclusion and exclusion both seem hard to accept, but the latter makes more sense. Inadvertent exclusion, however, seems preferable to inadvertent inclusion, for obvious reasons. We may not (being so far removed from the original manuscript) possess enough data to decide whether this passage belongs in the Bible or not. **But it is in there—and has been for nearly two thousand years!** Therefore, it either belongs, and God preserved it, or it does not belong, but God deemed that its presence would do no harm (apart from the fact that Christians for all these centuries have been deceived into believing something false about the Lord). The reader may conclude what he wants, but this writer stands on the side of authenticity.

The Savior On Trial

Early in the morning, Jesus was teaching in the temple. This serene period of instruction was about to be interrupted by some hypocrites who cared about nothing

but trapping Jesus into saying something that they could use against Him. Ultimately, because of their jealousy, they would have rejoiced in tricking the Lord into saying something that the multitude would not stand for, which would ruin His popularity. Failing that, they would content themselves with Jesus' advocating a course of action that would contradict the law by which they were governed.

Their stratagem involved bringing before Jesus an adulterous woman. The scribes and the Pharisees cared nothing about the woman or her sin; she was simply a pawn being used to put a King in check (John 8:6). Interrupting the Lord's teaching on this morning came the schemers and the miserable woman they forced to accompany them. They "set her in the midst" (John 8:3). The initial reaction of some might have been contempt, scorn, or anger; Jesus may have been the only One Who felt pity. Undoubtedly, He knew that the public exposure of her sin and her subsequent humiliation were only part of a strategy to bring about His downfall.

The enemies of the Lord could just as easily have posed a hypothetical question to Him without the use of a live visual aid. They could have said, "What if a woman were taken in adultery? What should be done with her?" Jesus often answered His critics by asking, "What do the Scriptures teach?" If He were to call their attention to the law, which taught the death penalty (Lev. 20:10), they needed to have the wretch handy so that the sentence could be executed swiftly.

Deciding what to advise concerning this woman constituted the horns of a dilemma. If Jesus encouraged the Law of Moses to be enforced, He would have violated Roman law (since Jews were not permitted to put sinners to death). If He were to say, "She shall not be punished," He clearly denies the will of God, which was a serious offense. In our day, adultery is so common that scarcely an

eyebrow is raised. And while it may not have been unusual in the Gentile world, Jewish society would not tolerate it. According to Barclay, the Rabbis of Jesus' time taught, "Every Jew must die before he will commit idolatry, murder or adultery."¹¹ The question before Jesus, then, was not one of a frivolous nature.

That she was caught in the very act of adultery is beyond question. Jesus would have known if the woman was merely a prop in a pretense. She stood before Him in her shame and guilt. We cannot help but wonder how is it that the scribes and Pharisees obtained her. Was it just happenstance? No, they brought her to test Jesus, so they were following a plan which they had devised. They either had information about an adulterous couple and waited until they were together, or a man volunteered to incriminate the woman, in return for which they let him go. If he was her habitual lover, how betrayed she must have felt.

The Question

Whatever the details were, the situation was contrived so that they could catch her in the very act and bring her to Jesus. The question they pose to Jesus is significant: "Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say?" (John 8:5). The question reveals that they were familiar with the prior teachings of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus frequently used the following sequence: "You have heard that it was said to those of old...but I say to you."

The first two times that Jesus uses this phraseology, He is quoting one of the ten commandments: "You shall not murder" (Matt. 5:21-22), and "You shall not commit adultery" (Matt. 5:27-28). He is not, however, setting these commandments aside; He is intensifying them. He moves

beyond the sin at its point of commission and traces it to its point of origin—the human heart. It is hatred that culminates in murder, and adultery results from lascivious, covetous thoughts (Exod. 20:17; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

Next, Jesus cites Deuteronomy 24:1, in which Moses allowed divorce for “uncleanness,” but He says that man should not divorce at all—except for fornication (sexual immorality). This time, Jesus does not intensify the law; He changes it. As we have already noticed, the law provided that adulterers be put to death. Jesus has replaced the punishment of death with divorce. Furthermore, He disagreed with the loose interpretation of **uncleanness** that many in His day would allow. He did not agree that a man could divorce His wife for any cause (Matt. 19:3-9).

He also took issue with “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Matt. 5:38). He told the multitude “not to resist an evil person” (Matt. 5:39). Jesus also called to their attention the philosophy, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matt. 5:43). God had commanded the “love your neighbor” (Lev. 19:18) portion of this popular saying; the “hating your enemy” part was erroneously inferred by the Jews. Jesus commanded them to love their enemies instead (Matt. 5:44).

Two observations are in order concerning the manner in which Jesus had taught. First, He spoke as One Who had authority (Matt. 7:28-29). Although we may be somewhat accustomed to studying Matthew 5-7, we must understand how revolutionary these teachings were to the Jews. Although Jesus only intensified two of the ten commandments, He took issue with the law on divorce; He also challenged their perception of the way to deal with enemies. The very words, “**But I say to you,**” bespeak authority. Anyone who would set himself above the Law of Moses would be presumptuous indeed—unless He spoke (as Jesus did) with the authority of God (John 12:48-50).

A new covenant, which must by definition replace the old, was not unexpected. Moses, at the very time he was repeating the law to the second generation of Israelites, foretold of one of their brethren who would be like Moses; furthermore, it was required that they must listen to this prophet (Deut. 18:15; Deut. 18:18-19).

In other words, someone possessing even more authority than Moses was going to come and speak things which (obviously) would be different, and the people must give heed to him. (Anyone saying the same things as Moses would not have a new message; hence, the admonition to hear him would be unnecessary.) Jeremiah 31:31-34 also prophesies of a new covenant to come. Jesus claims the authority to fulfill these prophecies.

Second, some have taught in recent years that Jesus just came to clarify the Law and that, therefore, His teachings (especially those on divorce and remarriage) are not part of the Gospel system. Such a notion should be thought of as absurd on the face of it. Why would Jesus clarify the finer points of the Law just in time for it to pass away into oblivion? Furthermore, if Jesus' mission was to clarify, why did He never present it in such a manner? He could have said, "Here is what God meant when He gave **uncleanness** as the reason for putting away one's wife." Instead, the Lord **changed** the reason for divorce to fornication, which, under the law, was punishable by death. Mark makes it clear from the very first verse that Jesus did not come to explain the law—but rather to initiate His covenant: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The Gospel system (the faith, the way) begins with John and Jesus—not the book of Acts. Jesus speaks with authority regarding His teaching.

The Answer

How will Jesus answer this question, which is based upon the authority that He has claimed? Will He reply

that, under His new covenant, this woman will not be put to death, thus stretching His authority even more than perhaps His own disciples would feel comfortable with? Will He uphold the Law of Moses, which was still valid and in effect? Will He side with Roman law, endorse the Mosaic Law, or set Himself above that law? He answers nothing: “But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear” (John 8:6).

Why did He do that? The reason cannot be that He knew not how to respond. Jesus was always prepared to answer any question—even the most difficult of them—that His enemies formulated (Matt. 22:23-32). We cannot imagine that the master respondent would need time to collect His thoughts. He obviously wanted to delay answering; the reason is a matter of speculation. Perhaps a few were indignant enough to stone the woman; stalling would thus remove the focus of attention from her to Himself.

A second reason may have been to slow down the action. The Lord’s enemies marched in, interrupted His teaching session, forced the question upon Him, and expected an immediate answer. Jesus balks at their fast-paced agenda, thus shifting control of the situation from them to Him. Third, by putting them off for a short time, He heightens their interest even more in the answer that He will give. His dramatic pause will cause them to listen carefully when He speaks.

What did Jesus write on the ground? This side of eternity, the answer to that question must remain speculative. The word translated “wrote” is the usual Greek word for actual writing, such as when Jesus says, “It is written,” or John is told to “write” what he sees. Presumably Jesus did write words. He might have written something to expose their hypocrisy, such as, “Where is the man?” Their continued badgering would then amount to

comments such as, “He got away. That doesn’t matter. Answer the question.”

Barclay suggests that He wrote down a catalogue of their own sins, which would heighten the effect of His later pronouncement, “Let Him who is without a sin amongst you, let him throw a stone at her first.” Looking at the list of sins Jesus had written would leave them defenseless. Barclay also suggests that “without sin” may mean “without a sinful desire.” In other words, they had desired to do the very thing of which she was guilty.¹²

It would also have been interesting if Jesus had written what He said in reverse order. He might have begun by writing, “Let him cast the stone first at her,” which would have made them think that He was agreeing with the Law of Moses; then, He could have added, “The sinless one among you.” F. F. Bruce refers to T. W. Manson, who avers that Jesus “was imitating the action of a Roman magistrate, who wrote down his sentence and then read it aloud. If that is so, the words which he wrote would be those which he utters in verse 7.”¹³

But the problem with all of these explanations is that the text provides none of them. What Jesus wrote on the ground was not the important part of what happened. How many would actually be close enough to see what He wrote, anyway? The words that He spoke were what produced the effect upon the crowd. They had probably imagined every possible answer that could be given to the question, and they had a ready response to each one of those. If He said to stone her, which agreed with the Law of Moses, they undoubtedly had some Roman authorities standing by to arrest Him for advocating the circumvention of Roman law. If He advocated leniency in any form, they would accuse Him of despising the Law of Moses, given by God.

Jesus could not tell them to ignore the Law of Moses. True, it was passing away and would soon be of no effect,

but He had already taught, “Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). He must uphold the law all of His life because it will remain in effect until He dies (Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:27-28). He cannot say, “Stone her now, but under my new covenant we will not be a theocracy and exercise the death penalty.” Neither can He answer, “Let this woman go.” Of all the questions that were ever asked of Jesus, this one was the most difficult. Jesus cannot say, “Have you not read,” and then cite a Scripture to resolve the situation handily, as He did with the Sadducees (Matt. 22:23-32).

This instance does not deal with a hypothetical situation; this one is real, and the stakes are considerable. Hanging in the balance is the life—not to mention the soul—of a woman whom, the Law of Moses says, should be put to death. Also at risk are Jesus’ reputation and credibility. He cannot command the woman’s death and be locked up in a Roman prison; neither can He deliberately teach His people to violate the Law. This is the most diabolical dilemma that His enemies ever constructed.

When Jesus answers, He agrees with the Law, but He adds one stipulation. The one who casts the first stone at the woman must be without sin. The dilemma is thrown back on them, and they are convicted by their own consciences (John 8:9). They might have replied, “Wait a minute. Moses knew the existence of sin in the lives of the Israelites, and he still commanded them to put to death adulterers. Why must we be perfect?” Jesus could have replied, “You asked for My judgment; I have given it to you.”

Whereas we are familiar with what Jesus said, those people were hearing it for the first time, and they are stunned. Jesus had postponed His reply for a few seconds, and, when He does speak, He has taken neither horn of the dilemma. They were listening for one of two answers,

and He said something totally different from what they were expecting. Furthermore, He lifted the guilt off of the woman and put it on each one of them. When the impurity of their motives is stirred in, Jesus had given them a very bitter drink to swallow. They stand exposed and ashamed. They leave after Jesus stoops down to write again on the ground. The Lord had chosen not to argue with them. He gave them a humble response and left them alone with their thoughts. They depart silently.

The Misapplication Of The Event

Is the purpose of this event to keep us from judging things to be sinful or to prevent us from withdrawing fellowship from brethren? Scarcely! Paul commanded about as imperfect a group of brethren ever assembled to withdraw from one living with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5), and numerous other passages require brethren to make such judgments (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). Furthermore, just prior to this sordid event, Jesus had taught, "Do not judge according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). What better example could there be of unrighteous judgment than for sinful men to have arranged in some way an adulterous situation to have occurred just so they could trap the Lord? No wonder their consciences bothered them! They were accessories in violating the Law in order to provoke Jesus into violating the Law so that they could accuse Him.

Understanding the context of John 8, along with the knowledge of Scriptures that command judgment, would keep people from misapplying Jesus' remarks. But many people lack a proper understanding of the text; usually, their knowledge of the New Testament itself is wanting. No one errs by calling sin by its proper name: "Sin." To cite the numerous passages that define or categorize sin in an effort to inform the public is not to judge; God provided

the definitions so that we could know the difference between right and wrong. Usually, people who are violating God's precepts (or their sympathizers) are the ones who complain about others judging them. They know that they are wrong and guilty, so they attack the righteous to put them on the defensive. Such are as hypocritical as those who brought the adulterous woman to Jesus—but with less compunction. They accuse the blameless in order to obscure their willful transgressions. They have seared their consciences and cannot even blush at their own wrongdoings. They will go to their graves, vainly attempting to justify and rationalize the evil they have done, and impugning the motives of their critics. Efforts to “spin” their behavior before the throne of God will fail.

We have only one Divine standard for morals and ethics: the Word of God. Many refuse to accept it as valid, but they have nothing to offer in its place except subjectivism. All who hope to have heaven as their eternal home must abide by the judgments of God. If He calls homosexuality a sin, then a sin is precisely what it is. No one can excuse himself on the grounds that he was born that way. He cannot enter the kingdom of heaven until he gives it up (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Jesus taught that no one can divorce and remarry except for fornication (Matt. 19:3-9); thus, someone who does so for another reason is an adulterer. These are not our judgments; they are God's definitions. Those who complain against God's children for bringing His Word into the discussion are actually at odds with God—not us. His noble laws and pure precepts would remain true whether or not we ever mentioned them. We are only providing the opportunity for others to reconsider their immoral actions.

We ought to be careful, however, that we do not come across as self-righteous. The case of the woman taken in adultery does make the point that we have all sinned.

James makes the point that, if we offend in one point, we stand guilty of all (Jas. 2:10-12). Therefore, when discussing a certain sin that we would never commit, we must not become haughty, since we have allowed ourselves at times to be ensnared by a different error. We ought always to remain humble in the face of someone else's shortcomings—something that the scribes and Pharisees failed to do when they brought the woman to Jesus.

Jesus And The Woman

After the scribes and the Pharisees departed, Jesus and the woman are alone in the midst of the others whom He had been teaching. Her accusers were gone, but that did not change the fact that she was guilty of sin before God. What would Jesus say to her? His reputation was well known throughout Jerusalem; He was a man without sin, pure and holy. Those who had brought her to Him were no better (in effect) than she was, but facing Jesus would be different. He had saved her from death (so far as she knew); what would happen next in the awkward silence? Those who had observed this extraordinary event had undoubtedly marveled at the Lord's handling of the situation, but they too are probably wondering what will happen next.

Jesus asks her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" These questions reinforce what had occurred: the wretched men who had publicly humiliated her (for no other purpose than to make Jesus look bad) were also guilty of sin (perhaps even the same one of which they accused her). But Jesus had not only resolved her problem; He humbled those men in the process. They exposed her; He exposed them.

Her answer is brief: "No one, Lord." She knows enough about Jesus to call Him "Lord" (John 8:11), and she wisely ventures no more information than is required of her.

Would Jesus now condemn her actions? He could rightly do so; He is the one person present without sin. He could make her feel small with but little effort; she may have already felt that way. She knows that she has sinned; Jesus does not need to tell her that. If there had been any doubt in her mind, being dragged into a crowd of people and being tagged as Exhibit A had dispelled any uncertainty.

Jesus now speaks to her three things, the first of which is, “Neither do I condemn you.” Can she believe her ears? Did she hear correctly? He too is not condemning her to be put to death; in fact, He has issued no punishment of any kind. She did not dare to think that her captors would let her go, but, having escaped those evil men, she could not hope to avoid condemnation by Jesus. He had delivered her from stoning, but surely He would recommend some lesser judgment. Would he recommend scourging, imprisonment, slavery, banishment—what? He does not condemn her at all! We are not given her response to the things that Jesus says to her, but mixed in with her elation must be her own conscience whispering to her, “But you **are** guilty.” Perhaps no one else has condemned her to be worthy of punishment, but she cannot escape self-condemnation.

The second thing Jesus tells her is, “Go.” One thing that she could not have envisioned from the moment she was surprised in her immorality was the possibility of freedom. Her accusers had departed; now she is at liberty to leave also. To walk away of her own accord must be counted as a blessed privilege. To be sure, everyone in town knows (or soon will) that she is an adulterer, and her reputation will be shot in that town—especially with her husband, if we infer that she was married—but she is still free to go. Perhaps she has relatives in another city, or it may be that people will forgive her. One thing is certain; they will never forget her—and the day in which the Savior of the world came to her aid.

Third, Jesus told her, “Sin no more.” Jesus has not overlooked her transgression. He is not unaware of her actions; He did not disbelieve the scribes and the Pharisees. He has not advocated punishing her either publicly or privately, but He does command her to cease from sin. With the scare that she has just endured, she should not find it difficult to change her life. A little fear can provide more than enough motivation to effect change in a person’s life, but, usually, the farther removed from the stimulus one is, the less vivid the incident becomes: the impact diminishes. Likely, however, this brush with death will forever change her, and she will be transformed. She had met the Savior: He did not condemn her, but rather encouraged her to live righteously.

Application

This woman represents each one of us: Jesus’ words could have been spoken to any of us. He does not condemn us: “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). Jesus did not need to leave heaven to expose our sins; we were already condemned (Rom. 6:23). He came instead to redeem us from our sins and give us hope. He does not need to add His scorn and disapproval to what we experience from others when we fail. If we have looked into the perfect law of liberty, we already know our shortcomings and transgressions.

When Jesus told the woman taken in adultery, “Go,” she was free from all immediate punishment; she probably did not know that Jesus would soon give His life to make her truly free. He had loosed her from the frowning faces of her peers, but, on the cross, He would free her from the guilt and condemnation of her sins. Jesus came to set us all free (John 8:31-32; John 8:36; 1 John 2:2). When our sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus at the time of

baptism (Acts 2:38; Rev. 1:5), we too may “Go.” We may go with forgiveness, go with God’s grace, go with God’s providential care, go with the freedom to evangelize, and call others to the great salvation that we possess.

Sinning no more required effort from the woman. Salvation is obtained through the sacrifice of Jesus, but we must still repent of our sins. Grace is not bestowed upon the rebellious and hardhearted. The grace of God is not so comprehensive that it extends to those who neglect it (Heb. 2:1-4). If salvation were so cheap that it required nothing out of us, it would not be appreciated, as evidenced by those who have been taught that a one-time confession was sufficient to guarantee their eternal security. The vast majority of these individuals who have subscribed to this false doctrine worships God seldom, remembers Christ infrequently, and thinks nothing of practicing various forms of sin.

Yet Jesus said, “Sin no more.” We cannot prepare ourselves for heaven by remaining exactly the way we are. Would Jesus have saved this the woman if she had gone away and immediately begun to think of when and how she could take another lover? He expects those who would be His to repent (Luke 13:3) and be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:1-2):

No one can enter heav’n who still
Insists on doing his own will.¹⁴

One cannot be born anew until he dies to his old self. Everyone who would be a Christian must be willing to “sin no more.” Then we must walk humbly before God, confessing our sins to Him (1 John 1:7-9). His Word remains in us, and we cannot sin (1 John 3:9). We do not know if we will see this woman in heaven some day; our desire would be that the Lord’s treatment of her that day made a powerful impact on her for eternity. We may never have a

public trial, as this woman endured, but we stood condemned, and Jesus intervened on our behalf. It is our fervent prayer that we never forget His sacrifice for our sins and that we go and sin no more. May each child of God be continually motivated to live for Him, Who died for us.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture citations are from the New King James unless otherwise specified.

2 R. C. Foster, **Studies In The Life Of Christ** (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), pp. 797-798.

3 David Watson, "Studies in Difficult Passages in John—III," **Studies in John**, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid, 1999), pp. 535-536.

4 Ibid, p. 540.

5 Ibid, p. 542.

6 Ibid, p. 543.

7 Ibid, p. 544.

8 Foster, p. 799.

9 Ibid, p. 800.

10 Ibid, p. 798.

11 William Barclay, **The Gospel Of John**, Volume 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), p. 1.

12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel Of John** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 415.

14 This couplet was written by this writer.

CHAPTER 12

What Jesus Said To The Rich Young Ruler

Barry Grider

Introduction

THERE COULD BE NO study more profitable, pleasant, and profound than the study of the sayings of Jesus (Luke 9:44).¹ His words have brought hope to those in trouble, light to those in darkness, and salvation to those lost in sin. The message of Christ is always relevant for every people in every generation. On two occasions, Jesus' baptism, and upon the Mount of Transfiguration, God's voice thundered from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; Matt. 17:5). On the mountain, these words were added, "hear ye him." Since salvation is found in Christ (John 14:6; 2 Tim. 2:10), and because on the Judgment Day man will be judged by the words of Jesus (John 12:48), wise men still heed His sayings:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods

came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:24-27).

The sayings of Jesus are recorded in the Bible. While this lectureship is primarily concerned with the teaching of our Lord during His earthly ministry (the words in red), it is understood that the entirety of the Bible belongs to Him and was given by Him (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Text

The thrust of this discourse is concerned with Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler, as recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels. The account of Matthew follows:

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said

unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last: and the last shall be first (Matt. 19:16-30).

The Background Of The Passage

Jesus, having concluded His earthly ministry in Galilee, “came into the coast of Judea beyond Jordan” (Matt. 19:1; Mark 10:1), which region was Perea. He was surrounded by His disciples, great multitudes, and the ever-present Pharisees, who were searching in vain to find fault with the Master Teacher. It was during this specific time that Jesus dealt uncompromisingly with the critical issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage; lovingly embraced with His precious hands the little children; and taught sublime lessons through parabolic teaching regarding persistency and humility in prayer.

Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler took place “in the way,” the path that led to Jerusalem. Without a doubt, the cross is looming before Him. True to His nature, and with a constant recognition of His Divine mission, He is interacting with people and engaging them in conversation as He travels along the path.

Analysis Of The Text

Our subject was a ruler. This fact is recorded by Luke alone. One cannot be sure, however, what this title implies:

By some the title is supposed simply to denote that he was the ruler of a synagogue or congregation; others, however, consider that it denotes that the subject of the narrative was a ruler of the Jews, and possibly, but this is of course doubtful, a member of the Sanhedrin.²

He was young. This fact is recorded by Matthew alone (Matt. 19:20). According to Philo, youth is defined as the period between twenty-one and twenty-eight.³ No doubt, one reason that he had reached a place of prominence at an early age was because he was rich. All three writers mention his wealth.

Mark reveals his attitude toward Christ, for he ran to Jesus and kneeled before him. Nothing about his character seems disingenuous. Though he may, to some degree, be guilty of self-righteousness, unlike the Pharisee in the preceding parable (Luke 18:9-14), he is not a hypocrite. He genuinely desires an answer to his question.

Many commendable things can be said about the man. Not only did he come with the right disposition, he came asking the right question: "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is the greatest question in all of the world. It is that which was asked by those in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37), by Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:6), and by the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30). A man is wise indeed to seek out the answer to this question.

Furthermore, he came to the right Source. Despite his position and pedigree, which no doubt was similar to that of Saul of Tarsus (Phil. 3:4ff), he, unlike Saul, was not an enemy of the Lord. He really believed that Jesus could solve his dilemma. Though wealthy, youthful, powerful, and prominent, he still desired more. Something was still lacking in his life. There was a void that needed to be filled. Only Jesus can fill that void. Hear His words: "the thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I

am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Jesus is heaven’s bread for man’s hunger, heaven’s water for man’s thirst, heaven’s clothing for man’s nakedness, heaven’s justification for man’s condemnation, heaven’s grace for man’s sin, and heaven’s hope for man’s despair. Though it is not this writer’s persuasion that the young man recognized Jesus’ Divinity, he, like Nicodemus (cf. John 3), did respect Jesus as a great teacher, thus calling Him “Good Master.” Barnes states: “He fell upon his knees (Mark); not to worship him, but to pay the customary respectful salutation; exhibiting the highest regard for Jesus as an extraordinary religious teacher.”⁴

Though the ruler perhaps did not understand that Jesus was the answer to his question (John 14:6), He did believe that Jesus could answer the question with regard to eternal life. The term “eternal life” is synonymous with everlasting happiness. This man, likely a Pharisee, and therefore well instructed in the law, believed in a future home of the soul, wherein dwelled peace and happiness, and, likewise, he desired to obtain it. Jesus did provide the answer.

The Question Of Jesus’ Goodness

The rich young ruler called Jesus “**Good** Master” and asked, according to Matthew, “what **good** thing shall I do, That I may have eternal life?” Sometimes a word is used loosely, without the full understanding of the import of its meaning. A fitting example in modern-day America is the use of the word “love.” The word “love,” in its modern-day usage, is used so loosely that some even use the word when referring to what really is lust. It does not appear that the young man really understood the word “good.” Jesus, getting to the heart of the issue, asked the young man, “Why callest thou me good?” This term, of course, was

meant to show profound respect. Without a doubt, the young man often expressed such a sentiment to the teachers whom he held in high esteem. Yet Jesus reminded him that genuine goodness resides only with a holy God. Why would Jesus make this statement? Some speculate that Jesus, being in the flesh, and being tempted to sin like any other, could not call himself good.⁵ However, Jesus, the Master Teacher, was progressively guiding His pupil to a full realization of the truth. If the young man really desired eternal life, he must come through Jesus. However, if he was to come through Jesus, he must accept Who Jesus is. He must recognize His Deity:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:24).

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2:5-6).

What was Jesus implying when he asked, “Why callest thou me good?” Since there is only One Who is good in the fullest sense, and that is God, was this young man recognizing Jesus’ Deity by calling Him good? He must come to that understanding if he truly desired to inherit eternal life.

Furthermore, the rich ruler insisted on doing some good thing to inherit eternal life. What is the one thing I need to do, he asked, that will guarantee my entrance into heaven? No doubt he was looking for something spectacular, impressive, or extraordinary that he could accomplish to

gain everlasting happiness. It appears that this young man, true to the religion of the Pharisees, was trying to gain salvation through himself—“What **good** thing shall **I** do?” Wait! Only God is good, said Jesus. When man sinned in the garden, from that moment until the end of time, man alone cannot reconcile himself back to God. God stepped in and provided a Savior (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Salvation comes through obedience to Christ, not through meritorious works of man:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. 3:5).

Is there something one must do in order to be saved? Absolutely! When the Pentecostians asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:37-38). Jesus said to Saul, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6). Man’s salvation comes through the grace of God, which is appropriated through the sinner’s submission to the will of Christ. The writer of Hebrews records, “And being made perfect, he [Christ, BG] became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). Therefore, the rich young ruler must understand that he could not be saved through his own righteousness, but he could be saved through total surrender to the Lord’s will.

Keeping The Commands Of God

If one desires to be faithful to God, he must faithfully follow the Law of God. Speaking of the parents of John the Baptist, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Luke records, “And they

were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). How can one be righteous? Keep the commandments of the Lord, “for all thy commandments are righteousness” (Psm. 119:172). Jesus said to the young ruler, “but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which?” (Matt. 19:17-18). This young man seemed to be unclear as to what Jesus was making reference. After all, he knew the Law of Moses. Surely, Jesus was speaking of a commandment[s], of which he was not familiar. Yet the Lord takes him to the Decalogue. It is interesting that Jesus listed the six commandments that deal with man’s relationship to his fellow man. Jesus, knowing the heart of the young man, was getting to the heart of the matter. As far as the rich young ruler was concerned, he had kept all these commandments, yet something was lacking. We can almost hear his impatient cry, “Teacher, tell me what I need to do.” He knew that something was hindering his relationship with God and likely could prohibit his gaining heaven. What is it?

Jesus Provides A Sobering Answer

Though Mark’s Gospel account is shorter than Matthew’s or Luke’s, he often provides details that the other two writers do not. In the account of the rich young ruler, we read, “Then Jesus beholding him loved him” (Mark 10:21). Jesus loves all mankind and desires to save everyone (Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). If a man is lost, it will not be because the Lord refused to love him. One is lost because he rejects everything that the Lord has done to provide for his salvation. Jesus said, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Jesus, Who knows what is in man (John 2:25), looked inside the ruler’s heart, and knew what was lacking. He saw many

admirable qualities, but knew he had not fully surrendered his will. Jesus provided the answer that the man needed to hear: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me.” The word “perfect” in this verse is *telios*, which means “complete, finished, having no part wanting.”⁶ James wrote, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas. 1:4). If this man really wanted eternal life, nothing could separate him from its Giver. Yet his riches stood between him and the Savior.

Our Lord requires a total commitment. What does this mean? Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Does God require of us what Jesus required of the rich young ruler? If riches are separating us from the Lord, He surely does. Remember: God does not have you until He has what is yours. Is such a sacrifice possible? Yes, indeed.

Following their conversion, on the Day of Pentecost, the Bible student observes, “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need” (Acts 2:44-45). One of the most beautiful pictures of sacrifice is seen in Mark 12:42-44:

And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which makes a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

Dear reader, be honest and ask yourself if you are willing to give up anything and everything that stands between you and God. Is there an area of your life which

is off-limits to God? Break down those idols and surrender to the Savior:

All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken;
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with thy love and power,
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

Chorus

I surrender all
I surrender all
All to thee my blessed Savior
I surrender all.

—J. W. Van DeVenter

Have you ever heard someone remark, “If only a person would do one thing he would be the best Christian? That is all he is lacking.” Many fall into this category. Yet the door was open to this rich young ruler. He could have eternal life, but this one thing, selling his goods and distributing to the poor, he must do. However, in so doing, he would not be losing, but rather gaining. He would receive treasure in heaven. This should be the goal of life for all of us. Jesus said:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your heart is, there will your treasure be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

The Lord desires that we not only surrender ourselves to Him, but, by so doing, become totally dependent upon Him. God takes care of His own, so the rich young ruler would not have been deprived.

Again, Jesus said:

Give, and it shall be given unto you good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again (Luke 6:38).

Paul wrote:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work (2 Cor. 9:6-8).

Jesus' final command to the young ruler was, "follow me." This is really what is essential to obtaining everlasting life. One may bestow all his goods to feed the poor (1 Cor. 13:3), yet, if he is not willing to follow Christ, he cannot have any part of Him. Jesus one time asked the question, "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Either Christ will be first place in the life of an individual, or He will be nothing at all. This young man could not serve two masters (Matt. 6:24), and neither can we.

The Ruler's Response

How wonderful it would have been if the young ruler had said, "Yea Lord, what thou sayest, I will do"? Such was not his response. It is obvious, according to the

Scriptures, that he was disturbed and distraught over the answer he received. Like many today, he could not break with his worldly possessions. These he loved more than God. How deceitful and destructive are riches!

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

It is interesting that all those who turn away from the Savior leave in sorrow. Despite their unwillingness to give up that which is most precious, they are still empty and unhappy. Yet those who follow Christ, even in the midst of persecution, rejoice. The problem with so many, including this man, is not with money, which is just a medium of exchange, but, rather, a love of money and trusting in money. Job recalls:

If I have made gold my hope, or have said to fine gold, thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand hath gotten much...This also were iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I shall have denied the God that is above (Job 31:24-25; Job 31:28).

This ruler should have remembered the words of the Psalmist: “if riches increase, set not your heart upon them” (Psm. 62:10).

The account of the rich young ruler is one of the saddest accounts in the Gospel record. His exchange with the Lord began with such promise. His eagerness and enthusiasm to find an answer to his question cause the reader to think that he would do whatever was required by the Lord. He was so close, yet so far away. He went

away sorrowful, and surely his sorrow, because of his unwise decision, increased even more. Unless he repented, this man who loved riches more than the Lord, and who trusted in riches more than God, will spend eternity in hell with the rich man of Luke 15 and the foolish farmer of Luke 12. How much security and comfort are the riches of these men providing them today? “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Conclusion

As Jesus watched the young man leave, no doubt the Savior’s heart ached, as well. He wanted to save him, but Jesus will not save anyone against that person’s will, nor will He save anyone who does not absolutely surrender to His will.

The Lord made an emphatic statement near the conclusion of this account. He made it clear that those who trust in riches will not go to heaven. Just as it is impossible for a camel to go through the needle’s eye, so it is impossible for those who trust in riches to be saved. Do not believe for a moment that this truth applies only to the wealthy, for even those who are poor in this world’s goods can still be looking for security and happiness in money. Such will never be found, for true riches are found only in Christ!

Endnotes

- 1 All Scripture references from the King James Version.
- 2 A. Luken Williams, **The Pulpit Commentary**, eds. H. D. M. Spence & James S. Exell (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), p. 110.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Albert Barnes, **Notes On The New Testament**, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1949), p. 197.
- 5 C. E. W. Dorris, **A Commentary On The Gospel According To Mark** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989), p. 233.
- 6 Barnes, p. 198.

CHAPTER 13

What Jesus Said To Mary (John 20:11-18)

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

IT IS A JOY supreme to come for this good, great, and grand **POWER** Lectureship, as I have done for all the previous ones. Gratitude is hereby extended to B. J., the fine eldership here, and the entire Southaven congregation for the invitation to speak on this current one and pen a chapter for the book. I admire the stately stance of Southaven and this lectureship.

There are at least a half-dozen Marys mentioned in the New Testament: Mary of Nazareth; Mary Magdalene; Mary of Bethany; Mary, the mother of John Mark; Mary, the wife of Cleophas; and a Mary mentioned in Romans 16:6. The Mary of our title is Mary Magdalene or Mary from Magdala, a city located on the western coastline of the Galilean Sea. She was a Galilean, as was our Lord.

This is a one-on-one conversation subsequent to the message of the angels. There are a number of these in the Gospel record of John. John 3 records the one-on-one conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus relative to the new birth. In John 4 there is the one-on-one conversation between Jesus and the nameless woman at Jacob's well pertaining to true, acceptable worship. There is the one-on-one conversation between Jesus and the formerly blind

man in the latter part of John 9. There is the one-on-one conversation between Jesus and Martha in John 11. There is the one-on-one conversation between Jesus and Pontius Pilate in the latter part of John 18. While on Calvary Jesus had a one-on-one conversation with His mother and then with the apostle John, to whom He committed Mary's care and keeping. Though six others were in the company on the Galilean seashore, there was a one-on-one conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter in John 21:15-17. Jesus was the Master Teacher before teeming masses. He also was the Master Conversationalist with certain ones who came in contact with Him.

Mary Magdalene In Background

It has been assumed that Mary Magdalene is the same as the woman in Luke 7 who came washing His feet and anointing them with precious ointment. Evidence for linking the two is just not there. It is true that Mary Magdalene is mentioned in the beginning of Luke 8, but so are Joanna, wife of Chuza, who was Herod's steward, and Susanna. There is no more justification for making Mary Magdalene the sinful woman in Luke 7:37-50 than in making either Joanna or Susanna into the woman of Luke 7.

It is also highly unfortunate that Mary Magdalene has been castigated into a woman with a sordid past. It is true that Jesus cast from her seven demons, as per Luke 8:2-3, wherein we read:

And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils (demons—ASV), And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.¹

Mary Magdalene is just one of whom the Lord cast out evil spirits. Why castigate her and not the others? I

know of no efforts to associate a sordid past with Joanna, Susanna, or any of the women left nameless in this passage. **Dickson's Study Bible** has this interesting observation:

The old view that she was a woman of bad character is wholly groundless. It is based on the fact that the first mention of her follows the account of the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus (Lu. 7:36-50) which is far from proving that the same person is referred to.²

Possession by an evil spirit or a demon does not necessarily imply a past life of iniquity or immorality. Subsequent to the transfiguration in Mark 9:2-13, Jesus met a father who had a demon-possessed son. Mark called him a child. The Greek here indicates boyhood. Had this young lad been immoral, which led to his demon possession? Not likely! The concerned father had requested demon expulsion at the hands of the eight apostles. In this they embarrassingly failed. Jesus explained the why of their failure (Mark 9:28-29). In the miracle-healing process, Jesus asked the father, "How long is it ago since this came unto him?" The grieved father responded promptly, "Of a child" (Mark 9:21). Here is a demon-possessed child. It was a grievous case of demon possession, as per Mark 9:18. Jesus cast the demon out of the child. Again, who would contend that this child was iniquitous and immoral when entered by a demon? Why cast the mantle of innocence over him, which is eminently correct, and yet cast the mantle of guilt over the marvelous Mary from Magdala in this matter of demon possession? Such is highly unfair to Mary Magdalene for a surety.

She was from Magdala, a town on the western shore of the Galilean Sea and near Tiberius. I visited that area while on a trip to Bible Lands in 1970. We had a delicious fish meal at a restaurant overlooking the beautiful blue

Galilean Sea, not far from where Mary once lived in the first century.

She was a devoted follower of the Lord. She, along with other women, ministered to the Lord “of their substance” (Luke 8:3). She was at the cross and fully sympathized with all Messianic sufferings (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). She observed with close scrutiny the burial site (Mark 15:47). Matthew observes that she and the other Mary were “sitting over against the sepulcher” (Matt. 27:61).

With a marvelous exhibition of continuing love and loyalty for her beloved Master, she was at the sepulcher the third day (Matt. 28:1). She, and “Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him” (Mark 16:1). Little did they realize that the sealed tomb would be open and empty of its original corpse—the body of their slain Saviour. Of the four inspired biographers of the Lord, Mark alone informs us that Jesus “appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils (demons—ASV)” (Mark 16:9). Human wisdom would have suggested that His first appearance should have been to Mary, His own mother, or one of the apostles such as Peter, James, or John—“The Inner Three.” However, the Risen Redeemer was not guided and governed by fallible human wisdom. His was infallible divine wisdom. She announced the news story of the ceaseless ages, His resurrection, to the Lord’s brethren (Mark 16:10-11).

Of her it has been beautifully penned in wonderful rhyme:

Not she with traitorous kiss her Saviour stung;
Not she denied him with unholy tongue
But she, while apostles shrank, did dangers brave;
Last at the cross and first at the grave.³

It is amazingly amazing that she is not mentioned by name in Acts or any of the books from Romans through Revelation. She may well have been included among the 120 set forth in Acts 1:13-14. Women, plus Mary, the Lord's mother, are included in this noble number.

Mary And The Two Angels

The disciple Jesus loved penned this trio of verses:

But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him (John 20:11-13).

Here is the sequence of events leading up to this cited text. Mary Magdalene, accompanied by other women, some named and some left nameless, came to the sepulcher fully intending to complete the partial anointing that had been done in haste by Joseph and Nicodemus (John 19:38-40). John 20:1 only mentions Mary's coming. Other accounts mention women with her (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-24:1). Mary apparently left the scene before the other women were told of His resurrection. The other women were informed by angelic testimony that He was no longer in that tomb but had risen from the dead (Luke 24:6). Mary had already gone to inform Peter and John of the empty tomb. Peter and John went to see for themselves. She evidently followed. After the survey ended by Peter and John and they had left, Mary lingered at the sepulcher site puzzled and pained. Amidst tears profusely shed, "she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher" (John 20:11).

She surveyed the site where the body of the crucified Christ had lain (John 20:12). Little did she realize that she stood upon the unique threshold of the greatest news story of the ceaseless centuries—the rich reality of her Lord’s resurrection.

She saw two angels sitting. Their positions were strategic. One was situated “at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain” (John 20:12). Note the employment of the precious past here—“had lain.” No longer was the crucified tabernacle of clay entombed in the borrowed sepulcher belonging to the Arimathæan Senator. She exhibited no fear at being in the presence of heavenly angels, as usually were such experiences—Zechariah in Luke 1 and Cornelius in Acts 10 being cases in point. At this time, she may not have realized they were angels or heavenly messengers. These angels were nevertheless real—not fabricated beings. This writing apostle did not doubt angelic reality. Clothed in white indicated their purity. Marvelous and majestic must have been their appearance once she realized their true identity.

They did not call her by name but by “Woman” (John 20:13). This was dignified and not degrading in the least. When a male is addressed as man in Sacred Scripture no one equates that with a degrading of the addressed one. Why do such with the “Woman” designation here? This is the very way Jesus addressed His own mother in John 2:4 and even while on Calvary in John 19:26. He surely was not degrading her or making her into a second-rate person. We ought to quit allowing militant feminists to warp our language terms and attitudes of heart.

They inquired into the why of her weeping. This is prior to her stunning discovery that He was now risen and no longer dead. She had no cause to be joyful at this moment. Her Lord was dead and this produced indescribable sadness in her holy heart, her sensitive spirit.

As respondent she said, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him” (John 20:13). Possibly, she thought that either Joseph or the enemies of Jesus had taken the body elsewhere. Earlier, she had voiced the same serious sentiment to Peter and John (John 20:2). In John 20:15 she promised to take Him away if only she could ascertain His whereabouts. She still associated the dead tabernacle of clay as being her Lord, a common error people still make toward a dead body. I write this one day before preaching the funeral of a precious saint. I will stand three or four feet from the casket containing her corpse. The real, loving spirit has departed. The same was true with Jesus. The whole Jesus was not buried in Joseph’s new tomb—only His body. At death, according to Luke 23:46, His spirit was received by the Father. Between that Friday afternoon at 3:00 and early the subsequent first day of the week, His body and spirit had been separated. His spirit was in Hadean paradise—the area where righteous spirits go at death and experience comfort, joy, and true pleasure. Jesus made that crystal clear in Luke 16:19-31. Righteous Lazarus was comforted; the wicked man was in torments.

Added to the mounting misery she faced and felt was her lack of knowledge relative to the whereabouts of His body.

Brother Woods, as he commented on this section of Scripture, has this well-deserved tribute to the marvelous Mary of Magdala:

The love she felt for her Lord both here and at the cross led her to disregard the scorn of the crowd, the fear of the soldiers, the malice of the Jews and the overshadowing presence of death. Love is humanity’s strongest weapon. . . . Through her tears she explained why she wept; her Lord, whom she loved above all else, had died, and now his body has been removed, she thinks, to some unknown location.⁴

In a matter of moments her unrelieved sadness will be turned into unparalleled joy. She, unknowingly in these verses, stands in the very presence of her lovely Lord—no longer dead, no longer hidden—but now risen in triumph over the tomb.

A Case Of Mistaken Identity

In a duet of verses John wrote:

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away (John 20:14-15).

In the previous verses her face had been toward the conversing angels, meaning that her back was to Jesus. Something apparently attracted Mary's attention to someone back of her. Perhaps the informing, conversing angelic duet gave her a cue by recognizing another party now present. Mary turned and saw the standing figure. Yet, at this time, there was no Messianic recognition on her part. This would not fit the infidelic contention of a plot by His friends that Jesus faked His death and His resurrection, with His friends joining in the conspiracy. Mary was not expecting to see Him alive again in this life. Also she was weeping. Amidst the tears filling her weary eyes, she did not recognize Him by sight, though often in His close presence she had been.

Jesus addressed her as "Woman" in John 20:15, just as the two angels had done in John 20:13. This form of address showed no disrespect on His part. This is how He addressed His own beloved mother at Cana in John 2:4 and on Calvary in John 19:26. This is how He addressed

the nameless woman at Jacob's well in John 4:21. Nobody ever respected women as did our Lord.

Jesus asked her two questions. Both were concise and clearly stated. A study of all questions He asked during His ministry is quite informative and refreshingly revealing. His questions were always short, clear, and to the point. I have answered hundreds and hundreds of questions in open forums and question-and-answer sessions for many years. If done orally, by the time the querist gets to the end of a long detailed question, it is a bit difficult for both audience and myself to keep it all clear. In constructing questions for others to answer, we all could learn from Jesus and His simple and precise way of interrogating those in His presence. Often times I am tempted to say, "Shorten it and make it clear!"

His questions were: "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" (John 20:15). In our English translation, the KJV, we have four words in the first query and three words in the second question. It is even briefer in the Greek text, with three and two words, respectively. Great power inhered in His brevity!

Weeping belonged to the short interval between Friday afternoon and early that Sunday morning. It belonged while He was dead. To the eleven in the Upper Room He stated:

Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you (John 16:19-22).

The time of weeping was over for Mary. The cause of her weeping, His death, was now in the past. As He would say later to the banished John on rocky Patmos, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (Hades—ASV) and of death” (Rev. 1:18).

“Whom seekest thou?” was His second query to the weeping Mary. She was seeking a dead body. He was the Risen Redeemer, the Living Lord, standing before her. What a contrast between her futile quest and the real object she should and could be seeking—One alive and destined never to die again. Death no longer has any dominion over Him (Rom. 6:9; Heb. 7:25).

The mistaken identity continued in Mary’s mindset. She supposed the garden caretaker was addressing her. We learn from John 19:41-42:

in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation day; for the sepulcher was nigh at hand.

John is the only biographer of our Lord’s life and death to mention the garden area. Likewise, he is the only one to mention this conversation where Mary confused the speaker as being the gardener.

Being face-to-face with Him and hearing herself addressed and interrogated still did not trigger her recognition of Him. Politely, she addressed Him as Sir. In marked contrast she will address Him as “Rabboni” in the subsequent verse. Presuming that he had removed the body either at the behest of Joseph or someone else, she requested knowledge of His whereabouts. She promised, “I will take him away.” Brother Woods wrote:

Note that she says she would take it away. She would lack the physical strength to have done

this personally; she meant that she would assume the responsibility of its removal. What a magnificent woman she was! She lives in history as one of the most devoted disciples the Lord ever had. She is representative of that class of women—and may their tribe increase—who always put the kingdom of God first in their hearts and lives and who make all else subservient and secondary to its interests.⁵

If she remained faithful till death, she will be among the jewels made by the Lord at judgment and received up into glory (cf. Mal. 3:17). Will it not be glorious to be with this marvelous Mary, this devoted disciple, in that sweet by and by?

A Refreshing And Reviving Revelation

The apostle of love next states:

Jesus saith unto her, Mary, She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her (John 20:16-18).

Jesus then called her “Mary.” How terse and yet how tender! Death had not chilled in the least the **agape** love He felt for her. Ready recognition on Mary’s part was instantaneous. Speaking in her own native Hebrew dialect, as per the ASV’s rendering of John 20:16, she called Him Rabboni. Why the slowness of her recognition up to this point is not revealed. Expositors have given a number of views and yet not one of them knows the answer for a surety. Whatever had been the cause, all is now clear to Mary of Magdala. He was not the gardener; He was not

the caretaker; He had not removed the body of another, as first she surmised. He was Christ or Messiah. He was the very Lord of glory—now alive, no longer dead. Her elation must have been mountain high by this point of time.

Mary's usage of "Rabboni" is interesting and intriguing. Jews employed three terms of honor, respect, and endearment for their beloved and revered teachers: Rab (teacher), Rabbi (my teacher) and Rabboni (my great teacher). She bypassed the lower two and ascended to the highest one in her affectionate assessment of Him. She would accord her Lord richly deserving glory, respect, honor, and love. Another Mary, the one from Bethany, knew how treasured Jesus was and anointed Him with costly ointment a few days prior to His death and burial (John 12:1ff). Mary of Magdala honored Him verbally. That one word was loaded with love.

Evidently, at this point she rushed to touch (perhaps even cling to) the Risen Redeemer. It was not essential that she do this. He was real—not a phantom or an apparition. Furthermore, He was not about to ascend immediately. Another forty days would transpire before His amazing ascension actualized. The touching could be done later. Expositors allow their minds to run quite fancifully when they say that her touch would have rendered Him unclean prior to His entering the Holy of Holies with provisions of His sacrificial blood. Obviously, this has no real credulity to a rational mind. It certainly was not improper for Jesus to be touched in His post-resurrection appearances. Certain women touched Him later that very day (Matt. 28:9). One week later Thomas was commanded to "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). At that moment it was far more important for Mary to tell the brethren the good news of His resurrection and the

soon-to-transpire ascension back to the Palace of the Universe than a continual clinging to Him and of Him.

Jesus spoke of “my Father and your Father.” He spoke of “my God, and your God.” Jesus and Mary both had the same Father, the same God. Yet Jesus sustained a relationship to the Father that neither Mary nor any of His disciples ever had or ever would have. He was eternal with the First Person; they were not eternal. He was God’s only begotten Son; they did not fit the marvelous *monogenes* used in John 1:14; John 1:18; John 3:16; John 3:18; and 1 John 4:9. He was Emmanuel; they were not. He would soon **return** to heaven; their **initial**, not a return, trip to heaven would be subsequent to final judgment, as per Matthew 25:46. In John 13:36-38 Jesus told Peter he would follow Him to heaven, but it would be later and not when Jesus ascended.

Mary now became a beautiful bearer of good and gracious tidings. Not in the least did she question the issued directive from her great Teacher and beloved Master. Real disciples never do question the Lord’s bidding of service to be rendered. Another Mary, the Lord’s own mother, said in John 2:5, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” She went, as commanded, and told the disciples of her eyewitness and earwitness account. She was a bonafide witness, telling what she had seen and what she had heard. It was no secondhand account with her. We do not have **any** eyewitnesses or earwitnesses either of Jehovah or of Jesus today, millions of zealous religionists to the contrary notwithstanding.

Weeping Mary became joyous Mary with the noblest news story of the countless centuries to impart. We can almost see the spring of her step, the radiance beaming from her now happy countenance, and the cogent confidence of her report as she gave it, with victory permeating each spoken syllable.

Twelve Applications To Our Lives From This Text

1. We need full empathy, inasmuch as possible, with the sufferings of Jesus, as Mary did while beholding Him on Calvary. Weekly communion aids this.

2. We need to accept both angelic and apostolic testimony about the reality of His resurrection and the surety of His return.

3. The ascension was real to Jesus, to Mary, and should be to each of us.

4. Jesus knew Mary by name; He knows every one of us by name also.

5. We need to accord Jesus all the homage and honor at our disposal.

6. The ascension of Jesus to His Father and His God assures the ascension to heaven of all His faithful ones subsequent to final judgment.

7. At the time Mary told the resurrection narrative, Jesus had not yet given the Great Commission.

8. At the time Mary told the good news of His being alive, the church had not been established in perfected reality.

9. At the time Mary told this message, not a single line of the New Testament had been penned.

10. Hence, we have a much fuller story to tell our peers than did Mary.

11. Mary told the good news with joy; we should do the same.

12. She told only what was authorized; we surely should do precisely the same.

Endnotes

1 All quotations are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.

2 John A. Dickson, **The New Analytical Bible And**

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Dictionary Of The Bible (Chicago: John A. Dickson, 1971) p. 139.

3 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary On The Gospel Of**

John (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1981), p. 424.

4 Ibid, pp. 422-423.

5 Ibid, p. 423.

Part Three

What Jesus
Said
About
Certain
Subjects

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CHAPTER 14

What Jesus Said About His Mission

Brandon Britton

Introduction

HISTORY IS LITTERED WITH the wit and wisdom of countless men of great education and influence. From these men we have gleaned many pearls of wisdom, often in the form of memorable quotes. Occasionally these “sentence sermons” blossom on the lips of politicians and statesmen such as John F. Kennedy, who exhorted us to “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” It was Thomas Jefferson who explained “That government governs best which governs least, because its people discipline themselves.” The wise Abraham Lincoln said, “He has a right to criticize who has a heart to help.” Unfortunately some quotes are more infamous than famous. “I am not a crook,” said Nixon. “Read my lips, no new taxes,” Bush promised. “I did not have sexual relations with that woman” was Clinton’s lie. History will never forget such disgraceful and deceitful quotes.

Other such bits of wisdom and memorable quotes come from the thinkers, poets, and artists in our history. “Courage is knowing what to fear,” Plato exhorted. It was Jonathan Swift who lamented, “We have enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love.” Shakespeare’s character Hamlet described death as “The

undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns.”

While many of these quotes are beneficial, educational, and helpful to us in many areas of life, none of these quotes compares to the words of wisdom that originated in heaven:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:
and the knowledge of the holy is understanding
(Prov. 9:10).

For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth
cometh knowledge and understanding (Prov.
2:6).

[T]he foolishness of God is wiser than men (1
Cor. 1:25).

While the former may give us encouragement or insight in life, the latter gives us the origin, purpose, and destiny of life, in addition to encouragement and insight.

While the words of men may be inspiring and motivating, the Scriptures are inspired (God breathed, 2 Tim. 3:16-17) and powerful: “The word of God is quick (living, NKJV), and powerful” (Heb. 4:12). How powerful are the words from above? Powerful enough to transform a murderous blasphemer like Paul into a martyred preacher. Powerful enough to change Peter from a coward who denied knowing Jesus to one who preached Christ and Him crucified before thousands. Powerful enough that those adhering to it were willing to sacrifice their freedom and lives for it. Those who preached this Word declared, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psm. 119:105), because they acknowledged, “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

The words and sayings of Jesus are like no other. All the wisdom of men through all the ages pales in

comparison to the knowledge imparted by Deity in less than four years of public teaching. Jesus was the primary proclaimer of this message, yet He emphasized that it was from above:

For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak (John 12:49-50).

[T]he word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you (John 14:24-25).

[A]ll things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you (John 15:15).

Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me (John 17:7-8).

Concerning the power and preeminence of His words the Lord declared:

the **words that I speak** unto you, they are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63, emp. mine throughout, BB).

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away (Matt. 24:35).

The words from heaven will be the standard of judgment on the last day (John 12:48). He did not speak merely to entertain or to inform, but He spoke to save:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on

him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not **heard**? and how shall they hear without a preacher?...So then faith cometh by **hearing** and hearing by the **word of God**" (Rom. 10:13-14; Rom. 10:17).

It is because of the distinctiveness, power, and purpose of the Word, both spoken and written, that this lectureship theme, **The Sayings Of Jesus**, is so valuable and needed. Knowing the great power, wisdom, guidance, and comfort that can be gleaned from the Word sent down from heaven, we will consider what Jesus said about His mission.

His Mission: Fulfill The Law (Matt. 5:17)

Even before time had its beginning, the Lord knew and understood His mission. Paul wrote of "the **eternal purpose** which he purposed **in Christ Jesus** our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). It was planned from all eternity and executed "when the fullness of the time was come" (Gal. 4:4). Yet seemingly from the beginning, His mission was misunderstood. At His birth Herod sought to kill the infant Jesus because he viewed Him as a rival king (Matt. 2). Herod did not understand that the mission of Jesus was not to become just another Jewish king here on earth, but King of kings in Heaven. Thirty years later, His own disciples were still having trouble understanding His mission. They asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Like most everyone else in their day, and untold millions still today, they thought that He had come to establish an earthly kingdom. Apparently, those present at the Sermon on the Mount misunderstood His mission as well. The Lord was able to know the thoughts of men (Mark 2:6-8), and so He said to them, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). Jesus begins this section by declaring plainly

that His mission was not to destroy (*katalusai*, to dissolve, demolish, throw down) the Law and prophets.¹ Concerning this proclamation Dave Miller wrote:

Because His teaching was so different from the predominant approach to religious teaching by the Jewish hierarchy, popular sentiment no doubt held that the teaching of Jesus contradicted the teaching of Moses as represented by the Jewish leadership. Jesus' teaching did contradict much of the Judaistic religion of His day, but His teaching did not contradict Mosaic teaching.²

Jesus was not the enemy of the Law, and He was not opposed to it. Therefore He did not say, "It is written...but I say," or, "Moses said...but I say," because He was not attacking the Law. However, He was opposed to the traditions of men and doctrines of the religious leaders that were contradicting and perverting the Word of God. Over the centuries the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and rabbis had misinterpreted the Scriptures and even added their own commandments to the Law. Because of this the Lord does say, "But I say unto you...Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...It hath been said...ye have heard that it hath been said" (Matt. 5:22; Matt. 5:27; Matt. 5:31; Matt. 5:33; Matt. 5:38; Matt. 5:43). He was condemning the additions to and perversions of the Word of God, which were expressly forbidden (Deut. 4:2; Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:6).³ Tragically, these traditions and commentaries had become the accepted religious standard of the day. No longer did the people turn to the Word for answers, but they now turned to the Jewish leaders, the "scholars and experts." A similar problem exists today because so many "churchgoers" view the pope, their pastor, or creed book as their authority in religion. Like the Jews in the days of Christ, they no longer turn to "the Book" for answers to their questions, and, like the Jews in the first

century, they are being led astray. Paul exhorted, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men,” and, “your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:25; 1 Cor. 2:5). The faithful Gospel preacher will do as did Paul and the Lord and turn people from what they might have heard to what the Word of God says.

“In this paragraph (Matt. 5:17-48, BB) we have Christ explaining His relationship with the Old Testament law of God.”⁴ Jesus contrasts the misconception that He came to destroy the Law with His true mission, to fulfill it. He was the accomplishment, fulfillment, end, and goal of the Law of Moses. His mission was to complete it, not demolish it: “Christ’s work was the logical sequel to Old Testament religion.”⁵ Jeremiah had foretold the end of the original covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), and that time had now come. The purpose of the Law was to prepare the world for Messiah, identify Him, and bring them to Him: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:24-25). Concerning the Law, Jesus said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39): “His relationship to the Law was not one of destructive opposition but constructive fulfillment. Jesus’ life and work was actually the logical goal (Rom. 10:4) of the Law of Moses.”⁶ This should not be misunderstood to mean that Jesus would not take it out of the way when the time came. The fulfillment of the Law included its being removed (wiped away, Col. 2:14) as part of its fulfillment (Heb. 8:13; Heb. 10:9). The Law foretold of its being rendered inactive and inoperative (Eph. 2:15).⁷

The Law of Moses was never intended to last forever: “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second” (Heb. 8:7). All

people should be thankful that He accomplished this aspect of His mission. Had He not succeeded in fulfilling the Law, there would be dire consequences for us. If the Law of Moses had not been fulfilled, we would have no forgiveness of our sins:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

The law could identify sin and condemn the sinner, but it offered no solution to or freedom from sin: “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Gal. 3:19). Because of this weakness in the law, “He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second” (Heb. 10:9), and the second is “a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb. 8:6).

His Mission:

Bring Light To The World (John 12:46)

In just a few years of preaching, there is one lesson that I have learned very well. Sin blinds people; it clouds their thinking and interferes with their ability to reason. I have seen normally faithful Christians become involved in adulterous relationships and blame their children, spouse, preacher, brethren, family, everyone but themselves. Because of their choice to practice sin, they are allowing the god of this world to blind them (2 Cor.

4:4). By refusing to repent, “they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2:20), and eventually they “wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). When the person in this predicament is someone you love dearly, it is impossible to sit idly and watch it happen without getting involved. Even if it means suffering yourself, being hated by them or blamed by others, you must do something.

When God looked down from Heaven and saw those He loved, His children, darkened, tainted, corrupted, and blinded by sin, He had to do something. The Lord could not sit idly by and watch this happen, so He got involved. He knew the consequences of getting involved. He would be “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3), but He came anyway because He was on a mission to restore the spiritual sight of His children: “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:46).

When left to himself, man will wander in darkness and sin because he does not know where to turn. Man on his own does not know where to go or what to do, though he may think he does: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

Sinful man needs guidance. He may want to escape darkness, but, without the proper guidance and direction, he is hopelessly lost. This is why Jesus, despite the knowledge of His inevitable suffering, set out to accomplish His mission, a mission foretold by the prophets:

And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them (Isa. 42:16)

He is Light, the giver of life, and He came to bring that light into a world darkened and blinded by sin:

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12).

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

The Light can illuminate our lives, no matter how darkened by sin, if we turn to His Word: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psm. 119:105).

Tragically, many people choose to refuse this Light. Some have become so blinded by their sinful practices that they now enjoy the dark and hate the light: “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:4-5). A powerful example of this pathetic condition is described in the very context in which the Lord revealed this portion of His mission:

Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light...But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him...Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them...Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they

loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:35-48).

Those who hate and reject the Light will not only be in darkness in life, but also in death: “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30).

**His Mission:
Cause Division/Bring A Sword (Matt. 10:34-35)**

Jesus prayed:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us...that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one (John 17:21-23).

If the Lord placed such a priority on unity, why did He, in the following verses, proclaim that His mission was to cause division?

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division (Luke 12:51).

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Matt. 10:34-36).

On the surface this might appear to be a contradiction, but further consideration proves that it is not. Jesus did not come with division as His goal or hope; He did not desire division. While it was not the mission of Jesus to cause division, He knew that it was inevitable. Most people would reject the way, and a few would follow it, thus causing a natural division between the two (Matt. 7:13-14). He foretold that families would be divided over the Gospel, His followers would be hated because of the Gospel (Matt. 10:22), they would be imprisoned for preaching His Word (Matt. 10:16-20), and they might even be killed for their allegiance to Him (Matt. 10:28).

In preaching true peace, He would be contradicting the false teachers and their damnable doctrines of the devil. Jesus knew that division and opposition were going to come because He would not compromise the truth for the sake of harmony, and this must be the attitude of the Christian. We do not have to be belligerent, hostile, angry, or insulting to incite the criticism of others. All one must do is lovingly, tenderly, truthfully, and completely preach the Word of God, and it will cause division, though it was intended to bring about unity. This division, however unpleasant, is necessary to separate the sincere from the selfish. Sin and righteousness, darkness and light cannot coexist in harmony because they are by their very nature and definition contradictory. It must be emphasized that the only reason that it causes division is because man rejects the Word of God. If all men would agree to do things His way and only His way, division would disappear, and unity would prevail. It is good and pleasant for us to have unity (Psm. 133:1), but it cannot come at the expense of truth.

We have been called to join with Jesus in accomplishing His mission. If we are going to stand with Him we will be expected to be “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58)

and to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3). Even in the face of contention, division, and strife, we must be “set for the defence of the gospel” (Phil. 1:15-17). While it may be unpleasant and sometimes heartbreaking to complete this mission, it comes with great reward:

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

His Mission:

Seek And Save The Lost (Luke 19:10)

My first experience in Memphis was not a pleasant one. I was not quite sure where I was going and ended up in a dangerous part of the city. I had not been willfully and knowingly negligent of the directions that I had been given, but this did not change the fact that I was lost and in danger. I was quickly approached by policemen in an unmarked car who told me I needed to leave immediately and they escorted me to where I wanted and needed to be.

Although God had created a perfect world for sinless man to inhabit, it did not take long for man to wander into the dangerous world of sin. Since that time billions have followed, whether willingly and knowingly or ignorantly, the path of Adam and Eve that led to sin and death (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23). The terrifying aspect is that, once man is lost in sin, he has no way of escaping. Thankfully Jesus did something about that. He saw man in a place where he did not need to be, a place of great danger. Because of the condition of man, Jesus set out on a search-and-rescue mission: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He did not come to earth

to sit in the temple and say, “Here I am, offering salvation. If anyone is interested they can come to me.” His mission was not just to rescue (save); it was also to **seek**. The Good Shepherd did not just call His sheep; He went looking for His lost sheep (Matt. 15:24; John 10:27). Some were lost and did not know it (John 8:32-33). Some knew they were lost but did not know where to go (John 4:19-26; John 6:67-68). This is why He went to them.

Consider how diligently we search to find our lost set of keys. How much time would we spend looking for a lost wallet filled with cash and credit cards? What parent would not spend a lifetime searching for a child who was lost? When we consider how important these things are for us to find, and the lengths to which we will go in order to find them, then we can begin to comprehend why He was willing to give up everything and come to nothing. It was so that we could leave nothing and gain everything: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15).

His Mission: Give Life (John 10:10)

Once He found those lost sheep, He made them an offer that no logical man would refuse. But before making this offer and revealing His mission, He warns of the mission of the enemy: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10a). The Lord has a mission and so does Satan. He will not be satisfied with making us unhappy, causing us discomfort, hindering our success, or playing practical jokes. Satan wants to kill you, but that is not good enough for him. Not only does he want to kill you, but he wants to inflict as much pain and suffering as possible in the process.

The mission of Jesus is equally as good as the Devil's mission is evil: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b). His mission was to seek and save the lost, and, in so doing, He was giving life—eternal, everlasting life. Satan was on a mission to cause death; Jesus was on a mission to give life. Everlasting life would be good enough, but Jesus does not stop there. Just as Satan is not satisfied with causing death, and wants to inflict pain and suffering before death, Jesus is not satisfied with just giving eternal life. His mission was to give eternal life when this one ends, but He wants our life on earth to be an abundant life as well. He offers a life filled with great blessings (Eph.1:3) that culminates in a life with greater blessings that will never end. The Lord wants His sheep to be able to say with David, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...my cup runneth over...goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psm. 23:1; Psm. 23:5-6).

His Mission:

Do The Will Of The Father (John 6:38)

When Jesus came to earth, He had many things to accomplish. As we have seen He came to fulfill the Law and prophecies (Matt. 5:17), bring light to the world (John 12:46), separate/divide the righteous and obedient from the wicked and rebellious (Matt. 10:34-35), seek and save His lost sheep (Luke 19:10), and give an abundant life on earth and eternal life in heaven (John 10:10). In addition to this, His mission was to serve others and offer Himself as a sacrifice for them (Mark 10:45), and to call sinners to repentance (Matt. 9:12-13). When He began His public ministry He prefaced His work by saying:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,

to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord, And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:18-21).

All of these reasons, and many others not listed, are but pieces to a puzzle that form the “big picture.” Every step He took, every sermon He preached, every life He touched, every soul He saved, every infirmity He healed, and everything He did were small parts of His ultimate mission: “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). The bottom line is that Jesus came to do the will of the Father. This was His mission. All of the glorious works of Jesus were done because they were the Father’s will. His glory and majesty are seen in His willingness to put aside self and submit to the Father’s will. It was for this reason that God exalted Him and gave Him glory, and it is this attitude that God, through Paul, exhorts us to imitate and make our mission in life (Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 12:1-3). If all men made it their mission to do the will of the Father, there would be no church splitting, backbiting, false teaching, vain worship, religious division, or any other problem, because all of these have the same source: man’s unwillingness to do the will of the Father. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

Conclusion

Most of us are accustomed to waking up in the morning with many things to do. Some of our tasks are

very important; others are simply mundane and routine chores of everyday living. Grass must be cut, laundry must be done, sermon or Bible class preparation must be made, funerals must be attended, children must be taken to ball practice, and the list could go on for pages. Occasionally our “to do list” is so intimidating and overwhelming that we are tempted to pull the covers over our head and hide from the world.

If these trivial matters can so easily consume us, what would we have done if we were faced with Jesus’ “to do list”? Fulfill the law, bring light to the world, cause division, call sinners to repentance, serve others, sacrifice self, seek and save the lost, give life. We would have probably chosen to remain in heaven, but not the Lord. What would have been mission impossible for us, the Lord made possible, and not just possible, but a reality. When His days on earth were nearing an end, concerning His mission, He was able to say, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

Endnotes

1 William D. Mounce, **The Analytical Lexicon To The Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), p. 268.

2 Dave Miller, “Matthew Chapter Five,” **A Homiletic Commentary On The Book Of Matthew**, eds. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1988), p. 203.

3 Ibid, pp. 202-203.

4 Jim Laws, “How Jesus Viewed The Old Covenant,” **The Two Covenants**, ed. B. J. Clarke (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996), p. 115.

5 Miller, p. 203.

6 Ibid, p. 204.

7 Laws, p. 120.

CHAPTER 15

What Jesus Said About Following Him

Bobby Liddell

Introduction

JESUS CALLS ALL MEN to follow Him. Our Lord expressed the **purpose** of following Him when He spoke to the Galilean fishermen about a new direction in their lives: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). Christ came to “Seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Therefore, His purpose was to call all men to salvation by showing the great love of God for us (John 3:16), by making the sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 10:12), and by preaching the way of salvation (Mark 1:14; John 14:6). As He came to obey the commands of the Father (John 9:4; John 6:38), so He commanded men to follow Him. As we follow Him, we will have salvation, and, like Him, will understand that our purpose is to bring others to follow Him (John 1:37; John 1:42).

Jesus spoke of the **priority** of following Him. When one of his disciples came to Him and said, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father,” He replied, “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Matt. 8:21-22). While burying one’s dead is not against the will of God, waiting (until his father died—which might have entailed many years) to follow Jesus is. Some delay following Him in order to spend a little more time satisfying their sinful lusts.

Delay is deadly. One with proper priorities will leave all to follow Him (Luke 5:28).

Jesus spoke of the **price** of following Him. To the rich (Luke 18:23), young (Matt. 19:20), ruler (Luke 18:18), the Christ said, "Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor...and come and follow me" (Matt. 19:21). The ruler had to make a decision as to which was more important: his riches or following Christ. Sadly, he chose his wealth, and "he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions" (Matt. 19:22). Jesus has called upon all men to make tough decisions. Too often men choose what they consider to be the easy way, but which turns out to be the hard way (Prov. 13:15), and the way which leads to eternal destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). Yes, there is a price one must pay in order to follow Jesus. Some are not willing to pay it.

Jesus spoke of the **protection** afforded to those who follow Him. In the great discourse of the Good Shepherd, He promised, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). God has, throughout man's history, been the protector and deliverer of His people (2 Sam. 22:2).

Just so, our Shepherd will lead us even through the valley of death. The Psalmist wrote, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psm. 23:4). The Lord affords protection to those who follow Him (cf. Heb. 13:6).

Jesus spoke of the **position** of following Him: "If any man serve me, let him follow me" (John 12:26). The only way one can serve Him is to follow Him. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Following after Him is where we must place ourselves.

Why follow Christ? Following Christ, one will walk in the way of light (John 1:1-5; 1 John 1:5), the way of love (John 14:15; John 13:35; 1 John 2:9-10; John 3:16), the way of law (John 3:19-21; Prov. 6:23; Gal. 6:2), and the way of life (John 8:12; John 10:10; Phil. 1:21). He will be a disciple of Christ (Luke 14:26-33).

The setting of our text (Luke 9:23-24) is the occasion, in Caesarea Philippi, of the good confession of Peter; the Lord's declaration concerning the truth Peter spoke about His Deity, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:13-18); the announcement by Christ of His suffering, death, and resurrection (Luke 9:22), which Matthew's account shows was followed by Peter's rebuke of the Lord; and the Lord's response to him, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:22-23). Obviously, Jesus' intent was to teach that the way of discipleship is not by leading Christ, as Peter assumed to do, but by following Him. He taught that the way of spiritual life is not by saving one's physical life (as Peter sought to do for the Lord), but by giving one's life in service to the Lord (Luke 9:24-25). From this context, let us consider what Jesus said about the decision, direction, denial of oneself, and determination required to follow Him.

What Jesus Said About The Decision To Follow Him

Jesus said, "If any man will." The decision to follow Him involves a choice. Man must choose whom he will follow and whom he will serve (cf. Matt. 4:10). Joshua told his fellow Israelites to make a choice as to whom they would serve:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Josh. 24:15).

As surely as they had a choice, so do we. Jesus called Matthew (Matt. 9:9), also known as Levi the son of Alphaeus, to follow Him:

And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark 2:13-17).

The Gospel accounts record no hesitation on Matthew's part (cf. Luke 5:28). It seems that he arose immediately and followed Jesus. Could he have resisted the call of Christ? Surely, he could. Was it his choice? Yes, it was. Do we face the same decision? Yes, we do.

The word "if" is important. On another occasion, Christ told "those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Notice the ifs in what Peter wrote:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these

things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

Peter's inspired response to the question put forth by those on Pentecost who were pricked in their hearts, saying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" was to command them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. He continued with many other words to testify and exhort, saying, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:37-41). The inspired apostle believed that the earnest inquirers, individually, had the ability to choose whether to receive his word or not, whether to be baptized or not, and whether to save themselves or not.

Just so, as accountable persons, we all have the ability and the responsibility to choose whom we will follow. If we choose to follow Christ and to do what the Lord requires, we will have what the Savior offers. If we choose to follow Him, we can go where He has gone and be where He is (John 14:1-6).

Jesus said, "If **any man** will." Contrary to the Calvinistic error of limited atonement, Christ died for all men:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

He offers salvation to all men. Peter learned, at the household of Cornelius, that God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35). God would have “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). It is not true (though this error is the watchword of Universalism) that all men are going to be saved (Matt. 7:13-14). It is true that all men can be saved—that is, salvation is available to all men, for any man can follow Jesus **if** he wills to do so.

For this reason, that man may know how to choose to follow Him, the Nazarene instructed his followers, saying to them, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). Likewise, for this same reason, He “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15), and He is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9).

Jesus said, “If any man **will**.” The decision to follow Him is a matter of the will. It is a determination made by man. In the last chapter of the Revelation are these words: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). Whosoever will may come. Whosoever will may follow Jesus.

Man will not follow Jesus accidentally. Following the Lord will not just happen without man’s intent, unexpectedly, either to his happy shock and surprise, or to his unhappy chagrin and resentment. Nor can one obtain blessing by his being forced against his will to follow the Good Shepherd (Tit. 2:11-12). If man follows Him, it will be a choice, a determination, a matter of man’s resolve or

purpose—that is, a willing of man to do so. Already, God has expressed His will. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). It is not God’s will that a single soul be lost; however, God does not override the will of man or overpower anyone, making him follow Christ. We must decide to follow Him.

What Jesus Said About The Direction Of Following Him

The Lord said about following Him, “If any man will **come** after me.” The word “come” indicates a movement from one place to another. Man can come after Jesus—that is, man has the ability. It is not true that man cannot choose to do good. Augustine’s “experience with sin led him to believe that the individual was not responsible for his sinful nature and that became basic to his theological system.”¹ If man were not responsible, and if he could not choose to do good, he could not choose to follow Jesus. The ideas are equally false, though espoused in Calvinism’s doctrines of non-election and irresistible grace as if they were the very bedrock of Truth, that some men cannot come to Jesus even though they would, and that others will be forced to come to Him even though they would not. While some men say there are those who cannot come, and others say none can come (without a direct operation of the Holy Spirit), the Messiah says:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34).

Thus, there is a direction that one must choose in moving from one place to another, which is to leave sin behind and come to Jesus for salvation. One day, during the life of Christ,

many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life (John 6:66-68).

Many chose on that day, to their shame and condemnation, to go away from Jesus. The foolish choose to go away. The wise will choose to come to Him, for, as Peter so accurately stated, to whom else shall we go? No other has the words of eternal life. Follow Him.

Jesus said, "If any man will come **after** me." Like the word "come," the word "after" indicates a place. The place is behind another. It means "to place back of, or afterwards." If we would follow the Lord, we must get behind Him and come after Him. When Peter attempted to run ahead of Christ, the Savior put him in his proper place—behind the Lord:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his

disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 16:21-25).

The disciple's place is behind Jesus, following after Him. We cannot follow Him by trying to go before Him. He is the One Who has been given all authority (Matt. 28:18). He, not man, is sitting on the throne (Heb. 1:8).

Jesus said, "If any man will come after **me**." There is no other whom we should follow and no other to whom we should go (John 6:68). There is "none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). He, alone, is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). Only He is the sinless Son Who made the perfect sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 7:27; Heb. 9:26). We must follow Him, for by His Word we shall be judged in the last day (Acts 17:30-31). The Lion of the tribe of Judah declared, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Man cannot successfully determine his way without Christ (Jer. 10:23). The way man chooses (instead of following Christ) may seem right to him, "but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). Man may listen to the words of other men and heed their calls to follow them, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Although Paul was an apostle and a great proclaimer of the Word, he called upon brethren to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Gal. 1:6-10).

Man's choice to follow Christ demands a new direction. From following the sinful way of the world, serving self, sin, and Satan, to following Christ is an about-

face, a one-hundred-and-eighty degree change in direction. Jesus said, "Come." Man can come to Christ, and he must come to Him, if he would find the rest the Savior offers (Matt. 11:28-30).

Note: Jesus said man must come after Him, not before or beside, but in the proper position of follower. Again, this must be the personal decision of the one who would follow the Nazarene (cf. Matt. 16:23; 1 Pet. 2:21). We must change direction to follow Him.

What Jesus Said About The Denial Of Oneself In Order To Follow Him

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him **deny himself.**" "Deny" involves the idea of not seeking one's own interests, but losing oneself in the furtherance of the interests of another. How could Paul say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21)? Because he could say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Paul had quit living for Paul. Though, from the viewpoint of men, he had much about which to boast in the flesh, he put his relationship with his former life and, subsequently, with Christ in proper perspective:

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have

suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ (Phil. 3:4-8).

We, like Paul, must deny ourselves in order to follow Jesus.

One cannot love the world and follow the Lord, for no man can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17; Luke 12:15). One cannot put something or someone before the Lamb of God and still follow Him (Matt. 6:33; Matt. 10:37; Matt. 22:37-38). If one chooses to turn from the Christ in order to gain for himself the things of the world, has he really benefited? Jesus asked, "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Luke 9:25).

Jesus denied Himself in order to do the will of the Father (Luke 22:42). He could have called for the angels to deliver Him: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53). He could have called for deliverance, but He chose not to do so. He said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Therefore, the inspired apostle penned, "For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me" (Rom. 15:3). If we would follow Him, we must deny ourselves.

What Jesus Said About The Determination To Follow Him

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross.**" To "take up" is to bear (as in bearing a burden), or take upon oneself (as a responsibility). One must make the determination, intelligently (with proper understanding), deliberately, and willingly, to take up his cross. The cross is a symbol of death, and always refers to death (see the context of Matthew 10:38); thus, taking up one's cross is dying to

oneself and to the world in order to live for Christ. The cross was a cruel means of lethal punishment, which idea the Romans had taken from the Phoenicians. It was a shameful, humiliating way to die, as one was hoisted up for all to see. Before the curious eyes of mocking onlookers, the crucified suffered the intense agony of a slow, painful death. Those crucified were considered to be the basest of criminals, the worst of evildoers, and the lowest of humanity (Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13):

The cross, a sign of shame, was reserved for criminals (Gal. 3:13). Whereas Peter attempted to prevent Christ's cross, he was confronted with his own. As Christ must bear His cross, so must all disciples take up their crosses and follow Him. The truth is, one who will not voluntarily for Christ's sake take his cross and follow Him is not worthy of Christ, nor can he be His disciple (Mat. 10:38; Luke 14:27). Each follower of Christ must forsake selfish ease, accept the responsibilities, bear the burdens, and endure the shame and reproach of His cross (1 Pet. 4).²

Some refuse to follow Christ because they do not want to make the commitment to bear the cross which comes with following Him. Some begin, but grow weary and quit (Gal. 6:9). The cross is a daily reminder of our determination to follow Him. No one else can carry the cross for us (cf. Gal. 6:5). Jesus carried His willingly. We must willingly carry ours, if we would follow Him.

What Jesus Said About Following Him Daily

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**." Offering to "give" one hour per week in the "service" of the Lord is miserly, beggarly, selfish, and sinful. What are we thinking when we approach discipleship as if it were something we put on upon entering a church building and leave behind upon exiting?

The church in Jerusalem followed Christ daily:

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:46-47).

They taught the lost and preached the Gospel daily: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). They grew daily (Acts 2:47).

We want to receive from God daily: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). He abundantly blesses daily: “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation” (Psm. 68:19). Is it too much for Him to say, “Take up your cross daily and follow me”? Let us do so and encourage others as well: “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). Surely, if we want to follow Him, we will do so daily. If we are not willing to bear our cross daily, we need not expect to wear a crown eternally.

What Jesus Said About Following Him As His Disciple

There is a personal responsibility of following Christ as a disciple of His. This responsibility is not mitigated either by the positive or negative response of others. When Jesus told Peter of the death that Peter would die, Peter’s inquisitive concern was over what “the disciple whom Jesus loved” would do:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and

another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me (John 21:18-22).

The word “follow” (Luke 9:24) indicates becoming a disciple, accompanying one as his disciple. If we would follow Him, we must do so as His disciple.

Conclusion

Jesus said, “Follow me.” Those who follow Christ will be saved. Those who do not follow Him will be lost:

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? (Luke 9:24-25).

Those who follow Christ find peace, hope, joy, fellowship, and salvation. They walk the way that leads to the Father. They have made the decision to change direction and have determined to deny themselves in order to carry the cross daily as His disciples. We will follow someone, and we will decide whom we follow. Jesus said, “Follow me.” At the Judgment, whether we followed Him or not will be all that really matters: “And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38).

Endnotes

1 F. W. Mattox, **The Eternal Kingdom** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1961), p. 159.

2 Bobby Liddell, “The Church Promised by Jesus and His Transfiguration,” **Studies In Matthew**, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1995), p. 217.

CHAPTER 16

What Jesus Said About The Law Of Moses

Mark Mosher

Commendation

AS MOST OF YOU know, my father preached here while I was a teenager. I have many fond memories of the time we spent here with the good brethren of this congregation. In a time when many have deviated from the old paths, it is certainly good to see that the Southaven congregation is still standing strong for the Lord. I consider it both an honor and a privilege to be invited to speak on the **POWER** lectureship.

Introduction

There are some who oppose both listening to the Old Testament being preached or taught in Bible class as well as personally studying from any of the books of the Old Testament. These brethren reason that we are no longer under the Old Testament law and should therefore spend our time studying the New Testament. This reasoning stems from ignorance because not only did the Gospel begin with Abraham (Gal. 3:8), but also the purpose of the Law of Moses was to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). The Law of Moses, along with the books of the patriarchal dispensation, was written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). Therefore, there is much value in studying the principles of the Old Testament.

Although the commands of the Law of Moses are no longer authoritative, the principles remain constant, for God is an unchanging God (Mal. 3:6). For example, the principle of the operation of grace has never changed. There have always been priesthood (Lev. 6-10) and sacrifice (Lev. 1-5). There has also always been a place where God meets man in worship. Under patriarchy, an altar was built to “call on the name of the Lord” (Gen. 12:8; Gen. 13:4). Under Judaism, they came to the door of the tabernacle (Lev. 17) and later the temple (1 Kings 8). Today the place God meets man in worship is the church (Eph. 3:10-11).

Another example of the principle of God’s law is to learn that there are consequences to man’s disobedience to God. When we read of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10), we learn that man must respect the silence of God in worship, or else face the consequences. When we read about Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6-7), we see the consequences of disobedience and the need to respect spiritual things. When we study the book of Judges, we see that we must never walk again by our own sight (Judg. 21:25).

By studying the Old Testament, one has a better foundation for studying the New Testament. The New Testament is filled with Old Testament references. It would be nearly impossible to study the books of Galatians, Hebrews, and Romans without a good understanding of the Old Testament. Much of what Jesus taught has its roots in the Old Testament, for He lived and died under its commands.

Through a study of the Old Testament, we can be made wise unto salvation, as was Timothy (2 Tim. 3:15). As one studies Genesis, he sees the beginning of sin and how man cannot hide the guilt of his own sins, but must meet the provisions that God has made. A study of the book of Exodus reveals that there is a way out—one can rely on the Passover Lamb. As one studies Leviticus, he

sees that sacrifice, priesthood, and tabernacle become the means through which grace operates. In the book of Numbers, one learns that God's promises are sure; therefore, man must serve Him. As one studies Deuteronomy, he learns that love is the motivation for serving God, and true love for God will come from our remembering all of God's blessings and provisions.

The book of Joshua teaches that, if one obeys God, he will receive the gift of this grace. As one studies Judges, one learns that he cannot walk by his own sight, or by deciding one's own right and wrong, but rather must walk by faith in accepting God's standard of right and wrong. In the book of Ruth, one sees God and learns that He is not a respecter of persons. God never forgot the Gentiles, for God so loved the world.

As one studies 1 and 2 Samuel, he learns that God needs great leaders to teach and pray for the people (1 Sam. 12:23). 1 and 2 Kings teach one that God is the only true King. As one studies Ezra, he sees the means of restoring one's faith in God and His Word. In the book of Nehemiah, one sees the need to restore the work of the Lord. Though the word "God" is never mentioned in the book of Esther, one sees His hand throughout and learns of God's providential care for His people.

As one studies Job, he sees the need for one to plead his case to God. In the book of Psalms, there is a renewal of appreciation for God's Word, and, in the book of Proverbs, one sees the need to have God in all areas of life. As one studies Ecclesiastes, he sees that the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). In the book Song of Solomon, one learns of the beauty of marriage that was created by God.

As one studies the prophets, he sees the coming Christ and His church, as well as the need for repentance and return to God.

Through a study of the Old Testament, one sees the serious nature of sin. As one studies the sacrifice, there is an impression of violence in death (see Lev. 1:1-5).

In Genesis 2:17, one reads of the first sin and learns that Adam and Eve were to die the day they ate of the forbidden fruit.

While some will conclude this is a spiritual death, the phrase “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” is a Hebrew idiom, literally, “in dying thou shalt die.” This phrase demands a violent physical death.¹ However, Adam and Eve did not die a violent physical death the day they sinned.

Instead, we read in Genesis 3:15 of the prophecy of the One Who took the place of Adam and Eve. Christ died the violent, physical death for Adam and Eve and all mankind when He died on the cross and “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

Therefore, as one thinks about Christ’s death on the cross, one should realize that it was his sin that put our Lord on that cruel cross. There should be a remembrance of the graphic picture of violence and ugliness associated with sin.

By studying the Old Testament, one learns about Christ in prophecy and has witness to the Deity of Christ: “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

When one studies the Old Testament, he has examples of what faith can accomplish in one’s life. Hebrews 11 is a tribute to those who walked in faith before God.

How could a study of God’s Word be complete without the knowledge of men like Abraham, Noah, Jacob, Moses, etc.? Having seen the value of the Old Testament, our Lord no doubt would have a great deal to say about it.

Selected Passages Of The Lord's Teaching On The Law Of Moses

Matthew 5:17-18

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-18).

In the preceding passage, Jesus contrasts two words: “destroy” and “fulfill.” The word “destroy” comes from the Greek word *kataluo*, which means “tearing down” or “demolition.”² Some have proclaimed that there is a contradiction in Christ’s statement with that of Paul’s in Ephesians 2:15: “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.” The term “abolish” stems from the Greek word *katargeo* and means “to render idle...inoperative” or “to deprive of force.”³ Because these words have such different meanings, *katargeo* should never be confused with *kataluo*. While Jesus did come to render the Law of Moses as inoperative, He did not intend to destroy it so that one would believe it had no purpose. To show this, He contrasts the word “destroy” with the word “fulfill,” which denotes accomplishment—that is, bringing the Law to completion. Christ then was the “goal of the law” (Rom. 10:4).

Christ states that He is the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies, as well as the very purpose or aim of the Law of Moses. Christ, therefore, completed the work begun by the Father. After God created the world, He rested because everything that He had created was perfect. He had to come out of this “rest” to work a plan for saving man. Christ then became the promised seed (Gen 3:15),

the seed of Abraham, and the hope of the world. The Law of Moses then was a vital part of the fulfillment of Christ's work.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, it brought to mankind the knowledge of the guilt of sin. However, this knowledge of guilt did not provide the knowledge of how to atone for that sin. Thus, when Adam and Eve attempted to hide their guilt with fig leaves, God clothed them with animal skins, showing that atonement can only be accomplished through a blood sacrifice; in this case, as through the Old Testament, the sacrifice was from the blood of animals. Man knew very little about God or the nature of God's holiness. Therefore God established a law to prepare man for the coming Christ. Man learned the principles of priesthood, sacrifice and holy living, and the serious nature of sin. These imperfections of the priesthood and sacrifice thus led to the need for a perfect Sacrifice and High Priest. Thus, the Law became a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). The Law then fulfilled the purpose of God in showing the need for Christ.

Paul declared the Law as good, holy, and just (Rom. 7:12). Yet merely having a knowledge of sin did not atone for that sin. Paul declared this struggle in Romans 7. The Law of Moses pointed out the sin, yet provided no remedy (Rom. 3:20; Heb. 10:4). Paul then, under the Law of Moses, asks the question, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). In Romans 7:25, Paul himself provides the answer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

Therefore was Christ the fulfillment or goal of the Law (Rom. 10:4) and establisher of the New Covenant. As the Hebrews writer proclaimed, in providing the New Covenant, God "made the first [covenant] Old" (Heb. 8:7-13).

This abolition (not destruction) of the Mosaical Law is a crucial element in rightly dividing the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15) so that one can understand and use the New Testament of Christ as the sole authority in belief, practice, and worship (Col. 3:17). Much religious error has been committed because many have not made the proper distinction between the testaments. For example, the use of instrumental music in denominations, the false belief of the kingdom to come, the Roman Catholic's special priesthood, the Seventh Day Adventist's observance of the Sabbath day, etc.

Matthew 5:19-20

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19-20).

This passage shows that one cannot violate the Law of God and remain pleasing to Him. If they were in the habit of breaking the Law of Moses, they most assuredly would break the law under the New Covenant. Christ's use of the term "least commandment" shows this to be so. Greatness is not determined by some heroic act. Those who have been great under the Law of Moses will have the same quality as those under the Law of Christ. Those who are great are those who obey the will of God. The righteousness of the Pharisees was that of self and was conceived by the people and by the Pharisees themselves as being great. Yet, in both dispensations—the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ—one's righteousness and greatness were dependent upon man's obedience to the

law, not his outward showing to the people. Thus our righteousness is to exceed that of the Pharisees' self-righteousness.

Matthew 22:35-40

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:35-40).

One would think that, after He put the Sadducees to silence (Matt. 22:34), there would be fear in attempting to ask Christ another question. Yet the Sadducees did ask another question, and, in answer, Christ quotes from two Old Testament passages (Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18). Jesus often showed the religious elite their ignorance of the Law when he quoted the simplicity of the Law. Oftentimes, their problem was they had not read with the purpose of understanding (Matt. 19:4).

The very reason Israel sinned in the wilderness was a lack of appreciation for the love of God, and, out of that lack of appreciation, they failed to love God in return. Israel had decided that God was the source of all their problems and, therefore, they concluded that God hated them (Deut. 1:27). Later in Israel's history, they again misread God and concluded that God was just too hard and could not be pleased (Mal. 6:6-7). God answered them, saying, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mal. 6:8).

It has been taught that the God of the Old Testament is a different God than the One we read of in the New Testament. It is believed by some that the God of the Old Testament was an angry God. Some false teachers will claim that God changed, and today He is filled with love, mercy and grace. Christ, however, showed that the Law of Moses was based on love.

Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, unfolded God's plan of redemption. In the book of Genesis, one learns of the beginning of man (Gen 1:26) and the beginning of sin (Gen. 3). Man for the first time experienced guilt and tried to cover sin by his own method. God, however, clothed man with animal skins, showing that guilt can only be overcome through a blood sacrifice. God prepared a way for man to be brought back into fellowship with Him. Man needed a way out, or an exodus. Therefore, the book of Exodus showed man the need for deliverance through the Passover lamb.

Yet man needed the assurance that he could remain in fellowship with God. So, through the book of Leviticus, God showed the principles of priesthood, sacrifice, holy living, the day of atonement, and the tabernacle, which became the means of how God's grace operates. In the book of Numbers, one learns of the need for daily service.

In Deuteronomy, Moses discloses the reason man has for obeying God; that motive is love. God's great love for man is shown in all that He has done and provided for him. Man's love for God is shown by his obedience to God's Word (John 14:15). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of all that God has done for them. The Israelites remembered all of their problems, but they did not remember that God helped them through their problems. Because of this lapse in memory, Moses reminded the people of Israel that God loved them:

The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor
choose you, because ye were more in number

than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:7-9).

Note that Moses said, God will only keep His covenant and mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments. Again, Moses reminded them that Israel was God's delight (Deut. 10:15). God chose Israel and made them a special people and brought them out of Egyptian bondage. Therefore, they should "love the stranger" (Deut. 10:19). A deep love for God and what He has done for us should cause us to love others. The whole of the law is learning how to love God and one another. All the commands given in the Bible show one how to accomplish this task. Today, that principle has not changed. If we love God, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15).

Again did Moses declare to Israel that God not only loved them, but that His love was a tender love: "Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words" (Deut. 33:3). When we know that God loves us, we feel secure and we develop a deeper desire to hear God's Word. The principle of loving God and others is, as Christ stated, the very foundation of the Law of Moses, as well as the foundation of the Law of Christ (John 14:15; John 13:34).

Jesus' Testimony Of The Law Shows The Authenticity Of The Old Testament

Many have and still do question the authenticity and authority of the books of the Bible. A plethora of apologetic

writings has been made on these subjects. Yet the Lord's testimony to the Old Testament canon never questioned the text's genuineness. He never charges them with adding to or taking from the Scriptures, or in any way tampering with the text. The Lord reproached the people of the day for their traditions and ignorance of the Scriptures. If our Lord does not name the writers of the books of the Old Testament in detail, it may at least be said that no word of His calls into question the genuineness of any book. The Law (first five books) is ascribed to Moses. Note these references:

go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them (Matt 8:4).

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead (Luke 16:31).

For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let them die the death (Mark 7:10).

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me (Luke 24:44).

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me (John 5:45-46).

Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me? (John 7:19; cf. John 7:22-23).

The Psalms are quoted by our Lord, and sometimes the writer is named: Psalm 110 is ascribed to David. The Lord's argument depends on its being Davidic (Matt. 22:41-46).

The genuineness of Isaiah is also addressed by our Lord. Quoting Isaiah 6:9:

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt 13:14-15; note also Mark 7:6 quoting from Isa. 29:13).

When Jesus came to Nazareth, and in the synagogue asked for the scrolls of Isaiah, he quoted from a passage in Isaiah 61. Note this passage:

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised (Luke 4:17-18).

The very section He quoted from has been questioned by liberal scholars as a “second” or “pseudo” Isaiah, yet Jesus recognized it as coming from God. In Matthew 24:15, Jesus speaks of the “abomination of desolation” and states that it was spoken by Daniel in both Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11.

Jesus also stated that the commands and teachings of the Law came from God. Notice these passages:

For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother (Matt 15:4).

As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God,

saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Matt 22:31-32).

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do (Mark 7:8).

Note also that Jesus refers to the laws of the Old Testament as the commandments of God (Mark 7:8-9). These passages show clearly that the Old Testament Scriptures are the very mind of God. They are indeed inspired of God. Jesus made reference to the inspiration of David in Matthew 22:43. Jesus claimed that the Old Testament Scriptures “cannot be broken” (John 10:34-36). The verb “broken,” from *luo*, signifies “to loose, unbind, dissolve.”⁴ When applied to the Scriptures, it signifies to deprive of authority. The authority of the Scriptures then is complete. As Christ stated in the Sermon on the Mount, “Till heaven and earth shall pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt 5:18). The jot (*yodh*) is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet; the tittle designates the little lines or projections by which Hebrew letters differ from each other. Everything then contained in the Old Testament is of divine authority and has its fulfillment in Christ and His law (New Testament).

Conclusion

Jesus, in answering the Jews who sought to kill Him, stated, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). The Jews thought that, just by possessing the scrolls or Law, they had eternal life, and yet they rejected the Christ of which the Law taught. As stated earlier, the Law of Moses was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal 3:24), and, without the Law, man is incomplete. However, merely possessing a Bible will not ensure one’s salvation.

To ensure one's salvation, one must study the law, accept God's Word, and obey it.

Endnotes

1 Notes taken from the Memphis School of Preaching.

2 W. E. Vine, **Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company), pp. 304-305.

3 Ibid, p. 15.

4 Ibid, p. 149.

CHAPTER 17

What Jesus Said About The Church/Kingdom

Kevin Beard

Introduction

WHAT THE WORLD CALLS “Christianity” today is a confused mess. Hundreds of different groups exist that claim to follow the teachings of Christ. When one examines these groups, he finds that their doctrines vary greatly, as do their organizations, their traditions, their names, their histories, and so forth. One might ask, “Why do all of these differences exist?” In answer to that question, many would downplay the importance of those differences, saying that they really do not matter. The common idea of today is that mankind has the right to do as he pleases within the church; Jesus is important, but the church is not. So the idea has become prominent that “we all are going to heaven, just taking different roads to get there.” The major slogan expressing religious ideals of today is, “Attend the church of your choice.” But which church would Jesus choose? No one seems to care what Jesus thinks about the church. No one seems to want to know what He said about it; but they should.

Jesus used the word “church” only three times in two different verses (Matt. 16:18; Matt. 18:17),¹ but that does not mean that He had little to say about it. Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom of God, and

so forth. The kingdom is the church. This fact is readily seen from Jesus' using the terms "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably in His conversation with Peter and the other apostles (Matt. 16:18-19). It is seen also in the fact that Jesus said He would drink the cup of His Supper with His followers in the kingdom (Matt. 26:29), and that takes place today in the church (1 Cor. 10:16). If Jesus said He would drink the cup with His followers in His Father's kingdom, and if His followers commune with Him by drinking that cup in the church, the Father's kingdom and the church must be the same thing. So whatever Jesus said about the kingdom, He also said about the church.

Jesus told many parables about the kingdom. He often introduced these parables by saying, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto...." These parables describe various aspects of the church and what it would be like. They are valuable sources of information as to the Lord's plans, desires, and intentions for the church. However, this discussion will examine only one text in which Jesus used the term "church." This passage is crucial to understanding the Lord's desires for the church because it is the only recorded time in which Jesus directly addressed His plan to bring the church into existence. Matthew 16:13-19 records this important conversation between Jesus and His disciples:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou

art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

This passage reveals at least five things the Lord said about the church.

The Church Is Divine In Origin

Why did Jesus ask the twelve about the general population's opinion of His identity? He must have wanted to impress upon them the fact that He was much more than a mere man, even more than a great prophet like Jeremiah or Elijah. Yet when Jesus asked them for their own opinion of Him, He caused them to think seriously about what they themselves really thought of Him.

When Peter proclaimed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15), he admitted Jesus' Divine nature, which, Jesus said, God had revealed to him (Matt. 16:16). The Father revealed this through all of the miraculous things Jesus did, as well as through the fulfillment of prophecy evident in Jesus' life. By emphasizing the fact that He was indeed the Son of the living God, and by saying that He, the Son of the living God, would build the church, Jesus made it clear that the church was Divine in origin.

It was no accident that God came to earth in human form; it was all according to the Divine plan. Paul said that the church revealed God's wisdom, according to the "eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). All of God's activity up to and including Jesus' coming to earth was designed to bring about the establishment of the church. Jesus saw the completion of that plan drawing nearer and wanted to prepare His

apostles for it. After the discussion with the twelve, Matthew said:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Matt. 16:21).

For them to understand why Jesus had to suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and ultimately be killed, the apostles needed to understand the Divine nature not only of Jesus Himself, but also of the plan that was behind His presence on earth.

God kept His plan hidden until the time was right for Him to reveal it. The prophets whom He used to reveal His will did not know the scope of His plan, nor did they understand everything about which they wrote and spoke (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Paul called God's plan a "mystery," which was not made known to men in times gone by, but was in His time revealed to the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph. 3:1-5). Now God's plan is no longer a mystery, because God has revealed it to all of mankind through the apostles and prophets. Now men can study the prophecies of old and see how the plan of God unfolded, culminating in the establishment of the church. The Lord promised David:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

Peter said that this promise was fulfilled in Christ (Acts 2:30), and the house that Jesus built is the church. 700 years before the fact, Isaiah said:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

This prophecy was fulfilled in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost following the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2).

If more people today appreciated the fact that the church is of Divine origin, they likely would have a more respectful attitude toward it. Imagine if someone paid millions of dollars to buy a masterpiece painting by Rembrandt, then took it home and, because they thought they could improve it, began to make changes to it, or if they took a knife and began to cut it in pieces. The masterpiece would be ruined and its value would be destroyed. Who would want a painting done by a master like Rembrandt that had been altered by someone else? Who would think of ruining a priceless piece of art that way? Yet for centuries people have been making changes to and destroying the church, the greatest masterpiece the world will ever know. They have changed its organization, its worship, its doctrine, its work, and just about every other aspect of it. People from both within and without have disparaged it, ridiculed it, and attacked it. But God's design is flawless. Any kind of wisdom that would contradict the wisdom of God is nothing but foolishness. Paul told the Corinthians how that God's plan demonstrated the ultimate in wisdom because it also demonstrated the utter foolishness of the ways of men. In bringing salvation to mankind through the death of Jesus Christ, God

destroyed the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Since God is greater than man is, it should stand to reason that God's ways are greater than man's ways (Isa. 55:8-9). For man to try to improve upon God's plan or set it aside is the epitome of foolishness.

The Church Is Built On Christ

After Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus pronounced a blessing on Him, and then said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Jesus promised to build His church, and He promised to build it upon a certain foundation. What exactly did Jesus mean when He said, "upon this rock I will build my church"? The Roman Catholic Church maintains that Jesus referred to Peter, indicating that Peter would become the head of the church:

Jesus solemnly told Peter he was to be supreme shepherd, the head of the Church. "I for my part declare to you, you are 'Rock,' and on this rock I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 16, 18-19).²

To Matthew 16:18, The **New American Bible**, a Catholic version of the Bible, adds this note in support of their position:

The presumed original Aramaic of Jesus' statement would have been, in English, "You are Rock (*Kepa*) and upon this rock (*kepa*) I will build my church." The Greek text probably means the same, for the difference in gender between the masculine noun *petros*, the disciple's new name,

and the feminine noun *petra* (rock) may be due simply to the unsuitability of using a feminine noun as the proper name of a male.³

The Roman Catholic view is not consistent with the rest of Scripture. Jesus did not make Peter the head of the church, because Christ is the head of the church: “And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18). Neither did Jesus promise to build the church upon Peter, because Christ is the foundation of the church: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus is that precious stone, chosen by God but rejected by men, that is now the chief cornerstone of the church (1 Pet. 2:4-7).

How could the church have been built upon any human foundation? Peter was a great man, but he was human, and subject to making mistakes and poor judgment, just like anyone else. He let his Jewish pride keep him from understanding that the Lord intended for the Gospel to go to people of all nations, not just the Jews (Acts 10:9-17), and it took the miracle of Cornelius’ speaking in tongues to make him fully understand (Acts 10:44-48). Peter allowed that same feeling to interfere with his fellowship with Gentile Christians later in his life, an action for which Paul publicly rebuked him (Gal. 2:11-14). Surely anything built upon a faulty foundation will not stand (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). If the church had been built upon Peter, or any other human being, it would have crumbled and been forgotten long ago. That was not God’s plan for the church.

God planned for the church to last forever. Daniel saw this in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. He said:

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be

destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44).

That kingdom is the church. If it is to stand forever, it must be built upon a solid foundation, and that foundation is Jesus Christ. There is no power in the universe that will ever be able to destroy the church.

Knowing that the church is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, and thus that it will stand forever, will cause Christians to appreciate the fact that time and culture cannot alter the makeup of the church. Many man-made churches of today are in the midst of crises of identity because they are trying to make their churches fit into the cultural context. Should “the church” ordain women as pastors, priests, etc.? Should “the church” accept homosexuals into full fellowship? How should “the church” handle the issue of abortion?

These are questions that most prominent denominations struggle with today, because they see the church as a changing body that must keep pace with man’s ever-changing ideas.

Jesus is the foundation of the church, and Jesus does not change. The book of Hebrews proclaims, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). The point of that statement can be seen in the next verse: “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines” (Heb. 13:9). Since Jesus is unchanging, and since He is the foundation of the church, then it must follow that the church also is unchanging. Various sorts of doctrines that are foreign to the teaching of Christ must be rejected, not adopted, for Jesus does not change. God’s eternal purpose was sufficient for all ages. Therefore, whenever human society becomes inconsistent with the church, it is society that needs to change, not the church.

The Church Belongs To Christ

There can be no doubt that Jesus claimed ownership of the church when He said, “upon this rock I will build **my church**” (Matt. 16:18, emp. mine, KB). He did not intend for Peter to own it, or for the apostles to own it, or for any human organization to own it. He owns it because He paid the price for it with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Jesus told a parable about a man who found a pearl of great price. That man valued the one pearl enough that he was willing to sell all that he had so that he could afford to buy that one pearl (Matt. 13:45-46). People value things according to the price they paid for them. When they have paid a great price for something they highly treasure, they will be very protective of it. Jesus thought the church to be of such value that He was willing to shed His blood to purchase it. He could have paid no greater price for the church than that, and so He cherishes and treasures the church. He will not think lightly of those who try to destroy His treasured possession.

Since Jesus owns the church, He is the One Who will provide for its needs. Paul acknowledged his recognition of this fact by saying, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Christ has promised to supply all that we need (Phil. 4:19). Knowing this truth provides Christians with a great amount of confidence. There is no good work that the church ought to do that the Lord will not enable it to do. So long as Christians are willing to allow God to use them for His cause, they will be able to accomplish the things God wants. Human understanding does not limit the power of God. Paul said, “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). Notice, first, that God’s power is beyond human understanding and imagination. How could finite human minds fully fathom the depths of the

power that created the universe? Then notice that God wields that power “in us.” He chooses to exert that immeasurable power through human agency. Why? Because the church belongs to Christ, and He wants the church to accomplish His will.

How sad it is, then, when men and women refuse to do the Lord’s will because they lack the faith to trust that the Lord will provide what His church needs to do His will. The poor churches of Macedonia did not operate this way. They implored Paul to take a monetary gift from them to help the poor saints in Jerusalem, even though they themselves were poor (2 Cor. 8:1-5). This kind of faith and dedication were possible because they knew that they belonged to the Lord. Paul said of them, “And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:5). All Christians need to have the kind of faith those people had. They need to recognize that the church belongs to the Lord and that He will provide what it needs to accomplish His will. However, the problem too often is that Christians are not interested enough in doing the Lord’s will. They become distracted from the Lord’s work and are too busy doing other things to develop an appreciation for the power that the Lord might exert through their efforts. The church belongs to the Lord, so there is no room for selfish interests. Diotrefes forgot this point, if he ever fully appreciated it. He wanted to be the one in control in the church, so, if anyone crossed him, he cast him out of the church (3 John 9-11). How many other men and women like Diotrefes have forgotten that the church belongs to the Lord, not to the people who are powerful enough to intimidate others so that they can get their own way?

There Is Only One Church

Faithful Gospel preachers have pointed out for generations that Jesus promised to build His church, not

His churches. He never intended to own a fleet of churches. If that had been His intention, then surely He would have said something about that; but He never did. He promised to build one church. Why do so many people today refuse to see this simple truth? Some try to evade the issue by saying the various denominations comprise that one church Jesus built; but that idea is preposterous. How can churches that are diametrically opposed to one another on many points of doctrine be a part of the same “universal church”? How can organizations born of division be united with one another? These groups cannot agree on what to name themselves. They cannot agree on whether baptism should be by immersion or sprinkling. They cannot agree on whether God created man with a free will or not. They cannot agree on whether God foreordained individuals to salvation or not. They cannot agree on whether God still gives miraculous gifts or not. They cannot agree on whether women should preach, teach, or lead prayer over men or not. They cannot agree on whether only one or three persons make up the Godhead. Yet some would espouse the position that all of these differences, which have been known to cause heated arguments, are a part of the one church that Jesus built. How preposterous! Paul said that God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). It is not possible that He would be responsible for this confused state of disunity present in the denominational world today.

Jesus intended for His church to be one harmonious, united body. The night before His death, He prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

Surely, the Father would not have answered that prayer with denominationalism. Instead, He answered that prayer with the true church. That church enjoyed unity from the beginning:

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers...And all that believed were together, and had all things common;...And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart (Acts 2:42-46).

What they had was not some contrived unity resulting from a feigned camaraderie; it was true unity that resulted from an adherence to the Word of God. Jesus said that those who believed on Him would do so through the apostles' word, which He had given them from the Father (John 17:14; John 17:20). Since the early disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, they were doing what was necessary to have the kind of unity they exhibited. The church in Corinth had lost the unity they should have maintained because they had begun to give their allegiance to men, rather than Christ (1 Cor. 1:12-13); but Paul commanded:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Paul did not tell them to agree to disagree and then try to be friendly for the sake of getting along. He did not tell them to vote on the issues and do whatever the majority decided. He told them to speak the same thing. Since he came to Corinth preaching only Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 2:2),

then he intended for them to speak only those things that Christ had revealed.

The Church Is Governed By Divine Authority

After Jesus announced His plans to build His church, He told Peter:

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:19).

With this statement, Jesus declared that He would delegate His authority over the church to the apostles. That this authority was delegated to all the apostles, and not Peter only, is clear, because later the Lord told all of the apostles the same thing: “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:18). Jesus’ plan was not to stay on earth; therefore, He needed someone to be in authority in His place on earth after He went back to heaven. He chose the apostles for this responsibility, and here tells them of that authority they would receive.

Jesus gave the apostles authority, but what degree of authority did He give them? A casual reading of this passage might lead one to believe that Jesus gave a complete authority to the apostles to decide on their own how things ought to be done, but this cannot be. Shortly before He was arrested, Jesus promised the apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit to guide them:

These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:25-26).

While Jesus was present on earth with His apostles, He was able to teach them and guide them, as they needed. However, since He was not to remain on earth with them, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to them to continue to guide them as He had done. The Spirit would bring to the apostles' remembrance the things that Jesus had taught them. Jesus also told them:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you (John 16:12-15).

It was not possible for Jesus before His death to equip the apostles fully for their responsibility. There were simply too many things that they were not yet ready to learn. That made the Spirit's guidance necessary. But Jesus carefully explained to them that the Spirit would reveal to them only those things that the Father through Christ had authorized Him to reveal. Therefore, whatever the apostles "bound" and "loosed" came directly from heaven, not from the apostles' own wisdom and opinions. Several New Testament passages bear out the truthfulness of this: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). Paul's writings were the commandments of the Lord because the Lord gave those commandments to Paul through the Spirit. Paul assured the churches of Galatia that his message did not originate with him, but with Christ: "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not

after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). Paul described the process of inspiration to the Corinthian Christians:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

Paul clearly stated that the source of his teaching was not human wisdom, but the revelation of God through the Holy Spirit.

When the apostles were faced with replacing Judas, they did not make a selection based on their own opinions. They sought Divine guidance:

And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:23-26).

It was the Holy Spirit, not the apostles, who selected Matthias. When faced with the question of Gentile Christians and their amenability to the Law of Moses, the apostles met, but it was the Holy Spirit Who revealed the Divine authority on the matter (Acts 15:28). So Jesus delegated authority to the apostles to bind and loose His will on earth in His place, but that will had already been bound and loosed in heaven. They merely enacted what the Lord had already decided.

Since Jesus said that the church is governed by Divine authority, those within the church must have a deep respect for that authority. Paul said, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). Jesus has given His instructions for the church. Those instructions involve everything from what man must do to receive salvation, to how man must worship, to how the church is organized, and much more. These are not issues of tradition or opinion. They are issues of Divinely given precept.

Conclusion

Shortly before His ascension back to heaven, Jesus said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). Because of that, all men must see the sayings of Jesus as being ultimately important. Men’s words may or may not be important or valuable to their fellow man. However, everything Jesus said is indescribably important and valuable. Men disagree over things having to do with the church, but, if they would heed the things that Jesus said about it, there would be no more disagreement. When Jesus discussed the church with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi, He said that the church is Divine in origin. It did not begin as an afterthought, or as the brainchild of any human being. God planned the church from the beginning. He said that the church would be built on Him. No human being could be a sufficient foundation for the church. It is a kingdom that will stand forever, and thus, needs a foundation that is sure to stand forever, too. He said the church belongs to Him. He bought it with His blood and thus, He treasures it highly. He provides all that it needs, and everyone in the church can confidently trust in that fact. He said that there is only one church. Jesus never wanted a multiplicity of churches. He wanted one church, and that one church exists today, just as it did when it

began. He said that the church is governed by Divine authority. Those things that make the church what it is came from heaven, not from men. Therefore, men must humbly submit to that Divine authority. The church is the most glorious institution the world has ever known. Praise God for His matchless wisdom, love, and grace in planning, promising, and preparing the church!

Endnotes

1 **Holy Bible**, King James Version (Cambridge: University Press). All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

2 Lawrence G. Lovasik, **Saint Joseph New American Catechism** (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1977), p. 185.

3 **The New American Bible**, (Nashville: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1997).

CHAPTER 18

What Jesus Said About Worship

Lester Kamp

Introduction

IT IS A PRIVILEGE again to be part of the **POWER** Lectures. The Southaven church continues to shine like a beacon in a dark world of sin and strife. The elders of this congregation are to be thanked and honored for their continued steadfastness in the Way of the Lord. Their oversight of this lectureship and the many other fine works of this congregation are to be commended. I believe that brother B. J. Clarke and brother Wayne Jones are two outstanding proclaimers of the unadulterated Gospel of Christ. It is a privilege to be associated with this good church and her capable preachers and elders during this week of studying the “Sayings of Jesus.”

Of the words uttered among men, nothing can be more important for our consideration than what Jesus, our Lord, said during His earthly ministry, and what He authorized through the Holy Spirit in the New Testament of Christ. We have, therefore, an important responsibility as we consider during this lectureship the “sayings of Jesus”—the responsibility of recognizing the authority of these words and submitting ourselves to these instructions. It would be ridiculous to recognize Jesus as Lord and then refuse to do what He said (Luke 6:46).

There are many today who seem to think either that Jesus did not say anything about worship or that what He said regarding worship does not matter, for they worship according to their own desires rather than according to the exact standard of His Word. Jesus did speak on worship; in fact, He spoke on this subject a number of times. Jesus has all authority on this subject (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23). We must recognize His authority and submit ourselves to Him. It is our purpose in this chapter to look carefully at what Jesus said about worship and then to emphasize the application of what Jesus said to our lives.

Worship Versus Service And The Object Of Worship

The first reference Jesus made to worship is found in the temptations in the wilderness immediately after His baptism by John. Our attention is focused on the third of these temptations. Satan took Jesus to “an exceeding high mountain” and showed Him “all the kingdoms of the world” (Matt. 4:8).¹ Jesus was then told that He could have all of these kingdoms if He would simply fall down and worship Satan. The subject of the proper object of worship is involved in this temptation. There are certainly other things which are also involved. For example, the possibility of Jesus’ obtaining the kingdoms of the world without going to the cross is part of the “snare” of this temptation. Now carefully notice the response of Jesus. He said, “for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10).

First, it is worthy of notice that there is an obvious difference between worship and service in this Scriptural response (a reference to Deut. 6:13). There are some brethren today who make the mistake of equating these terms and conclude that all of life is worship. All of life is

to be given in service to God, but all of life is not worship. Service is a broader term than worship. Some

confuse worship and service. Worship is service to God, and it is right to say that we go to worship services, but all service is not worship: plowing, guitar playing, eating hamburgers, etc. Some apparently have been misled by some new translations that have removed the word “service” from Romans 12:1, and have inserted the word “worship” (RSV, NASV, NIV). It is true that in certain contexts the Greek word in Romans 12:1 (*latreuo*) is properly rendered as worship (as in Romans 9:4). But in itself the word only means serve, whether the service is toward God or men (cf. *Latris*, a hired servant; *latron*, hire, pay). Sometimes the word refers to a lifetime of service to God (Acts 24:14; Heb. 12:28), and the context of Romans 12:1 shows one’s offering his body as a living sacrifice is a lifetime of service, not of meditation (which is what worship is).²

All worship is, therefore, service; but not all service is worship. We should notice here that worship does not occur accidentally without the realization of the participant, and that worship is not continuous:

Abraham climbed a mountain to worship on its summit, and then, after worship, returned to his base camp at the foot of the mountain (Gen. 22:1-5). When David learned that his baby was dead, he bathed, changed clothes, and went into the house of Jehovah, “and worshiped” (2 Sam. 12:20). When he had worshiped, he returned home and ate a meal. Worship is not all that one does. It is punctuated by stop and go.³

The Ethiopian had been to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8); worship was not then nor is it now all of life.

Second, Jesus tells us clearly in this statement of Matthew 4:10 that the only one worthy of worship is God (the Godhead). Worship is to be offered to no other. Worship

should not be offered to the pope, to Mary (the Lord's earthly mother), to special people who are highly regarded, etc. Worship is to be directed to the God of the universe, the Creator of man and of all the good things that are in the world in which we live.

Vain Worship

The second statement of Jesus on the subject of worship to which we will give attention is found in Matthew 15:8-9. On this occasion Jesus again quoted the Old Testament—this time the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 29:13). Jesus was obviously well acquainted with Scripture. He said to scribes and Pharisees:

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

From this statement of Jesus we learn that not all worship offered to God is acceptable. Worship must come from a sincere, honest heart. People can go through the outward motions of worship (these actions can even be those authorized by God) and have their worship rejected by God. These people can say the right things, and even say those things in the right way; but their worship is unacceptable to God, for their hearts are not in the words or actions. We certainly ought to be very careful here. We need to make sure that the words that we utter in prayer and song are not just words, but those words must accurately express the sentiment of our hearts. We, therefore, must understand the words of the songs we sing (1 Cor. 14:15). We must concentrate on the words that are being sung and make sure that those words are accurate not only according to God's Word, but also accurate reflections of the intent of our heart (of the ones singing).

We must also avoid repeating words in our prayers without paying attention to what we are saying (Matt. 6:7). Memorized words often lose their meaning. Words which we have heard others use in public prayers may sound good, but those words may not mean anything to the one who repeats them without appropriate thought. According to these words of Jesus in Matthew 15:8, it is possible, for example, to sing without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music, observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, and still have our worship rejected by God, if our heart is not the source of that which we say and do.

Second, Jesus said that our worship can be vain if we "teach for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Many good, sincere people are vainly worshipping God today, for, instead of following the commandments of God, they follow the commandments of men. When it comes to authority in religion, these are the only two possibilities: the commandments of God or the commandments of men. On another occasion, in Matthew 21:24-27 regarding John's baptism, Jesus posed to the chief priests and the elders of the people a question regarding authority in religion. He framed the question in this way: "The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?" (Matt. 21:25). Those to whom Jesus asked this question were obviously insincere. They recognized their dilemma and reasoned, "If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet" (Matt. 21:25-26). They, therefore, refused to answer.

The doctrines of men must be rejected in favor of the commandments of God. Many sincere people today are offering vain worship to God because they are not allowing the commandments of God to dictate what they do in worship. The commandments of men are the authority for

much of what is offered as worship. This is not only true in the religious world in general, but also true of many who claim to be members of the church of Christ. As long as we follow the Divine standard of God's Word, we can speak the same things and be of the same mind and judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

The Word of God, when followed, will produce the same acts of worship. Drama presentations, special singing groups (solos, choirs, "miking the best singers," etc.), applause, "gymnastics to the glory of God," magic-and-clown tricks may be called worship by some, but are not according to the commandments of God. No matter how much these activities are enjoyed and desired, their authority is from men, not God. Regardless of the sincerity of the hearts of those people involved, the worship offered involving these actions is vain. God rejects such worship. It is empty, meaningless, and ineffective before God.

In Spirit And In Truth

A third mention of worship by Jesus occurs in John 4. Jesus "left Judea, and departed into Galilee" (John 4:3). Then we are told, "he must needs go through Samaria" (John 4:4). The Jews hated the Samaritans; most avoided the territory in travel, even though it meant many extra miles. Jesus was walking. When He arrived in Samaria, He was tired. He went to the site of Jacob's well and sat upon the wall surrounding the well. It was the sixth hour of the day, the heat of the day. He was hungry and sent His disciples into the city to procure food while He waited.

When a woman came to the well to draw water, He requested a drink. The woman was puzzled when she heard Him speak because she knew that Jewish men would not ask anything of a Samaritan, especially a woman! The normal situation can be summarized, "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). McGarvey observed:

According to later tradition, a Jew accepted no hospitality from a Samaritan, and to eat his bread as a guest was as polluting as to eat swine's flesh, but such social courtesy was the very thing which Jesus here asked.⁴

Jesus began from this discussion of water to tell her of "living water," made some statements regarding the sinfulness of the woman's private life (she had had five husbands and now was living with a man who was not her husband), and then launched into one of the most significant treatments of worship in the New Testament. This portion of Jesus' conversation is the focus of our study here in this chapter. What did Jesus say here about worship?

Upon realizing that Jesus was "a prophet," the Samaritan woman seized the opportunity to ask Him about worship. She said, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (John 4:20). Even in this worldly woman there was a keen interest in how people "ought" to worship. There was in her an obvious desire to worship; her desire was to learn the prescribed method of worship which would be acceptable to God. She realized that there was a way that men "ought" to worship.

Recall that when the northern kingdom of Israel was established, the worship of these ten tribes quickly became corrupted. It was no longer possible for them to go to the temple in Jerusalem. King Jeroboam established places in that territory for worship.

Because of their sinful disobedience, these tribes were ultimately taken into Assyrian captivity. The people of Samaria were the result of marriages that occurred between the Israelites of the northern tribes and Gentile people. Their religion was a mixture of paganism and a part of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch.

By the time of Jesus, the Samaritans considered Mt. Gerizim to be sacred; Mt. Gerizim was about 100 feet west (within eyesight) of Jacob's well, where this conversation occurred. They believed this to be the mountain on which Abraham nearly offered Isaac. The Jews rightfully considered Jerusalem to be the sacred place of worship under the Law of Moses. In essence the question was an effort to determine whether it matters where a person worships. Does the sacredness of the place determine the acceptability of the worship? Jesus' answer was about the sacredness of worship places under the new covenant which was about to be established. He said, "the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father" (John 4:21).

In other words, Jesus said that, under the new covenant, there will not be a designated, sacred place where acceptable worship can exclusively be offered. Under the covenant of Christ, the place of worship is not sanctified, but the worshiper and the acts of worship are sanctified. Those who speak of the place where the church worships as "the sanctuary" have failed to understand the significance of what Jesus said here. The room in which the church gathers for worship is not sacred; the worship is sacred, but the place is not. Now God dwells in the church (1 Cor. 3:16-17), and the people that belong to Him—they are saints.

God's people under the New Testament can worship God acceptably in any place, as long as the acts of worship are those authorized by Christ. (This fact becomes clearer in John 4:24, which we will notice shortly.) The church can worship just as acceptably in a rented space, under a "brush arbor," or in a building owned by the church and designed for the purpose of worship. Under the covenant of Christ, the place does not matter. Much later, the apostle Paul told the Athenians, "God that made the world and all things

therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). **Now**, Jesus proclaimed, in the new dispensation of Christ, the importance is not placed on the **where** of worship but on the **how** of worship.

Jesus then said, “Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). Joseph Meador well observed regarding these comments of Jesus in this verse:

Jesus’ appeal to an objective standard in this verse should not be overlooked nor minimized. Merely because the Samaritans were sincere and desired to begin a new religious movement which reflected their own cultural differences, values, and mores were insufficient reasons to change the Will of God. However, Jesus made it clear that God had specifically manifested His Will, through His Word, to the Jewish nation. His law could never be altered or changed by the will of man so as to result in the pleasurable disposition of God.⁵

Jesus here spoke of the ignorance of the Samaritans’ worship. Indeed they were ignorant. They accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament, and, therefore, were totally ignorant of the psalms and prophets. But ignorance of what God has revealed does not eliminate the guilt or the consequences of violating God’s Word (Acts 17:30).

Furthermore, Jesus clearly stated here that salvation came through the Jews:

By this He meant (a) that the Jews produced the Old Testament; it did not come from or through the Samaritans. (b) The Jews produced the Messiah; He did not come through the Samaritans. (c) The Jews had been cured of their idolatry and had preserved monotheism in the world which contributed greatly to the world’s knowledge of God and their respect for God. (d) And last, the Jews had in some measure

preserved the types of Christianity in the offerings and sacrifices which they made under the law. In these, if not other ways, the statement that salvation is from the Jews is illustrated.⁶

For emphasis note here again: the Messiah was of the “seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16), He was “born under the law” (Gal. 4:4), and the Jews were the custodians of the written Law of Moses (Rom. 3:2). Salvation is indeed of the Jews. God kept the bloodline pure until the Messiah came.

Then, significantly, Jesus stated:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

Jesus spoke of “true worshipers.” This implies the possibility of false worshipers. In other words, there are those who offer worship to God, but for some reason their worship is not right with God and, therefore, not accepted by Him. Cain was this type of worshiper. His problem was not that he tried to worship other gods; his problem was not that he failed to worship at all; his problem was that he offered to God as worship that which God had not authorized. Both Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God, but “the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering” (Gen. 4:4). The writer of Hebrews declared, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Heb. 11:4). Notice here that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith; Cain did not. Recall that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). For Abel to offer his sacrifice “by faith” indicates clearly that he followed the Word of God carefully in making that sacrifice.

This was not true of Cain. There remain many today who follow the pattern of Cain and are not “true worshipers” of God. Their worship is directed toward God, but they are not “true” in their worship. The Bible speaks of “will worship” in Colossians 2:23. Hendriksen wrote on this reference that the terminology used by Paul probably means “self-chosen, self-imposed cult or ritual, self-made religion.”⁷ This type of worship follows the individual’s own desires rather than the dictates of God. It is the philosophy of “do your own thing” applied to worship.

Jesus noted that God seeks a certain kind of worshiper. He not only accepts worship, but also seeks a certain kind of worship. God actually seeks worship from men and women who will follow His directions (do what He has commanded) in worship. Another has observed appropriately:

God is pictured as going up and down looking for someone who is worshiping Him in spirit and in truth. As you sit in the audience taking part, or maybe not taking part, in the worship, God is looking and trying to see if **you** are worshiping in the proper spirit. Is the worship an ordeal? Is there such hatred for someone in the service that you cannot worship with the right attitude? Are you listening to the prayers, and saying your amen to them? Did you miss the Bible study? Are you taking a part in the singing? Did you give your smallest coin, or mouldiest old bill? Is the service something to criticize? How many real worshipers did God see in this audience...?⁸

“God is a Spirit.” God is the appropriate object of worship—not idols (Rom. 1:23), not angels (Rev. 19:10), not other men (Acts 10:25-26). Paul told the Athenians, that the “Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). God, as spirit, cannot be confined to a specific place but is omnipresent. This reflects again on the questions of the Samaritan woman about which

place is holy and where acceptable worship could be offered. Jesus' reply was that no place was holy. His form is not physical or material, but spiritual. God is not manifest to the physical eye, but to the spiritual eye of faith.

Now notice the word "must" in this statement of Jesus: "They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). "Must" suggests obligation. The conditions stated here by Jesus are **absolutely necessary** for worship that is pleasing and acceptable to God. These are not suggestions or mere recommendations. Worship **must** be "in spirit and in truth"! There is no other worship accepted by God.

"To worship in spirit means that we will be sincere and earnest in our worship. It means that the worship must come from our hearts, that we will put our thoughts into the form of worship."⁹ Worship is not the reciting of memorized words. Worship is not a set of rituals which have been repeated so often that they no longer have meaning to the worshiper.

Worship takes careful thought and constant attention. One's heart (mind) must concentrate on that which is being said and done in worship. This requires self-discipline. The true worshiper must not allow his thoughts to wander, but he must hold his mind on those matters at hand. Otherwise, worship becomes mere form. "In spirit" has to do with the attitude of the worshiper. Right emotions and feelings are involved.

There are things which can destroy the proper spirit of worship. Let us note a few:

- (1) **Sinful motives.** Worshiping to be seen of men (Matt. 23:5-7), or for some selfish interest, possibly the furthering of business interests (John 6:26).
- (2) **Sinful lives.** Isa. 1:15; Isa. 59:2-3.
- (3) **Any kind of hatred in the heart** (Matt. 5:23-24).¹⁰

I would add to this list also (4) **a lack of awe, reverence and respect for God** (Heb. 12:28). There is altogether too much lack of thought and casualness in dress and demeanor today as people approach the presence of God in worship.

It is possible to recognize and criticize our religious neighbors for “their formalism and ceremonialism in their robed choirs and great musical organizations which entertain their people,”¹¹ and then not see our own failure to worship “in spirit” because of the lack of mental discipline to put our hearts genuinely in our worship.

“In truth” is a second condition stated by Jesus as essential to acceptable worship. What does this mean? Jesus stated in John 17:17, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” This tells us that God’s Word is Truth. Therefore, to worship God “in truth” means to follow the authority of God’s Word: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). “In the name of” means by the authority of. The authority of Jesus is in His Word (John 12:48).

In order to worship God acceptably, we must do in worship only those things authorized by His Word:

It means that we must do all that we are taught in the Gospel to do in worship to God. And it means that we will refrain from doing anything as an act of worship which is not taught in the Word of God.¹²

It is also impossible to worship “in truth” without having a knowledge of the Truth. Knowledge of God’s Word is acquired through the process of study. We cannot expect to worship God acceptably without studying God’s Word to know what God requires. Acceptable worship is not just doing anything that we want to and calling it worship. Acceptable worship follows the guidelines of God’s Word.

A person's attitude in worship must be right, but the actions of worship must also follow God's dictates in order for worship to be accepted by God.

Therefore, things that please us and may even seem right in worship are not acceptable worship regardless of the sincerity of our hearts, if God has not authorized those acts. Indeed, "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Some of the things that are popular among many people as "worship" which are not authorized are lighting of candles and lamps, burning of incense, mechanical instruments of music, priestly robes and vestments, lifting and waving hands, applause, mimicking the sounds of mechanical instruments, dancing, communion on some other day than the first day of the week, reciting the rosary, sacrifice of the mass, celebrating Easter, celebrating Christmas, genuflection, entertainment of all kinds, etc.

The list of those things authorized by God in worship is short. There are only five items, or avenues, of worship, according to the Truth. God has authorized in worship: (1) on the first day of every week, partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7); (2) on the first day of every week, giving financially to the work of the church (1 Cor. 16:1-2); (3) teaching God's Word (Acts 20:7; Acts 2:42); (4) praying together (1 Thess. 5:17; Acts 2:42); (5) singing without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

These are the only things God has authorized in the New Testament for the church to do in worship. Adding to this list those things that we would like to use in worship will make our worship vain, meaningless. Worship is not intended to please us, but to please God. Worship is not designed to entertain us or satisfy the desires of the flesh:

From the idea that is frequently suggested about singing, we gather that many in the church think worship is to be entertainment. But this is far from the truth. Worship is spiritual. It is to help us gain control over the flesh, and to do this the worship **must** be spiritual. If it appeals to the flesh, it defeats its own purpose. How foolish it is to add some novel attraction to worship to draw a crowd, and cultivate a taste that cannot be gratified, for more and more entertainment. If we enter into competition with the shows we are bound to fail, for the shows can put on far better shows than the church can, and so why go to church to see a show. Let us keep worship spiritual, and not arrange it to appeal to the flesh.¹³

Conclusion

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day because of its being the day of the Lord's resurrection (Mark 16:9), the day in which the church was established (Acts 2), and the church of the first century met upon the first day of the week to remember the Lord's death (Acts 20:7). It is also interesting to note that Jesus Himself engaged in each of these authorized items of worship or spoke definitively on these items during His earthly ministry. (1) He instituted the Lord's Supper the night before His betrayal. Then He told His disciples that He would not partake of it again until He would do so "in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). (2) Jesus taught much on financial giving. Paul told us that Jesus had taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). We recall the vivid way that Jesus taught us to give sacrificially when He observed the woman give her two mites (Mark 12:42-44). (3) Jesus was noted for His teaching. Following the "Sermon on the Mount," "the people were astonished at his doctrine (teaching, ASV): for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). (4) Jesus was One Who often prayed. When the disciples noticed His life of prayer, one

of them requested that He teach them to pray (Luke 11:1).
 (5) Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn on at least one occasion (Mark 14:26).

Looking at what Jesus has said on the subject of worship has given us a fairly complete picture of what acceptable worship is in the Christian dispensation. The history of man given in the Bible shows man's inclination to worship as he pleases. The Word of God clearly tells us what we must do to worship in the way that pleases God. Christ has all authority in worship (and in all matters of religion). We must follow His Word, for by it we will all ultimately be judged (John 12:48).

Endnotes

- 1 All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.
- 2 Hugo McCord, "Worship," **Firm Foundation** (June 1, 1982), p. 6
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 J. W. McGarvey & Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing), pp. 143-144.
- 5 Joseph Meador, "Dialogue At Jacob's Well, A Second Sign," **Studies In John** (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1999), p. 100.
- 6 **Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary 1957** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1956), pp. 168-169.
- 7 William Hendriksen, **New Testament Commentary: Exposition Of Colossians And Philemon** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), p. 132.
- 8 **Lesson Annual On Uniform Bible Lessons 1955** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1955), p. 71.
- 9 **Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary 1957**, p. 165.
- 10 **Lesson Annual on Uniform Bible Lessons 1955**, p. 71.
- 11 **Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary 1957**, p. 166.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 **Lesson Annual on Uniform Bible Lessons 1955**, p. 73.

CHAPTER 19

What Jesus Said About Prayer

Ronnie Hayes

Introduction

IT IS ALWAYS A privilege to be at this great lectureship. I want to thank the elders and Bro. B. J. Clarke for the invitation to come and be a part of this wonderful work.

The subject that has been assigned me is “What Jesus Said About Prayer.” Prayer is a wonderful subject, and to study the prayers of Christ is even a more enriching study. This is an important subject and one that needs to be studied. Prayer is one of the greatest blessings and privileges that a Christian has; yet, in many cases, prayer is often neglected, or not used at all. Some might even ask, “Why study this subject?” John Allen Chalk, in his book **The Praying Christ**, wrote:

There are several reasons that suggest our study of “the praying Christ.” First, we become more thoroughly acquainted with the Master and thereby more appreciative of who and what he was. He did leave us “an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21) Second, through this study we arrive at a better understanding of prayer. The twentieth-century Church (sic) owes much of the loss of its vitality to her failure to pray penitently and powerfully. James brings us back to prayer’s potential when he remarks, “The supplication of a righteous man availeth

much in its working” (James 5:16). Third, in coming to know and appreciate “the praying Christ” our own personal devotions are encouraged and the source of badly needed spiritual strength for our contemporary burdens uncovered. Jesus counseled his followers, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptations: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).¹

Prayer is the Christian’s opportunity to communicate with his heavenly Father. From Vine’s we can see that

(1) *Proseuche* is used of prayer in general; *deesis* stresses the sense of need; it is used sometimes of request from man to man. (2) In the papyri *enteuxis* is the regular word for a petition to a superior.²

Herbert Lockyer says, “prayer is the desire, opportunity and privilege of talking with God.”³ Robert Burns says, “prayer is a correspondence fixed with heaven.”⁴ Someone has written:

[P]rayer is helplessness casting itself upon power; it is misery seeking peace; it is unholiness embracing purity; it is hatred longing for love; prayer is corruption panting for immortality; it is the dove returning home; it is the eagle soaring heavenward; it is the prisoner pleading for release; it is the mariner steering for the haven amid the dangerous storm; it is the soul oppressed by the world escaping to the empyrean, bathing its ruffled plumage in the ethereal and the divine.⁵

Prayer is the opportunity for the children to speak to the Father. It is the child’s chance to seek help, strength and comfort. Why would any Christian fail to know all they can know about prayer? Why would any Christian fail to use such a powerful force? This is why the study of what Christ had to say regarding prayer is vitally important!

We will approach this study from three points. First, we will look at Old Testament precedents. Second, we want to look at what Christ said about prayer and to look at His prayers. Then third, we want to draw some conclusions and lessons that each of us can use today.

Old Testament Precedents

Paul tells the church at Rome, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).⁶ One of the reasons why Christ thought prayer was so vital was the importance placed on it by God and His people throughout the annals of time.

From the Old Testament, we can see the universal need of prayer expressed:

O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come (Psm. 65:2).

Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people (Isa. 56:7).

We can see the need and value of prayer: “Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually” (1 Chron. 16:11). We can see the promise of God to answer our prayers:

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him (Psm. 91:15).

Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity (Isa. 58:9).

And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God (Zech. 13:9).

We can also learn that, for our prayers to be heard and answered, we must be contrite:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14).

Much more could be said about prayer in the Old Testament, but these examples should serve as a basis for why prayer was so important in the life of Christ.

Christ's Prayers And His Teachings On Prayer

In this section, it will be my attempt to mention as briefly as possible the prayers and teachings of Christ concerning prayer.

In Matthew 6, Christ teaches much about prayer. In Matthew 6:5-8, we find out that we are not to be hypocritical:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward (Matt. 6:5).

In Matthew 6:9-13, Christ teaches His disciples how to pray:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

We can learn Whom we are to address and the reverence which should be used. The importance of God's kingdom, the expression of our daily needs, our responsibility to forgive, and our need for the Savior can all be seen in this model prayer.

Christ reminds us of our part in prayer: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7). Certainly, we are to ask, but then it is imperative for us to get up and give legs to our prayers!

In Matthew 11:20, and following, we read of Christ as He rebukes some wicked cities because they will not repent. They have had the Gospel preached unto them and the opportunity to repent, yet they turn their backs on this chance. Then Christ prays:

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight (Matt. 11:25-26).

Hasn't it always been true that the worldly wise seem to be the ones who reject Christ?

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:20-21).

Christ is thankful for those "babes" who see the importance of the truth and are willing to obey.

There are several occasions that Christ sought solitary places to pray. Matthew pens that “he went up into a mountain apart to pray” (Matt. 14:23). Mark records that he “departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). Luke also tells us that Christ withdrew Himself and prayed (Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; Luke 9:18; Luke 9:28-29). Time after time, we can see the Savior as He seeks a place of solitude to pray.

We can also see that Christ was a man of thanksgiving. Christ said, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25). At the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew 14:19, and also at the feeding of the four thousand in Matthew 15:36, we read of Christ giving thanks. At the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Christ said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 11:41-42). Isn’t it interesting that something as simple as a prayer of thanksgiving was used to teach others? Christ said that He knew that God heard His prayers. This was not done for His benefit, but this prayer of thanksgiving was offered for the benefit of those around Him. The same can be and still is true. I love to be in a restaurant and see a family take time to give thanks. I may not know everything about that family, but I can see that they respect God enough to pause and give thanks. I also know that it teaches a great lesson to everyone who is around.

Maybe one of the most powerful prayers Christ prayed was for little children:

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But

Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:13-14).

In instituting the Lord's Supper, we see that Christ prayed:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:26-28).

In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ prays one of His most heart-wrenching prayers. Matthew describes this time as when Christ "began to be sorrowful and very heavy" (Matt. 26:37), and when Christ's "soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38). Luke says, "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Even while on the cross, Christ prayed possibly three of the most unusual prayers. Why would I consider these prayers so unusual? Because one is not for His benefit, but on behalf of others. Christ prays, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). I can't help but wonder if I would be so forgiving. Man seems to deal more in vengeance than in forgiveness. Possibly, I would have been saying, "Get me off of this cross and out of this misery." But Christ shows us how we should be even when we face difficult times! The second prayer is unusual because it gives us an insight into the heart of Christ. We hear Christ utter those mournfully lonely words, "E-li, E-li, la-ma sa-bach-tha-ni? That is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). This had to be the most difficult time for Christ—suspended between heaven

and earth. Earth did not want Him, and heaven could not help Him. Have you ever wondered if this was the background of Christ's statement, "and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20)? How painful it is to be alone! As a child of God, Christians never have to fear being alone! The third prayer of Christ on the cross is a prayer of hope among the most hopeless times. Luke records the final words of Christ: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). What hope for Christians! We, too, commend our spirit unto God with the hope of eternal life.

Luke records for us that, at Christ's baptism, He prayed (Luke 3:21). Jesus also spake a parable "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Prayer is such a powerful tool for Christians. In good times and in sad times, we should pray, yet, as powerful as it is, prayer often goes unused! How could it be?

Also in Luke 18, Christ gives us two examples of prayer, one which was acceptable and one which was not:

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

John pens two prayers of Christ that merit mentioning: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I

say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name” (John 12:27-28). Then in John 17, Christ prays for His disciples:

I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are (John 17:9-11).

Conclusions And Lessons We Can Draw

There is no way that we could exhaust all of the lessons which we could learn from the teachings about prayer and the prayers which Christ uttered. We want to look at some of the most important, as we see them, and hopefully we can learn to make proper application of these lessons to our prayer life.

In Matthew 6:1-8, Christ teaches us that **hypocrisy** has no place in the life of a Christian, especially in our prayers. It is interesting that Christ points out that, if we are giving of our alms or praying to be seen of men, we have our reward (Matt. 6:2; Matt. 6:5). Hypocrisy deals with being two-faced. **Webster’s** says hypocrisy is “a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not esp., the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion.”⁷ **Vine’s** says that it is “play-acting, a pretense.”⁸ Isn’t it interesting that, in John 9:4, we read, “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.” The prayer that God hears is one which is not hypocritical—from the one who is a true worshiper of God, and not only a worshiper, but one who acts accordingly! Christ also mentions the term “vain repetitions” regarding one who is speaking hypocritically (Matt. 6:7). As Christians, if all

we are doing is going through a ritual, then our prayers are vain. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). As Christians, we cannot leave our heart out and expect God to listen to what we have to say.

One of the greatest lessons that we can learn from Christ’s prayers and His teachings on prayer is the role that we have to play in prayer: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7). Some want to pray and then sit around and let God do our work for us. **It does not work that way!** God is not going to do for you what you can do for yourself. This always has been true, and it remains true. This is God’s Divine economy. Brethren, don’t take me incorrectly. We must address our needs to God, but then it is time for us to roll up our sleeves and go to work! We wouldn’t pray for financial help and then go outside and wait for God to rain money from heaven. We would pray and then hit the pavement looking for work, and God will provide. We would not pray for the lost and then do nothing to help. We pray, and then we seek and find. God will provide the opportunities. It is then our responsibility to teach and to convert (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Prayer is not an excuse for us to get out of our work, but prayer should be used to seek God’s assistance to us in our work. Prayer works! May we as Christians never forget that. We should pray for the lost and then open our eyes to the opportunities that will come our way.

Out of subtle situations, God provides great lessons, and maybe one of the greatest in regards to prayer is the value of solitude. We are told often that Christ departed into the mountain or desert to be alone (Matt. 14:23; Matt. 26:36; Mark 1:35). How often do we spend time alone with God? It is a time to reflect, a time to respect, and a time to be restored with the strength of God. Everyone needs to

have their “batteries” recharged from time to time. One of the greatest ways is for us to spend time in prayer. Often when Christ spent time alone with God, it would be all night long. May we never use our time with God in a rush or simply as an SOS. It would be a shame if the only time God hears from us is when we are in trouble. Do you spend time alone with God? Christ, speaking of our private prayers, said:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:5-6).

When as Christians we pray in secret, the value can be seen in God’s answering our prayers.

Christ also teaches us a valuable lesson of being in the right disposition of heart:

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:13-15).

Some expect, even demand, their importance to be recognized (Luke 18:11). They do not enter into the presence of God with humility, as a servant, but with haughtiness, as an equal. As an equal, they come with demands, not requests. As a spoiled child, they want to see the results of their prayer right now! It is never the case that the child should come demanding of the father. So it is true of our relationship with our heavenly Father. We must have the innocence of a child to approach the

throne of God. Christ tells us, “for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14).

This passage also teaches our dependency on God. As a child, there were many things that I could not accomplish. I would seek help from my earthly father, and he would help as he could. As a Christian, I have to recognize that there are many tasks that I cannot accomplish alone, but, with God’s help, I can do them. If I never recognize my inabilities, I will never see the need to ask for help. This is why I need to keep a childlike heart. I need to see the need and ask for help, but isn’t it difficult as an adult to have to ask for help? We want to be self-supporting and self-sustaining. We don’t like to admit that we need help, but the truth is that we all need help from time to time. There is no better one to turn to than our Father!

Possibly one of the most difficult lessons to learn would be, as Christ prayed, “Thy will be done” (Luke 22:41-44). It is not unusual to hear someone state in a prayer, “Thy will be done,” yet, when that prayer is not answered the way they wanted, then they want to blame God. It is at this point you want to say, “Ears, listen to what the mouth is saying!” We pray, “Thy will be done.” Then, may we be mature enough as Christians to accept how God answers our prayer. It appears that some have the misconception that the only time God answers a prayer is when they get their way. God can say “yes,” “no,” “wait for a while,” or even “try another solution,” and all of these are answers! May God give us the wisdom to pray, “Thy will be done,” and the courage and strength to accept the answer we receive.

The value of never giving up or quitting is found in prayer: “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Why should prayer give us such strength? I personally think that there are two reasons.

First, because God will hear the prayers of His children any time! We don't have to wait for business hours. God is always available and ready to listen. You can see an example of this in 1 Kings 18, when Elijah is challenging the false prophets of Baal to call on their god to take his sacrifice. Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked" (1 Kings 18:27). God is never asleep or out of contact with His children. You can call on Him any time.

Second, because we have God's promise that He will answer (John 9:31). I, as a Christian, don't have to wonder if God is going to answer because I know he will. The Hebrews writer tells us that "it was impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:17). God has promised to answer the prayers of those who love Him, and God cannot lie; therefore, I should gain strength not to faint from prayer. May we recognize all of the valuable lessons from Christ's prayers and His teachings.

As we look at some conclusions, notice what W. Frank Scott said of Christ:

He is our example in prayer; in time of trouble the same blessed source of strength and comfort is open to us. He is our example in submission to the divine will: acquiescence in the Father's will is the true source of inward peace and strength to endure. He is our example, as the divine Son, in desiring the highest good – the divine glory.⁹

Look also at the conclusions which D. Bevan draws in **The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia**:

(1) Prayer is the highest exercise of man's spiritual nature. (2) It is natural to the soul even in perfect accord with God. (3) It is not only the expression of need, the supply of which is sought

of God, but by the example of Christ it is the highest expression of trust, submission and union with God. (4) It is to be used both in solitude and in society; it is personal and intercessory. (5) It may be accompanied by the plea of Christ's name, and for Christ's sake.¹⁰

The ultimate conclusion for Christians is that, if we fail to pray, we are missing out on one of the greatest blessings offered to God's children. God has made sure that His words are communicated to us through the Bible. Prayer is the Christian's opportunity to make his requests made known unto a loving, caring, and listening God!

Endnotes

1 John Allen Chalk, **The Praying Christ And Other Sermons** (Dallas: Christian Publishing, 1965).

2 W. E. Vine, **Expository Dictionary Of Old Testament Words** (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1966), p. 200.

3 James M. Tolle. **Prayer** (San Fernando, CA: Tolle Publications, 1963), p. 7.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotes will be taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

7 Henry B. Woolf, ed. **Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary** (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1973), p. 564.

8 Vine, p. 241.

9 Tolle, p. 74.

10 James Orr, ed. **The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia** (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1939), p. 2433.

CHAPTER 20

What Jesus Said About Hearsay Errors

Tom Wacaster

Introduction

JESUS HAD AT LEAST three things to say with regard to hearing:

Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he thinketh he hath (Luke 8:18).

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete it shall be measured unto you; and more shall be given unto you (Mark 4:24).

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7).

We are particularly interested in the second of these, “Take heed **what** ye hear” (emp. mine throughout, TW).

Man, while created in the image of God, is quite gullible. He is prone to believe just about anything he might hear. This may explain why the tabloids at the local supermarket are so successful. In spite of the fact that the headlines are so unbelievable, these sensational papers continue to sell with great success. It seems that, the more

outlandish and unbelievable the headline, the more anxious the customer is to pick up a copy, peruse, and then purchase for further investigation. The introduction of the personal computer, with its access to the “world wide web,” has provided more fuel for the fire of man’s inquisitive nature. A visit to the “information highway” is a challenge, even for the most experienced. Unfortunately, much of what you read on the Internet is fraught with error, void of documentation, and in many instances, unfit for human consumption.

Fortunately, some folks with good intentions have sought to debunk those “urban myths” that we hear from time to time. A little research will show that the Battle of Bunker Hill was actually fought at Breeds’ Hill; that the battle of Waterloo was actually fought at a point removed from Waterloo; that Leif Erickson (not Columbus) discovered America; that Lindbergh was not the first, but the 67th person to fly across the Atlantic Ocean; that there are no Japanese soldiers holding out on some remote islands in the Pacific still fighting WWII; that Congress never really sponsored a bill to honor the Boston Strangler; that the late Madalyn Murray O’Hair never actually petitioned the Federal Communications Commission to limit or ban religious broadcasting; and that Procter & Gamble corporation is not secretly in league with the Devil. These, and untold thousands of other “urban myths,” are simply the figment of someone’s imagination. Indeed, we must be cautious about **what** we hear.

We will use some selected verses from Matthew chapter five as a springboard for our study in this chapter. Jesus often resorted to the mountains to provide an occasion for rest and to instruct His disciples. While in the mountain Matthew tells us that “**his disciples came unto him,**” suggesting that they took the initiative. It has been commented that this Sermon on the Mount was “spoken

in the ear of the Church and overheard by the world.” With regard to the Sermon on the Mount, John T. Fisher wrote:

If you were to take the sum total of all the authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental hygiene—if you were to take the whole of the meat and none of the parsley, and if you were to have these unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you would have an awkward and incomplete summation of the Sermon on the Mount. And it would suffer immeasurably by comparison.¹

This sermon has been called “The Manifesto of the King,” “The Constitution of the Kingdom,” and “The Magna Charta of Christianity.” It has been described as a “forecast and an epitome of the entire oral ministry of Christ.” Indeed, it is “the masterpiece of the Master Preacher.” Frequently in chapter five, Jesus set forth a contrast between what the multitude had “heard said” and what He then set forth as authoritative truth. Five times in that chapter we read the words, “Ye have heard...but I say unto you” (Matt. 5:21; Matt. 5:27; Matt. 5:33; Matt. 5:38; Matt. 5:43).

A question is raised, therefore, as to whether the truths set forth in the Sermon on the Mount were intended for you and me, or was Jesus attempting to correct the Jewish misunderstanding of the Mosaic Law? It is our studied conviction that this marvelous sermon was **not** an elaboration upon the Jewish Law. For one thing, there are things contained within the Sermon on the Mount that do not appear in the Law of Moses. Let’s consider a couple of examples: Matthew 5:43 reads, “Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray

for them that persecute you.” J. W. McGarvey had this observation:

“Love your neighbor as yourself” was an express precept of the law of Moses, while the sentiment “Hate thine enemy” is not found in the law as a precept. But the Jews were forbidden by law to make peace with the Canaanites (Ex. 34:11-16, Deut. 23:6), and the bloody wars which by God’s own command they frequently waged against their enemies inevitably taught them to hate them. This was the feeling of their most pious men, and it found utterance even in the devotional hymns. It is a true representation of the law, therefore, in its practical working, that it taught hatred of one’s enemies. This is one of the evils of the Jewish dispensation, which like the privilege of divorce at will, was to endure but for a time.²

It is obvious that Jesus was not contrasting the Mosaic Law with corrupt Rabbinical interpretation of the Law. The contrast was between what the Law of Moses taught and what Jesus said would be a part of the New Testament legislation.

Another example is seen in Matthew 5:27-28: “Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” The Old Testament prohibition to which Jesus referred is located in Exodus 20:14. The Mosaic legislation was not as extensive as that given by our Lord. It seems only reasonable that the warning set forth in Matthew 5 is more than an elaboration upon the Mosaic Law. It is, in fact, an extension of that law by which the mental act is prohibited as well as the physical act.

In addition, the various “contrasts” that appear suggest that what Jesus was giving was to supersede that Old Testament Law. The Sermon on the Mount may very

well be viewed as a foreshadowing of those principles that would find application in the coming Kingdom.

We turn our attention now to the text for this study:

And he said unto them, Take heed **what ye hear**: with what measure ye mete it shall be measured unto you; and more shall be given unto you. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath (Mark 4:24-25).

Our assignment in this lecture is to address “What Jesus Said About Hearsay Errors.” We shall do this under the following headings: (1) Definition, (2) Doctrines, (3) Dangers, and (4) Duties.

Definition

It is important to define terms. Much of what we put into our mind is “hearsay.” The modern “information highway” has provided the human race with easy access to untold volumes of information. That information is, by its very nature, “hearsay.” But not all “hearsay” is bad. It might be an innocent story, an amusing joke, or an impressive poem. There is nothing inherently wrong with listening to or passing along “hearsay” information. There even may be an occasion when false information is received and then passed along to others that poses no threat to one’s moral integrity, nor does it harm those who might listen to what you have to say. The very ease of communication and the abundant access to information, however, have caused us to become somewhat lax in investigation of our sources. When it comes to matters pertaining to religion, we must be cautious concerning what we hear, for these things affect our faith and fidelity to the Lord. We shall define “hearsay errors” as those things that are contrary to God’s Word, and which endanger the spiritual well-being of those who hear, believe, and embrace

those things heard. Certain principles and practices must, by their very nature, be challenged. We are to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21), “prove the spirits” (1 John 4:1), and “handle aright the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). With this in mind, we want to consider some things that will help us define what we mean by “hearsay errors.”

First, it is important to **signify** what we mean by “hearsay errors.” Webster says that “hearsay” is “Report; rumor; common talk...repeated second hand by one who heard the actual witness relate or admit what he knew of the transaction or fact in question.” Admittedly, then, not all hearsay is wrong, nor is all hearsay “error.” For example, we read in Hebrews 2:1-4:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.

Our assignment presupposes that there are different classifications of “hearsay,” and that we want to give particular attention to hearsay **error**. We are addressing, therefore, hearsay that is, by its nature, false and/or displeasing to God.

Second, consideration must be given to the **sources of hearsay error**. The sources of hearsay are manifold. **Friends and loved ones** may be used unawares by the devil to promote hearsay error. We are warned, therefore, not to love mother or father more than Jesus (Matt. 10:37). When Jesus told the disciples that “he must go unto

Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed,” Peter rebuked the Lord (Matt. 16:21-23). This humble servant and disciple of Jesus was used by Satan in an attempt to thwart the Divine plan.

Another source of hearsay error has included **preachers, teachers, and religious leaders**. Warnings abound to “beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Those who teach error are “false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). Seeing that “Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light, it is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Unfortunately these warnings are not taken seriously by the multitudes. The way some folks treat false teachers reminds me of the following news report:

Lucky, a German shepherd guide-dog for the blind, has so far been responsible for the deaths of all four of his previous owners. “We will not have him put down. Lucky is basically a good guide dog,” Ernst Gerber, a dog trainer from Wuppertal, Germany told reporters. “He just needs a little brush-up on some elementary skills, that’s all. I’ll admit it’s not an impressive record on paper. He led his first owner in front of a bus, and the second off the end of a pier. He actually pushed his third owner off a railway platform just as the Cologne to Frankfurt express was approaching and he walked his fourth owner into heavy traffic, before abandoning him and running away to safety. But, apart from epileptic fits, he has a lovely temperament. And guide dogs are difficult to train these days.” Asked if Lucky’s fifth owner would be told about his previous record, Gerber replied: “No. It would make them nervous, and would make Lucky nervous. And when Lucky gets nervous he’s liable to do something silly.”

Quite obviously the **media** is a rich source of hearsay error. Bill Bennett has noted, “The media may not determine what people think, but they can determine what people think about.”³ As brother Gary Summers noted:

Thanks to the news media’s coverage of those furthering Satan’s causes, the public today is continually bombarded with such vapid mottoes as: “A woman has a right to control her own body,” “Everything is relative,” and “Who are you to judge someone else?” The news media did not invent these, but they certainly keep them at the forefront of people’s attention... The popular term for propaganda is spin. With the news media’s reluctance to report facts, people’s perception of things, for all practical purposes, becomes reality. If error is repeated with great frequency and truth seldom mentioned, which one will most people likely become exposed to and therefore believe?⁴

A third important element in defining and describing hearsay error has to do with the **simple minded and hearsay error**. While false teachers will be held responsible for the error they teach, what we **do** with that error lies squarely on the shoulders of the one who hears. While the “tongue of the wise is health” (Prov. 12:18), it is also true that “The ear that hearkeneth to the reproof of life shall abide among the wise” (Prov. 15:31). Paul warned us to

mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17).

The King James has “simple” instead of “innocent.” The Greek means “fearing no evil from others, distrusting no

one.” While in some circumstances that may be a good attitude to have, caution must be exercised when it comes to the guarding of one’s soul. Carl Garner shared the following information with his readers:

“The Bigger The Lie”

During the years 1936-38, the National Socialist Party of Germany was seeking ways whereby they might justify their military and social actions. Among other things, Adolph Hitler wanted possession of Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Poland; and he wanted to annihilate the Jewish race. Joseph Goebbels was assigned the responsibility of accomplishing these tasks, and that of creating good “reasons” for doing so. It was then that Goebbels adopted the phrase: **Tell a Lie That is Big Enough, and Repeat it Often Enough, and the Whole World Will Believe It.** He assumed the world would not be gullible enough to believe “little lies,” but the bigger the lie, the more likely it is that people would eventually accept it as true. By the use of misinformation, negative propaganda, movies, and various dramatic presentations, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda was successful beyond the generation’s realization. Goebbels was right, at least about the “Big Lie.” We have seen this to be true in politics, ethics, science, industry, and advertising. Make it big enough and repeat it often enough, and a lot of people will believe it.⁵

We stand absolutely amazed at the success of some of the most radical, un-Biblical, anti-Biblical, extreme doctrines being taught in the name of “Christianity.” Indeed, the “simple minded” are the innocent victims of hearsay error, but they are victims nonetheless.

A fourth element that might help us define “hearsay error” is the use of **synonyms for hearsay**. Webster included “rumor” as a synonym for “hearsay.” Hearsay could, and often does, include rumors, gossip, and slander. Let’s give some consideration to each of these. **Rumor** is

the **dissemination of misinformation**. Important here is the word “**mis**-information.” It has been said that truth scarcely puts on its boots before error has encircled the globe. Rumors have the uncanny knack of spreading quickly and traveling far. In some cases the spreading of a rumor may be intentional (such as lying), while in some cases it may be unintentional (failure to verify the source, or check out the available evidence). The Christian has the sacred obligation of making sure that information that he passes on to others is accurate and not merely hearsay. While it is true that some rumors may be innocent, with no serious consequences attached to the telling of any particular rumor, it seems to this scribe that passing on rumors and misinformation is not something to be taken lightly.

For one thing, it manifests carelessness in dealing with facts. This in turn will have an impact upon our honesty and integrity. Most of us are aware that good journalism demands accuracy. Handling facts carelessly, or refusing to do a little follow-up work before reporting something, will discredit a magazine and its editor. Likewise, the individual should be very cautious with regard to what he passes along to others.

Gossip is another synonym for hearsay. It is often difficult to distinguish between gossip and rumor. **Nelson’s Bible Dictionary** defines gossip as “A person who spreads rumors or idle fruitless tales.” In this lecture we will distinguish between the two by noting that gossip is often destructive and harmful to another. We are concentrating here on the destructive nature of such hearsay error. The destructive force of gossip has been witnessed by a number of even the most casual observers. The extremes to which gossip can reach are illustrated by the reported case of slander that was leveled against a preacher. It was said that his wife was attending a certain meeting, that he went

there in a rage and physically drug her from that meeting, and forced her to go home with him. In order to answer the charges the preacher wrote:

In the first place, I never attempted to influence my wife in her views nor her choice of a meeting. Secondly, my wife did not attend the meeting in question; In the third place, I did not attend the meeting myself; To conclude, neither my wife nor myself had any inclinations to go to the meeting; Finally, I never had a wife.

David Brown wrote of the unintentional growth of gossip:

Once a man found an object he did not recognize. He gave it a slight bump with the toe of his shoe and was startled to see the thing grow larger. His curiosity aroused, the man kicked the unidentified object harder. With the second more powerful kick the fellow was amazed to behold the strange object almost double in size. Hurriedly he picked up a stout pole and gave his newly found enigma a double-handed and resounding whack! In an instant the object more than tripled its original size. In a last act of desperation the poor man grabbed a large metal bar and with all his might he clubbed the monstrous object with a blow that would have killed an elephant. In abject horror the terrorized man stood transfixed as the monstrous thing swelled to a gigantic size. The panic-stricken fellow now fled the scene of battle. After some distance had been hastily put between the man and his newly created behemoth, he rushed breathlessly upon an old man who, from a safe distance, had been following the previous confrontation with much interest. Seeing the old man, the fleeing fellow gestured back toward his gigantic antagonist and gasped, "Do you know what that monster is?" The old man calmly and deliberately answered his querist, "Yes," he said, "It is called a rumor."⁶

Digging deeper, let's consider the **causes** of gossip. One cause of gossip is an evil heart. Jesus told us:

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil: for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh (Luke 6:45).

This should not surprise us since the Psalmist warned that some love “evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness” (Psm. 52:3). Another cause might be hatred for a person. David experienced one who “compassed about me with words of hatred” (Psm. 109:3). Then, gossip may be caused by idleness. Casual and unguarded talk may turn to gossip if we are not careful. Turning our attention to the **causes** associated with gossip, we note Solomon’s warnings:

He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool (Prov. 10:18).

A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends (Prov. 16:28).

Gossip can cause strife and dissension:

The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly (Prov. 18:8).

Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth (Prov. 26:20).

One of the seven things that Jehovah hates is “A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:19).

Finally, what is the **cure** for gossip? In view of the fact that Jesus warned us to “take heed what ye hear,” it seems reasonable that the most effective cure is to refuse to listen to gossip in the first place. The advice of an unknown poet is wise indeed:

“Three Gates”

If you are tempted to reveal
A tale someone has told
About another, make it pass,
Before you speak, three gates of gold.

These narrow gates: First, “Is it true?”
Then, “Is it needful?” In your mind
Give truthful answer. And the next
Is last and narrowest, “Is it kind?”

And if to reach your lips at last
It passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear
What the results of speech may be.

A number of years ago I came across the following analogy to gossip. Unfortunately the author’s name was not given:

Gossip Town

Have you ever heard of “Gossip Town”
On the shores of “Falsehood Bay.”
Where “old Dame Rumor” in a rustling gown
Is going the live long day?

It isn’t far to Gossip Town
For those who want to go,
And Idleness is the train that will take you
down,
In just an hour or so.

The “Thoughtless Road” is the popular route,
And most folk start that way,
But it is steep down grade, and if you don’t watch
out
You will land in “Falsehood Bay.”

The principal street is called “they say,”
And “I’ve heard” is the Public Well,
And the breeze that blows from “Falsehood Bay”
Is ladened with “Now don’t you tell.”

Just back of the Park is Slander Row,
T’was there a good name died,

Pierced by a shaft from “Jealousy’s Bow”
In the hand of “Envious Pride.”

The people that live in Gossip Town,
All reap the seed they sow.
And you will find as they found,
If ever you chance to go.

Gossip tends only to destruction and not edification.
It has been rightfully described this way:

“The Wrecker”

I watched them tearing a building down,
A group of men in a busy town.
With a ho-heave-ho and a lusty yell
They swung a beam and the side-wall fell.
I asked the foreman: “Are these men skilled
And the men you’d hire if you had to build?”
He gave a laugh and said, “No, indeed,
Common labor is all I need.
I can easily wreck in a day or two
What builders have taken a year to do.”
I thought to myself as I turned away,
Which of these roles have I tried to play;
Am I a builder who works with care,
Measuring life by the rule and square?
Am I shaping my deeds to a well-made plan,
Patiently doing the best I can;
Or am I a wrecker, who walks the town,
Content with the labor of tearing down?

A third synonym for hearsay error is **slander**. One said, “Slander is a vice that strikes a double blow, wounding both him that commits, and him against whom it is committed.” Another pointed out that “Slander is the revenge of a coward, and dissimulation his defense.” Diogenes, on being asked, “What is that beast, the bite of which is the most dangerous?” replied, “Of wild beasts, the bite of a slanderer; and of tame beasts, that of the flatterer.” What does God say about slander? “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor:

I am Jehovah” (Lev. 19:16). The word “talebearer” is from the Hebrew word *rakil*, which means a “slanderer, one who utters or spreads a false statement or statements, harmful to another’s character or reputation.” The slanderer is that person who goes about from house to house hawking malicious gossip. He is literally a “walker of slander.” Listen to the wise man:

A worthless man deviseth mischief; And in his lips there is as a scorching fire. A perverse man scattereth abroad strife; And a whisperer separateth chief friends (Prov. 16:27-28).

For lack of wood the fire goeth out; And where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth (Prov. 26:20).

Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I destroy: Him that hath a high look and a proud heart will I not suffer (Psm. 101:5).

An evil speaker shall not be established in the earth: Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him (Psm. 140:11).

Before leaving this point, a word of caution is in order for those of us who are privileged to edit and/or write for brotherhood papers. Brotherhood journals serve a great purpose and, like any other privilege, it should not be abused. One of the major rules of journalism is the need to verify every word written. It is one thing to “mark” the false teacher. It is quite another to “mark” someone falsely, without love in our heart, or motivated by envy and hatred.

Doctrines

Every conceivable attempt has been made to discredit, displace, discombobulate, and destroy every single doctrine and teaching that God has given to man. There will be a host of souls lost on the judgment day who,

like Naaman, will say, "Behold, I thought..." Having drunk from the wells of the "traditions of men," and the "religion of their fathers," little if any attempt was put forth to determine what Jesus taught on the matter. Keep in mind that we are concerned right here with some of those areas in which "hearsay" has had a bearing upon important doctrines/teaching in matters that address the spiritual man. Using the words of our Lord from the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was said...but I say unto you," we suggest the following for consideration.

First, there are those **doctrines pertaining to worship**: Ye have heard that it was said, "Sincerity is all that is essential in your worship," but I say unto you, "God is a spirit and they that worship must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Ye have heard that it was said, "How often or on what day you partake of the Lord's supper is superfluous," but I say unto you, "Upon the first day of the week when the disciples were gathered together to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Ye have heard that it was said, "Nowhere does the Bible say, 'Thou shalt not use instrumental music,'" but I say unto you, "Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Second, there are those **doctrines pertaining to salvation**. Ye have heard that it was said, "Man is saved at the point of faith without any further acts of obedience," but I say unto you, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), that "faith, if it hath not works, is dead in itself" (Jas. 2:17), and "that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (Jas. 2:24). Ye have heard that it was said, "Baptism is not essential to salvation," but I say unto you, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16), that "baptism doth now save you" (1 Pet. 3:21), and that you must "repent and be baptized...for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Ye have heard that it was said, "You do not add one whit to your salvation," but

I say unto you, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12), “save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40), and “if ye love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Third, there are those **doctrines pertaining to morals**. Ye have heard that it was said, “Dancing never hurt anyone,” but I say unto you:

The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness [dancing, TW]...of which I did forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Gal. 5:19-21).

Ye have heard that it was said, “A little imbibing never hurt anybody, and besides that, the Bible only condemns drunkenness, and not drinking,” but I say unto you, “Don’t even begin the process of being filled with wine” (cf. Eph. 5:18). Ye have heard that it was said, “How I dress is my business and anyone who gazes upon my flesh is an adulterer in his heart,” but I say unto you, “That women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety” (1 Tim. 2:9-10). Ye have heard that it was said, “Gambling helps the economy and enriches the lives of the lucky,” but I say unto you:

For yourselves know how ye ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat bread for nought at any man’s hand, but in labor and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you (1 Thess. 3:7-8)

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need (Eph. 4:28).

Fourth, there are doctrines pertaining to **existence of God and origins**. Ye have heard that it was said, “God

is dead,” but I say unto you, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:32), and, “that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is” (Acts 14:15). Ye have heard that it was said, “Man is the product of evolution,” but I say unto you that man is “created in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27). Ye have heard that it was said, “God used billions of years to create man and every ‘day’ in Genesis chapter one is a long geological time period,” but I say unto you, “In six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore Jehovah blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exod. 20:11).

Fifth, there are those **doctrines pertaining to the church**. Ye have heard that it was said, “One church is as good as another,” but I say unto you, “Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up” (Matt 15:13). Ye have heard that it was said, “There is nothing in a name,” but I say unto you, “In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Ye have heard that it was said, “The church doesn’t save you anyway,” but I say unto you, “For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23).

Yes, beloved, the warning of the Savior, “Take heed what ye hear” is relevant and most needed in our generation.

Dangers

Having set forth a **definition** of hearsay error, and some **doctrines** affected by hearsay error, we turn our

attention to some **dangers** relative to believing and following hearsay error. It should be pointed out that the danger lies not only in the **doctrine** itself, but in the **attitude** of the hearer.

First, there is distinct danger that “hearsay” will **leave the hearer ignorant of God’s Word**. Many a soul is comfortable with sitting in the pew, hands folded and mind in neutral, listening to, believing, and embracing what comes from the teacher or preacher without so much as a whimper, much less examination of the Scriptures. Some years ago I had a sister in Christ tell me that she depended upon the preacher to study for her; that is what he was paid for. But beloved, relying merely upon what we have heard without searching and studying on our own will leave us in a precarious position. God has told us to “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). We are encouraged to be like the noble Bereans, who “received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Depending upon hearsay will leave us void of knowledge of the Scriptures, and displeasing to God. We fear that a large portion of our brethren now find themselves in this situation for no other reason than the fact that they have depended upon what they have “heard” through the years.

Second, when we depend upon hearsay, **the “faith” that we possess is not our faith, but the faith of another**. Children, while growing up, receive and often depend upon the faith of their parents. This may be necessary during the formative years. But there comes a time when they must obtain a faith of their own (Heb. 11:6). That faith must be based upon evidence, coupled with a healthy diet of God’s Word (Rom 10:17, 1 Pet. 2:1-2).

Third, if the person from whom you have heard is

spiritually blind, and following a doctrine that will cause him to lose his soul, then **you, with him, shall fall into the ditch:**

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch (Matt. 15:13-14).

Consequently, leadership is stifled, dedication is weak at best, and sincerity is for naught when we fail to study for ourselves (cf. Matt. 7:21-23).

No wonder Jesus said, “Take heed what ye hear.” Hearsay without proper investigation will rob a man of that heavenly home promised by the Savior.

Duty

What, then, is our **duty** when it comes to “what we hear” and “how we hear”? We suggest the following. First, we must stay **informed**. The best preventative against error in general, and specifically hearsay error, is to be informed. This is especially applicable to the false doctrines that might come our way. If we know what the genuine looks like, we are not likely to be fooled by a counterfeit. The best way to stay informed is to spend time studying and searching God’s Word. Spend time in reading good brotherhood literature. Second, **investigate**. Do not take anything at face value, especially when it relates to those things that would affect our spiritual well-being. If we hear something with which we are not familiar, take time to investigate. The Scriptures teach us to do so. We are to “prove the spirits” (1 John 4:1). We have the sacred obligation to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21). Third, so far as gossip, rumor, and slander are concerned, we should seek to **interrupt** its spread. We can do this by refusing

to hear, and, if we happen to hear, refuse to pass it along. When you listen to gossip, you increase the gossiper's sense of importance. In short, you give him an audience. Without an audience or an ear to hear, the gossip will soon cease. The Scriptures abound in references regarding our responsibility in this area. While the Bible specifically says that the "aged women are to be in behavior as becometh holiness...not false accusers" (Tit. 2:3), the same can be said of men as well. We are to refuse "busybodies" (2 Thess. 3:11; 2 Thess. 3:14-15), nor are we to have company with those who wander about "from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies" (1 Tim. 5:13-14). An uninspired proverb stated it well: "There would not be so many open mouths if there were not so many open ears." A modern parable may help us to realize our duty in this area:

Behold, the blower went forth to blow; and as he blowed, some seeds of gossip fell by the wayside, and the foul ear picked it up and devoured the good brother it concerned. Some fell to the phony Christian and, having not much worth, he straightway sprang out of his chair, telephoned his neighbor, and when he had hung up his friend was scorched and his love withered away. And his brother among thorns fell, not knowing how the talk grew up, and he, believing it, was choked, and lo! he perisheth. But luckily, some fell to the good man, and it brought forth pity, so he squashed it, and he continued to gather of the blessings an hundred fold, sixty fold, and thirty fold. He that hath ears to hear, let him take heed how he heareth; and he that hath a tongue to speak, let him take heed what he repeateth.

Finally, **instill** God's Word in your heart. The following passages, committed to memory and instilled upon the heart, will serve as an effective preventative against hearsay error:

Thou shalt not take up a false report: put not thy hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness (Exod. 23:1).

And if he come to see me, he speaketh falsehood; His heart gathereth iniquity to itself: When he goeth abroad, he telleth it. All that hate me whisper together against me; Against me do they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him; And now that he lieth he shall rise up no more. Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, Who did eat of my bread, Hath lifted up his heel against me (Psm. 41:6-9).

Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I destroy: Him that hath a high look and a proud heart will I not suffer (Psm. 101:5).

He that hideth hatred is of lying lips; And he that uttereth a slander is a fool (Prov. 10:18).

A perverse man scattereth abroad strife; And a whisperer separateth chief friends (Prov. 16:28).

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, And obtaineth favor of Jehovah. The poor useth entreaties; But the rich answereth roughly (Prov. 18:21-23).

The north wind bringeth forth rain: So doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance (Prov. 25:23).

A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, And a rod for the back of fools (Prov. 26:3).

Take ye heed every one of his neighbor, and trust ye not in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will go about with slanders (Jer. 9:4).

being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of

envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents (Rom. 1:29-30).

Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor: for we are members one of another (Eph. 4:25).

For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision (Tit. 1:10).

And the tongue is a fire: the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind. But the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the likeness of God: out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be (Jas. 3:6-10).

Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation (1 Pet. 2:1-2).

Conclusion

Untold harm has been done because of the failure to “take heed what ye hear.” Friends have been separated, unity destroyed, and reputations damaged, often beyond repair, all because some innocent soul listened to something that would have been better left unsaid or unheard.

“The Tongue”

A quick whisper in the dark
A couple of turns around the park,

“I’ll tell you what Jane told me,
Sue said, Jim said....was seen by Mary Lee.”

Throw a pebble into a pond,
Watch the ripples move on and on.
Gossip repeated, be it false or fact,
Can never, never be brought back.

The tongue, a small fire—oh! My yes,
But what destruction and distress;
A careless word dropped here and there
Sputters and flickers, then quickly flares.

Small faults, like flames whipped by a wind
Soon mount into a major sin.
Told and retold, self-righteous pride,
Another victim crucified.

—Grace R. Gross

Endnotes

1 As quoted by Eldred Stevens, **The Sermon On The Mount** (Dallas, TX: Eldred Stevens, 1982), p. 1.

2 J. W. McGarvey, **Commentary On Matthew And Mark** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light, 1875), p. 59.

3 Gary Summers, “The Devil’s Work In The Media,” **Satan: Diabolical Ruler Of The World**, Memphis School of Preaching Lectures (Memphis, TN: Sain Publications), p. 370. We recommend a careful study of brother Summers’ material on this subject.

4 Ibid.

5 Carl Garner, **Christian Worker** (Austin, TX: August 1998), p. 8.

6 David Brown, “Abounding Rumors,” **The Defender** (Pensacola, FL: August 2001), p. 4.

CHAPTER 21

What Jesus Said About Humility

Garland Elkins

Introduction

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR perfect example, and we are to walk in His steps. Peter wrote, “For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Before we discuss what Jesus said about humility, we need to examine some things which the Scriptures say about our Lord’s humility.

Christ Practiced The Truth Before He Preached It

The writer of Acts states, “The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1). Please observe that Jesus began both to **“do”** and to **“teach,”** in that order.

One of the most wonderful of all the Scriptures on this subject is Philippians 2:5-11. It reads:

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea,

the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The above-detailed account of the humiliation of Christ is precious, amazing, and makes us humbly grateful for what He has done for us. These verses show Christ's great love, concern, and sacrifice for mankind.

1. Paul first shows that Christ repudiated vain grasping: “Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, (Phil. 2:6). Before our Lord emptied Himself, He enjoyed full rank with God the Father before any material thing was created. John wrote, “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). In that great position, Jesus never, at any time, felt that He should not serve in any way necessary, even to His willingness to leave that favored position alongside His Father in order to live among sinners. His existence alongside of God His Father was not a thing to be grasped.

2. Paul further remarks that Christ was not only willing to leave the heavenly realm, but also that He was willing to take the position of a servant: “but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). When man puts concern for self above service, he fails to remember what role he assumed after He arrived. His servants had difficulty in understanding that He worked as a servant instead of demanding the rights of a king. To leave heaven for earth was amazing—but to leave heaven for the humiliation of earth will ever remain beyond human comprehension. The Old Testament prophets prophesied of One Who would serve rather than be served: “Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit

before thee; for they are men that are a sign: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch” (Zech. 3:8). All of the writers of the New Testament describe the suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, and Mark does this in much detail.

3. Christ also willingly became a part of the human family. He voluntarily left the spiritual world, heaven itself, to partake of the sufferings of the fleshly world. Paul says that Christ was “being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself” (Phil. 2:7-8). Christ did not enter into a world such as existed in the Garden of Eden, a world without pain, suffering, sin, and death. John tells us that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Thus, He announced the most loving act of God toward man. Christ entered the human race. He became “a man.”

4. It is obvious to even a casual observer that Christ’s humiliation for us does not conclude at this point: “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). Crucifixion was a wretched and terrible way to die. It was reserved only for the basest of criminals. Crucifixion had been practiced for centuries before Christ. Cicero once described crucifixion as “the most cruel and terrifying punishment.”

There were steps in Christ’s humiliation. **First**, He willingly left heaven. **Second**, He assumed the life of a servant. **Third**, He did not mind becoming flesh and blood, joining the human family. **Fourth**, He submitted quietly to crucifixion.

We Need To Follow Christ In Humility

There is nothing that more obstructs the will of God in the lives of some of us than our foolish pride, our self-centeredness, and our insistence upon our own views. The people appreciated Abraham Lincoln. He was a man who

reached the summit of earthly fame, but who never allowed personal ambition to stand in the way of his larger usefulness to the world. He valued the good opinions of others, but never for their praises did he forsake the path of duty. It was said of him that “he had the saving grace of humility.”

The most powerful figures of history have been those who gave up thrones rather than exchange principle for the praise of men. That is what Christ did, He debased Himself of heaven and took upon Himself the form of a servant.

Christ exalted humility to a degree never seen before nor since. His purpose for coming into the world was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19: 10). He was very concerned about the poor and the blind, told us that true greatness is always lowly, and exhibited that lowliness in His own life to perfection. Humility is a very beautiful grace. It is the gateway to Christianity. Someone said, “Fairest and best adorned is the one whose clothing is humility.”

Jesus' Sayings Concerning Humility

In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me: But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea (Matt. 18:1-6)

See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels

do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. For the Son of man came to save that which was lost. How think ye? if any man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go unto the mountains, and seek that which goeth astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth over it more than over the ninety and nine which have not gone astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (Matt. 18:10-14).

Also we read:

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should lay his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence (Matt. 19:13-15).

From Mark and Luke, we learn about an occasion that came about because of the dispute which the disciples had among themselves regarding who was the greatest among them. Mark's account reads:

And they came to Capernaum: and when he was in the house he asked them, What were ye reasoning on the way? But they held their peace: for they had disputed one with another on the way, who was the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve; and he saith unto them, If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a little child, and set him in the midst of them: and taking him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me (Mark 9:33-37).

Humility is one of the fundamental virtues of the religion of Christ. Peter wrote:

Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you (1 Pet. 5:5-7).

Jesus Illustrated True Greatness

“In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt. 18:1). This lesson immediately follows the incident of the temple tax in the closing part of the preceding chapter. Jesus and His disciples were in Capernaum. This was His last visit to Galilee before His death. Mark and Luke show that the reference was to the greatest person—that is, which of them was the greatest.

It appears from Mark’s record that Jesus first set the child in the midst of them, and then took him up in His arms. The need of the hour was for the apostles to turn from their selfish ambition to be the greatest in the kingdom. The spirit of rivalry which they were manifesting was totally foreign to the spirit of Christ their Lord. They were told by Christ that they needed to “turn.” If they did not turn around, they not only could not have a big place in the kingdom of heaven, but it meant that their salvation was also involved. Humility is very important!

This object lesson of the child shows what the Lord wants His followers to understand regarding the meaning of humility. When people are characterized by true humility, all selfishness is removed, and spiritual matters become the supreme object of their interests and desires. Such people prefer others to themselves and are willing to take second place when need be.

A child is naturally humble, and those who are little children will live unselfishly and become more like the

Lord. To “receive” means to regard one and to treat him as if he belonged to Christ (Matt. 25:40). One should be made to tremble when he considers that even his speech and conduct may cause a fellow disciple to stumble. The terrible consequences are stated in these words: “It is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).

God Does Not Want Any To Perish

Jesus said, “Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” The importance of this lesson cannot be overemphasized. The selfish person, who is more interested in having his own way than in strengthening and saving the weak and uninformed, is in absolute opposition to the declared and plain will of God, and he will be held responsible for the souls whom he has despised when he faces the judgment at the last day. God wants all to be saved, and, even though the majority of mankind will be lost (Matt. 7:13-14), that is not what God wants. Paul wrote:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Another Example Of Jesus’ Teaching On Humility

In John 13:36-14:24, Jesus taught and showed a marvelous example of humility. The Passover had been observed and the Lord’s Supper instituted. The traitor had

departed. The disciples were very troubled and extremely sorrowful. Some of His disciples asked Him some questions.

“Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered, Whither I go, thou canst not follow now; but thou shalt follow afterward?” (John 13:36). The Lord had spoken of His departure. Jesus’ reply brought comfort to Peter and to all the rest (John 13:36-14:4).

Thomas’s question was, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:5-6).

Philip made a request: “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (John 14:8). Jesus pointed out that He was the manifestation of the Father. He also pointed out that, on His departure, the Holy Spirit would come to guide them into all truth (John 16:13; John 14:26).

Judas asked, “Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (John 14:22). In reply, Jesus showed that He was not forsaking the world, but that He would shine upon the world through him in whom He (Christ) and God the Father could live.

In the context of observing the Passover “and supper being ended” (John 13:2), and before Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He washed the disciples’ feet. He did not make this a part of the Lord’s Supper. Feet washing was not, and never has been, a church ordinance to be practiced in connection with the Lord’s Supper.

A Few Of The Many Verses On Humility

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14).

The fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom;
And before honor goeth humility (Prov. 15:33).

By reward of humility and the fear of Jehovah
are riches, and honor, and life (Prov. 22:4).

What doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do
justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly
with thy God? (Mic. 6:8).

He hath put down princes from their thrones,
And hath exalted them of low degree (Luke
1:52).

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be
humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself
shall be exalted (Matt. 23:12).

Christ, Our Example Of Humility

Paul, in the Philippian epistle, writes one of the most profound and sublime doctrinal sections of the entire New Testament. This section contains one of the most marvelous passages in all the Bible. It affirms the Divinity of Christ, His pre-existence, His equality with the Father, His incarnation, His perfect humanity, His death upon the cross, and His glorious exaltation. This Scripture also contains one of the most precious passages in the New Testament relative to the humility of Christ (Phil. 2:5-11). Christ is our example in humility, as He is in all good things (1 Pet. 2:21). Let us study and apply our Lord's characteristics of humility.

Jesus, our example, encourages us to possess the trait of humility. Jesus set the example when He taught His apostles that, if they wanted to be great in the kingdom of God, they must become servants of all. He then gave Himself as an example, saying, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Jesus did not institute feet washing, for, as far back as Abraham,

the custom of feet washing was practiced as an act of hospitality in the home, but not as an act of worship (Gen. 18:4; 1 Tim. 5:8). So Jesus found the custom of feet washing and used it during the night of His betrayal to teach humility (John 13:14-15). Though feet washing was never an act that the Lord intended to be practiced as an act of worship, He did use it to instruct the disciples in humility (John 13:17).

As Christians, we must cultivate humility. True humility is not to be equated with timidity. Humility has a modest sense of one's ability and importance, but that does not mean that one underestimates his ability which leads to inactivity in the work of the Lord. The inspired Paul forbids egotism when he says that one is "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3; Phil. 2:4; Gal. 6:3). Egotism repulses people and is a great hindrance to one's good influence. We are to do nothing "through faction or through vain glory." (Phil. 2:3).

Humility will help one to become great by the Lord's standard (Matt. 20:28). A proper humility toward sin demonstrates greatness. The Bible has much to say on the subject of sin, i.e., its curse, its definition, prevalence, heinousness, punishment, forgiveness, etc. The Corinthians were puffed up in spite of, not because of, the fornicator, but Paul rebuked them for this (1 Cor. 5:2). We must realize that no one is above sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10). In deep contrition, we ought to repent of sin (Acts 2:36-38; Acts 8:20-22). One can, with the power of the Word of God, rise above sin. David and Peter did this.

Humility toward service is true greatness. The world's standard of greatness in this respect is not the Lord's standard (Matt. 20:25). There is a trend in the Lord's church toward aspirations for bigness, and some disdain small things. However, God has often chosen insignificant men for great service. God was not unmindful of little

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things—a little child (Matt. 18:2), little birds (Matt. 6:28), a little cup (Matt. 10:42). The great person is one who is willing to serve in little things.

Humility toward self is true greatness. True humility is determined by our attitude toward our talents. The little person is not humble with respect to his ability. Nebuchadnezzar was proud of his accomplishments in a wrong way (Dan. 4:30). The truly humble person is one who has a right attitude toward his talents. He discounts his talents in his own estimation. He appreciates a compliment and, at the same time, discounts it a little in his own heart. He delights in the talents of others (Phil. 2:3). Our only desire should be to be great before God!

CHAPTER 22

What Jesus Said About Hypocrisy

Chuck Webster

Introduction

NO *SIN IN ALL* of Scripture aroused more indignation in Christ than hypocrisy. On eight different occasions He exposed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day, pointing out their blatant disregard for the essence of true spirituality. His exposé stands as a stark warning to all religious people, because one of our greatest temptations is not to abandon Christ altogether, but rather to exchange a faith that is living, abiding, and genuine for one that is fraudulent, bound solely to external rites and ceremonies. From each occasion we learn a characteristic of hypocrisy that will help us avoid it.

A brief look at the Greek words translated “hypocrisy” and “hypocrite” will lay the groundwork for a closer examination of Jesus’ sayings. Wilckens suggests that the verb form “first means ‘to explain,’ also, rarely, ‘to answer.’ *hypokrisis* can mean ‘answer,’ but *hypokrites* means ‘actor,’ probably as one who interprets a poet, depicting by his whole conduct the role assigned.”¹ From this meaning the transition to feigning or playing a part was quite easy.² As A. T. Robertson suggests, “It was an easy step to mean to feign, to pretend, to wear a masque, to act the hypocrite, to play a part.”³ In the Greek theater a *hypokrites* was one

who wore a mask and played a part on the stage, imitating the speech, mannerisms, and conduct of the character portrayed.⁴ The root words (*hypokrisis* and *hypokrites*) “reflect the classical and Hellenistic use of the words to refer to ‘acting’ and ‘actor.’”⁵ Thus, the word family stems originally from the world of the theater.⁶

The lexicons unanimously agree that *hypokrisis* (“hypocrisy”) is:

1) an answering; 2) an answer; 3) the acting of a stage player; 4) dissimulation, hypocrisy.⁷

condemnation, dissimulation, hypocrisy.⁸

a response, answer; histrionic personification, acting; hypocrisy, simulation.⁹

“answer,” then Attic “playing a part,” hypocrisy, pretense, outward show.¹⁰

A *hypokrites* (“hypocrite”) is:

1) one who answers, an interpreter; 2) an actor, a stage player; 3) a dissembler, a pretender, a hypocrite.¹¹

an actor under an assumed character (stage player), i.e., a dissembler (“hypocrite”).¹²

the giver of an answer or response; a stage player, actor; in New Testament a moral or religious counterfeit, a hypocrite.¹³

mostly in the sense “play-actor”...hypocrite, pretender, dissembler.¹⁴

In the New Testament, the noun forms are used 27 times (*hypokrisis*, “hypocrisy”—seven times; *hypokrites*, “hypocrite”—20 times) and the verb form only once [*hypokrinomai*, “which should **feign** themselves just men” (Luke 20:20)]. Every usage is metaphorical; i.e., it is used in a negative sense to refer to one who is playing a religious part as if on stage—his faith is not genuine.

Jesus' warning in Luke 12:1 serves as a perfect introduction to this discussion concerning Jesus' sayings concerning hypocrisy: "In the mean time, . . . he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Albert Barnes notes three similarities between hypocrisy and leaven:

Hypocrisy is like leaven or yeast, because: 1. It may exist without being immediately detected. Leaven mixed in flour is not known until it produces its effects. 2. It is insinuating. Leaven will soon pervade the whole mass. So hypocrisy will, if undetected and unremoved, soon pervade all our exercises and feelings. 3. It is swelling. It puffs us up and fills us with pride and vanity. No man is more proud than the hypocrite, and none is more odious to God. When Jesus cautions them to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees," he means that they should be cautious about imbibing their spirit and becoming like them.¹⁵

That serves as an appropriate warning concerning the seriousness of this discussion. We now take one lesson from each of the remaining seven occasions on which Jesus castigated hypocrisy.

Hypocrites Engage In Religious Acts To Impress People, Not God (Matt. 6:1-8; Matt. 6:16-18)

The story is told of an eastern ascetic holy man who covered himself with ashes as a sign of humility and regularly sat on a prominent street corner of his city. When tourists asked permission to take his picture, the mystic would rearrange his ashes to give the best image of destitution and humility.¹⁶ That man would have been very comfortable among the Pharisees of Jesus' day: "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them" (Matt. 6:1, ASV).¹⁷ **"To be seen of them."** With

those words the Lord introduced a section of His teaching that would occupy a significant portion of the Sermon on the Mount: the blatant hypocrisy that characterized the inward spiritual poverty and outward religiosity of many first-century Jews. Jesus' word choice in this introduction is significant. The two most common verbs for "see" in the New Testament are *blepo* (135 times) and *horaō* (59 times).¹⁸ Here, however, the Lord uses *theaomai*, which means "to look upon, view attentively, contemplate."¹⁹ From this verb comes the noun *theatron*, from which we get our word "theater."²⁰ So, in other words, Jesus is saying, "Don't make a theatrical show of your religious activity. Don't parade your piety."²¹

It is interesting to understand the historical background that contributed to the pervasive character of first-century Jewish hypocrisy. Thompson explains:

In a time when religion is persecuted, as in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, or despised as it was in the Hellenizing times which preceded and succeeded, it would be the duty of religious men not to hide their convictions. The tendency to carry on this public manifestation of religious acts after it ceased to be protest would be necessarily great. The fact that they gained credit by praying at street corners when the hour of prayer came, and would have lost credit with the people had they not done so, was not recognized by them as lessening the moral worth of the action. Those who, having lived in the period of persecution and contempt, survived in that when religion was held in respect, would maintain their earlier practice without any [mental reservation]. The succeeding generation, in continuing the practice, consciously "acted"... Their hypocrisy was none the less real that it was reached by unconscious stages.²²

With that said, Christ begins a three-fold admonition concerning almsgiving (Matt. 6:2-4), prayer (Matt. 6:5-15), and fasting (Matt. 6:16-18).

Almsgiving (Matt. 6:2-4)

The word translated “alms” comes from the noun *eleos*, which means “mercy, pity, compassion.”²³ Jesus condemns sounding a trumpet when one is about to give alms. Some believe Jesus to be speaking literally here, suggesting that these hypocrites would cause a “trumpet to be sounded, professedly to call the poor together to receive it, but really to call the people to see the proofs of their liberality and piety.”²⁴ More likely, though, the meaning here is purely figurative—Jesus is simply condemning the actions of those whose motive is to draw attention to their giving.²⁵ “They have their reward”—Jesus used a technical word here that means literally, “They have received full payment with a receipt.”²⁶ In other words, all they want is human applause, and that is all they will ever get.²⁷

Jesus then uses another figurative expression: “let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Matt. 6:3). He does not mean, of course, that all giving is to be concealed (see Acts 4:36-37). His emphasis is on **motive**: make certain that you give not to impress others, but to please God.

Prayer (Matt. 6:5-15)

Jesus’ discussion on prayer addresses the same point. Hypocrites are not concerned about the **content** of prayer; they want to impress their peers with their piety. They “love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men” (Matt. 6:5). Christ was not condemning public prayer but “rather that they made it their point to be found praying at the prayer hours.”²⁸ The Lord encourages His followers, however, to enter a “closet” and pray “in secret” (Matt. 6:6). The word translated “closet” simply means an “inner room”; Jesus’ emphasis is on our **attitude** and **motive**, not our location.

Our prayers should be heartfelt praise expressed from consecrated, sincere hearts. As an illustration, Jesus includes the model prayer (Matt. 6:9-15).

Fasting (Matt. 6:16-18)

So that others will recognize their spirituality, hypocrites clothe themselves in a “sad countenance” and “disfigure their faces” when they fast (Matt. 6:16). The phrase “of a sad countenance” is all one word in the Greek and means “with a sad, gloomy, or sullen look.”²⁹ They would sometimes put dust or ashes on their heads, wear an uncomfortable sackcloth shirt next to the skin, allow their hair and beards to go loose and unkempt, and neglect their general appearance for the duration of the fast.³⁰

Though only one fast was commanded by God [on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29; Lev. 23:27)], many Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12), usually on the second and fifth days of the week.³¹ They had turned it into a ritual to gain favor with God and garner attention from men.³² In so doing they turned a practice designed to improve one’s communion with God into another ostentatious stage-act. But Jesus admonishes His followers to be unconcerned about demonstrating their spirituality to others. “Act as you always act,” He says, “and do not attempt to impress others.” Anointing one’s head, as Jesus suggests, is an allusion to the use of various oils as a refreshing skin protection against the dry, hot air of Palestine.³³

The Lord’s admonitions are, of course, just as applicable today as they were then. We should ask ourselves, “What are our **real** motives for our religious acts?”³⁴ **Why** do we give—to impress others with our generosity or to express the sincerity of our love (2 Cor. 8:8)? As we give, do we think more about how **much we give** or how **much we have been given**?” We must be

careful that our giving to God is offered from hearts that are unconcerned about impressing fellow Christians—we give because we love God and want to further His work.

Our prayer lives likewise need to be characterized by sincerity. There is danger for the one who leads public prayers during congregational worship, because he will struggle to keep from thinking about the many critical ears listening. It is too easy to want to be regarded as a highly “spiritual” person who enjoys intimate communication with God.³⁵ Perhaps, as Fowler suggests:

[T]he worst form of pride is the desire to appear humble. One must examine his heart to determine whether his prayer would be simpler and shorter were he praying alone with God and whether the manner or content of his prayer is being affected by those who listen.³⁶

Are we more concerned, especially in public prayer, about praying **eloquently** or praying **earnestly**? Which pleases us more—others’ remarks about our deep spirituality, or God’s being pleased with our ardent, though perhaps not eloquent, appeals?

If we fast, our motives must be spiritual: to cultivate our relationship with Christ during times of trouble and grief; to obtain a victory over selfishness, pride, or other sin; or perhaps to express penitence (cf. Deut. 9:9; Judg. 20:26; 1 Kings 19:8; 1 Kings 21:4; 1 Kings 21:27; Acts 13:3; Acts 14:23; et al.).³⁷

The concern is, **why** do we do what we do religiously? **Everything** we do spiritually must be done because we love God, because we are overcome by His goodness, and because our love for Him allows nothing else. If we perform religious acts to impress anyone besides God, we will receive that reward, but it will be the only blessing that we will receive. What we do in secret reveals more about us than all our known, public acts could ever reveal.³⁸

Hypocrites Are Hypercritical (Matt. 7:1-5)

Perhaps no text is more widely quoted and more often misapplied than the Lord's instruction to "judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). Christ did not mean, as so many seem to believe, that **all** judging is wrong (cf. 1 Cor. 5; John 7:24). He did, however, condemn a certain kind of judging, calling those who engage in it "hypocrites" (Matt. 7:5). The Lord's mote and beam (speck and plank, NKJV) metaphor is at once both humorous and, because of its sober implications, serious. Imagine the laughable image of a man with a "beam" ("plank," NKJV) embedded in his eye trying his best to clear from his brother's eye a "mote" ("speck," NKJV). Yet the humor is clouded somewhat by the stark realization that such deluded people are numerous. In a similar vein, Paul convicted the Jews with pointed questions:

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? (Rom. 2:21-23).

His conclusion preceded the questions: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom. 2:1). The kind of judging the Lord condemns is that in which hypercritical people engage, oblivious to their own weaknesses and sins, but ever-ready to identify and condemn the slightest defect in others.

Jesus condemns the kind of spirit seen in one Connecticut city, where fifty-three residents of a certain neighborhood signed a petition to stop reckless driving on

their streets. The police set a watch involving two squad cars parked inconspicuously at different locations. A few nights later five violators had been caught—**all five of them had signed the petition!**

All Christians should engage in regular periods of self-examination, especially when we are dealing with the sins of others (cf. Gal. 6:1—“considering thyself”). Do we examine those around us, hoping to find faults? Are the faults that we deem “minor” in ourselves regarded as inexcusable, blatant, and damnable in others? The fact is that many who constantly criticize others would do well to spend more time and effort turning the critical eye toward themselves.

Hypocrites Exalt Man-made Traditions Above Inspired Precepts (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13)

When the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples for violating the “tradition of the elders” by eating with unwashed hands (Matt. 15:2), they were referring to their oral law, which, they claimed, had been passed down from Moses through every generation.³⁹ They were no doubt referring to the ceremonial washing which their uninspired tradition demanded, as Mark’s fuller account explains (Mark 7:2-4). Adam Clarke quotes several Jewish rabbis, demonstrating clearly the extent to which the Jews elevated their traditions above God’s law:

The words of the scribes are lovely beyond the words of the law: for the words of the law are weighty and light, but the words of the scribes are all weighty. He that shall say, There are no phylacteries, though he thus transgress the words of the law, he is not guilty; but he that shall say, There are five Totaphot, thus adding to the words of the scribes, he is guilty.⁴⁰

It is no wonder, then, that Christ responds with this question, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment

of God by your tradition?” (Matt. 15:3). He cites a specific example of their blatant hypocrisy:

For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition (Matt. 15:4-6).

In other words, “You accuse my disciples of transgressing the traditions of the elders—I accuse you of transgressing the commands of God in favor of your own tradition, thus preferring the inventions of men to the positive precepts of God.”⁴¹

The Old Testament command to “honor” one’s parents meant more than simply submitting to and respecting; it also meant taking care of, nourishing, and supporting them (cf. Exod. 20:12; Num. 22:17; Deut. 27:16; Judg. 13:17).⁴² The Pharisees, though, had found what they perceived to be a loophole. According to their oral tradition, if one had the means by which he could care for his parents, he could simply say, “It is a gift” (Matt. 15:5), or, “It is Corban” [an “oblation” (Mark 7:11)], thereby dedicating it to God. In so doing he could remove his obligation to care for his parents. He was saying, in effect, “It is true, father, that if I were to give this to you that you would benefit by it, but I have offered it as a gift for pious uses, and therefore, at whatever cost to you, I am not allowed to give you any of it.”⁴³ Mark reveals that Jesus added, “And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother” (Mark 7:12). Through this “loophole,” Jesus says, you allow people to neglect their familial obligations.

Jesus then applies a quotation from Isaiah to these “hypocrites”: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their

mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matt. 15:8; cf. Isa. 29:13). He also adds this biting postscript: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9).

By elevating their uninspired traditions above God’s Word, they had revealed the nature of their hearts. Their religion was superficial, bound in external rites and ceremonies. They equated faithfulness with keeping certain myriad, meaningless traditions, and failed to grasp the concept that a relationship with God begins with one’s heart.

Two applications are obvious:

1. We must distinguish between uninspired traditions and authoritative precepts. Traditions are not inherently sinful, as long as we distinguish between those which are inspired and those which are not. 2 Thessalonians 2:15, for example, encourages Christians to “stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” It is possible, however, for us to equate cultural traditions with Divine precepts. Though this possibility has been abused by many who have gone to the other extreme in their attempts to steer the Lord’s church toward denominationalism, the fact remains that we need to safeguard ourselves by repeatedly examining our practices in the light of God’s Word. Let us never depart from **inspired** traditions, but let us be careful not to bind **cultural** traditions as law.

2. Man-made traditions result in vain worship. As Albert Barnes suggests, “God only has a right to declare what shall be done in his service.”⁴⁴ With that principle understood, we dare not introduce that which is unauthorized, nor should we remove anything God has commanded. The consequence of “teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” is worship that displeases God and disrespects the authority of His Word.

Hypocrites Are More Concerned About Earthly, Rather Than Spiritual, Matters (Matt. 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; Luke 12:54-57)

Two opposing sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were united in their opposition to Jesus, so, feigning sincerity, they asked Him to show them a “sign from heaven” (Matt. 16:1; Mark 8:11). Jesus responded by pointing out their ability to study certain signs in the sky and predict, to a fairly accurate degree, impending weather. Red evening skies suggest fortuitous weather, while threatening morning clouds, made red by the rays of the rising sun, indicate a storm in the Judean country.⁴⁵ Consequently, Jesus asked them, “O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Matt. 16:3).

In other words, “you pay attention to these unimportant signs, which have no eternal consequences, but are completely ignorant of the undeniable signs which I have already worked in your presence?”

And, sadly, many of a similar character still exist today. They are fairly accurate at predicting the rise and fall of the stock market. They take a great interest in the fortunes of their favorite football team and discuss with vigor the outcome of last week’s race. Their clothing models the latest fads in the industry, and their homes are decorated with elegance and charm. They follow the **Wall Street Journal**, the happenings among corporate America, and the reports of last quarter’s earnings.

But try to stimulate a Bible discussion with many of these people and notice the sudden reticence. Watch what happens when the latest fashion violates the Biblical principle of modesty. Observe their behavior when a baseball or soccer game conflicts with Wednesday night Bible study. See if they get as excited about a baptism or restoration as they do about a touchdown.

It is to these people that Jesus is still speaking today. A hypocrite is a religious person who is simply not very interested in spiritual matters. His priorities—what he does, how he spends his money, what delights him, what he talks about—tell the sad story. Perhaps Jesus would ask us a similar question: “You can discern the economic indicators, the changing fashions, and the effect of last year’s recruiting class...but are you interested in what **really** matters?”

Hypocrites Say One Thing And Mean Another (Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:12-17; Luke 20:20-26)

A common method of ensnaring a bird or wild animal was to stretch a net, wait for the unsuspecting animal to walk under it, and then quickly spring it over the animal.⁴⁶ Matthew chose a word that is derived from the Greek word for this sort of trap to describe the Pharisees’ decision to “entangle” (“ensnare,” ASV) Jesus in His speech.⁴⁷ Their question addressed one of the “hot” topics of their day—taxation: “Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” (Matt. 22:17).

Though Rome’s methods of collecting taxes varied over time, two things were consistently true: (1) taxes in Judea went to the imperial treasury, and (2) these taxes were extremely heavy.⁴⁸ In A.D. 7 Quirinius was sent to Judea to take a census for the purpose of a poll tax, an action which led to the insurrection of “Judas of Galilee” (mentioned by both Acts 5:37 and Josephus).⁴⁹ In fact, according to some historians:

[T]his same census was the occasion of the final destruction of the Jewish commonwealth, for the fierce antagonism to Rome which was aroused at that time never died out until it was extinguished in blood.⁵⁰

Regardless, the question of Jews and taxes was a vexing issue in Jesus' day.

Jesus' caustic response, however ["Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" (Matt. 22:18)], was not occasioned by the nature of the question itself, because sincere Jews had no doubt previously considered the issue. Christ responded as He did because of the blatantly artificial adulation which preceded their question: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men" (Matt. 22:16). These words were nothing more than a smokescreen for their true motive: to trick Him into saying something that would stymie His influence. Jesus called them "hypocrites" because they said one thing and meant another.

Unfortunately, the temptation to flatter others still exists today. Take, for example, the businessman who praises a peer to his face and then later disparages him to his employers. Or the Christian who compliments the preacher's sermon in the church foyer and then mocks it over lunch. Or perhaps the teenager who purposefully asks a classmate certain questions in front of others in hopes of embarrassing her.

Do we really mean what we say? The old adage "Say what you mean, and mean what you say" certainly applies to our relations with people. To do otherwise, according to Christ, is hypocrisy.

Hypocrites Demonstrate Little Compassion For Hurting People (Luke 13:10-17)

A cursory reading of the New Testament reveals a striking thing about Jesus: He was **always** concerned about people. In fact, we see an oft-repeated sentiment in the statement, "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were

scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36; cf. Matt. 14:14; Matt. 15:32; Matt. 20:34; et al.). The fact is, Jesus cared about people—their needs, their wants, their hurts. Contrast that, however, with the attitude of the Pharisees. On one occasion, as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, He healed a woman with a “spirit of infirmity” that rendered her “bowed together”—she could not stand erect (Luke 13:10-14). The ruler of the synagogue became indignant and said to the crowd, “There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day” (Luke 13:14). Jesus responded with an biting illustration: “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?” (Luke 13:15). Then He made His point: “And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” (Luke 13:16).

Jesus called the ruler a hypocrite because his tangled logic had somehow led him to believe it was permissible to provide aid to an animal, but not to a human being created in God’s image—a “daughter of Abraham” [i.e., a Jewess (Luke 13:16)]. He also misapplied the Sabbath laws, which were never intended to prevent acts of compassion.

In these respects the world has not changed since this encounter. We still live in a world of hurting people, and we are still tempted to become so engrossed with our need to **defend** the faith that we fail to **extend** compassion to hurting people. In no sense, of course, are we ever to compromise Scripture; some religious people have exchanged Biblical authority for a “social gospel” (i.e., a religion that meets people’s physical needs but ignores or mistreats their spiritual ailments). But we must be careful not to go to the other extreme and forsake our responsibility to “do good unto all men” (Gal. 6:10). In the

parable of the Good Samaritan, the Lord emphasized our responsibility to meet the needs of hurting people—“Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:30-37). A hypocritical faith is one that forgets that we serve a “God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3)—a God Who cares when people hurt.

**Hypocrites Are One Of The Greatest
Deterrents To Christianity
(Matt. 23:13-39; Luke 11:37-54)**

Too often we have heard it said, “I’m not going to church there—there are too many hypocrites!” While such an excuse, of course, is no justification for one’s unfaithfulness, the sad thing is that the statement is true. Most churches **do** have hypocrites in attendance, and these hypocrites cause many to become disinterested in the Lord and His church. Perhaps that is why Christ began the “most eloquent, most appalling, and most terrible of all discourses”⁵¹ with this accusation:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,
hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven
against men: for ye neither go in yourselves,
neither suffer ye them that are entering to go
in (Matt. 23:13).

This is the first of eight woes in this passage which the Lord pronounces against the hypocritical religious leaders of His day (Matt. 23:13-37; Luke 11:37-54). It serves also as a “most impressive summary of all that he had ever said, or that he had to say, of a wicked and hypocritical generation.”⁵² Consider the following brief discussion of these woes (Matt. 23).

1. They shut people out of the kingdom (Matt. 23:13). The key point of this entire section seems to be not only that those guilty of such blatant hypocrisy would lose their souls, but also that they would be responsible for

countless others' being lost as well. It is with that overarching theme that Jesus proclaims these woes. Each is an explanation of how these hypocrites are guilty of what is described in this first woe, of shutting people out of the kingdom (Matt. 23:13).

2. They devoured widows' houses and for a pretense made long prayers (Matt. 23:14).⁵³ They gained the trust of widows, inducing them to entrust their properties to their care. They then defrauded them.⁵⁴ Their prayers would sometimes exceed three hours in length in their demonstrations of deep "piety."⁵⁵

3. They proselytized others, then corrupted them with their wickedness (Matt. 23:15). The Pharisees spared no pains to gain proselytes, probably to swell their own numbers and make gain by extorting their money under various pretenses.⁵⁶ "Child of hell" was a Hebrew expression that signified one who was deserving of hell⁵⁷—one who "might claim hell for his mother, and the Devil for his father."⁵⁸

4. They greedily made artificial distinctions in religious matters (Matt. 23:16-22). The Lord begins this woe by again pointing to their negative influence on others: "Woe unto you, ye blind guides" (Matt. 23:16). They had made "subtle distinctions...as to the sanctity of oaths, distinctions invented only to promote their own avaricious purposes."⁵⁹ Some commentators see here a reference back to the Pharisees' tradition of designating a portion of their estate as consecrated to God's use, thereby rendering it unavailable to impoverished parents (cf. Matt. 15:5-9).⁶⁰ According to their meticulous system, motivated by greed, if they had wealth which they set aside for God's use {the "gold [designated for] the temple" (Matt. 23:16); the "gift" on the altar (Matt. 23:18)}, they could swear by it, and the oath would be valid—i.e., they were relieved of their responsibility to care for their parents. What amazing hypocrisy!

5. They emphasized minute aspects of the law and overlooked its character (Matt. 23:23-24). Adam Clarke summarizes their disposition well: “They were remarkably scrupulous in the performance of all the rites and ceremonies of religion, but totally neglected the soul, spirit, and practice of godliness.”⁶¹ They ignored “judgment” (fairness toward others), “mercy” (to the downtrodden), and “faith” (in the heart toward God). Our Lord did not object, of course, to their being meticulous in their paying tithes on the smallest, most insignificant items, but, when they did so to the exclusion of the principles behind the external rites and ceremonies, they demonstrated the emptiness of their religion.

6. They emphasized external aspects of their religion to the exclusion of the internal (Matt. 23:25-28). The Pharisees went to painstaking extremes to make certain that they observed all the washings and purifications prescribed by the Law (e.g., washing cups and plates; whitewashing tombs so that they could be seen and thereby easily avoided, averting ceremonial uncleanness). What they failed to realize was that this **external** cleanness should have represented **internal** purity—something for which they cared little. They washed their plates, but failed to purify their hearts. They whitened the sepulchers, but overlooked their own spiritual decadence and corruption.

7. They outwardly honored men whose principles they abhorred (Matt. 23:29-39). It was customary to express veneration for a distinguished man by building a tomb for him.⁶² This the Pharisees did for righteous men with great care, decorating and beautifying them. Yet their lives suggested that this was mere hypocrisy and that they actually approved of the conduct of their ancestors who had slain these men. Jesus said these Pharisees were the “children of them which killed

the prophets” (Matt. 23:31)—that is, they possessed their spirit and would, if the circumstances were similar, do what they had done.⁶³

While the Lord identified several tenets of a hypocritical faith in this text, the most pointed is His suggestion that hypocrisy leads others away from the kingdom. If our faith is fraudulent, it will keep us **and** others out of the kingdom. Our co-workers will see through our facade and recognize our spiritual emptiness. But nowhere is this more visible than in our homes. We may be able to mask our lack of spirituality and convince others that it is genuine. We can speak religious jargon and offer pious-sounding prayers. We may even be able to engage in lengthy religious discussions. But our families know who we are. They know our priorities, our passions, our true love. They hear us sing “O How I Love Jesus”—and know if it is true or false. They have sat beside us as we have enthusiastically asked God to “Give Me the Bible”—and they know how often we read it. They have “Surveyed the Wondrous Cross” with us—and know if Calvary is truly the centerpiece of our lives. Hypocrisy is a tragedy for us, but we see its true horror when we recognize that it will also cause others to be lost.

An Aesop’s fable tells of a wolf that wanted to have a sheep for his dinner and decided to disguise himself as a sheep and follow the flock into the fold. While the wolf waited until the sheep went to sleep, the shepherd decided he would have mutton for his own meal. In the dark he picked out what he thought was the largest, fattest sheep, but, after he had killed the animal, he discovered that it was a wolf. What that shepherd did inadvertently to a wolf in sheep’s clothing, God does intentionally. The Lord judges hypocrisy.⁶⁴

The vehemence with which Jesus attacked the hypocrisy of His day should give us all pause. Why are we

religious? Is that religion manifested merely in outward forms, or is it truly a part of our nature? Why do we do what we do religiously—so that others will be impressed by our piety, or because we love Jesus Christ? God knows our hearts, and He **does** judge hypocrisy. Let us never be guilty of living with a counterfeit faith.

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CHAPTER 23

What Jesus Said About Worry/Fear

Bill Burk

Introduction

SUDDENLY IT IS FELT. Somewhere, deep within the stomach, comes a sickening, painful feeling. If the feeling itself was not bad enough, the accompanying symptoms help to make it almost unbearable. At times, the heart may race; sweat may break out on the back of the neck, on the palms of the hands, and under the arms. The mouth may go dry. The mind may race, and weakness may describe the sensations felt in the arms and legs. When experienced, the victim may have difficulty breathing; experience bodily aches and pains in different parts of the body; and, in the worst-case scenario, long for death.

If you are like most, then just hearing about these symptoms may cause you to worry about experiencing them. You may actually begin to fear that these things will suddenly come upon you. If this is true of you, then you just suffered them either in a mild or severe way. Why? Because the symptoms described are those that often accompany the emotions of worry and fear.

Since we live in a fast-paced, uncertain, pressure-cooker world, the states of worry and fear, along with their symptoms, have become common. Brother Garland Elkins helps us to comprehend the worry epidemic:

Worry is widespread and is a universal problem. It is not limited to any one class. The poor and rich, the cultured and the unlearned and both the young and old worry. We worry about how to get money, and, once we have it, we worry about how to keep it or perhaps spend it. We worry about what we have, and we worry about what we do not have. We worry about we have said and about what we have not said. We worry about what we have done and what we have failed to do. Some worry because they are not married, while others worry because they are. We worry over troubles both real and imaginary. The disturbing events of the world, the insecurity of our jobs, the unstable economic situation causes much worry. We worry about the body, and we worry about the soul. We worry about life, and we worry about death.¹

The emotions of worry and fear are nothing new. Truly, both are consequences of living in a sin-cursed world (Rom. 5:12). In fact, one of the first negative emotions that the first pair felt, after the transgression in the garden, was fear: “Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself’” (Gen. 3:9-10).²

With the breaking of God’s Law (Gen. 3:6) came worry and fear. The concerns of Adam and Eve came to pass in that the Lord pronounced curses upon them (Gen. 3:16-19) and banished them from Paradise (Gen. 3:22-24). Yet, despite such harsh penalties, Jehovah did not leave them without hope in that He promised to send the Seed of woman into the world to crush the head of the Devil (Gen. 3:15) and to give man an answer to anxiety and terror.

Still, throughout Bible history we see worry and fear raise their heads.

1. Abraham’s fear and worry motivated him to be deceitful (Gen. 12:10-13; Gen. 20:1-2).

2. Moses' fear and worry prompted him to doubt his ability to carry out God's will (Exod. 3:11; Exod. 4:1; Exod. 4:10; Exod. 4:13).

3. Saul's fear of the people led him to disobey God (1 Sam. 13:11-12; 1 Sam. 15:24).

4. Peter's fear and worry led him to deny the Lord three times (Matt. 26:69-75).

In this discussion we will focus on what Jesus said about worry and fear. He has the answer to both because He is the answer (cf. Matt. 11:28-30; John 14:27; etc.). As we begin this important discussion, let us notice the following.

Worry And Fear: Their Definitions

What exactly is fear? Fear is "an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation of awareness of danger."³ Fear is not always a bad thing. In fact, the emotion itself helps to safeguard our survival:

Fear is the most basic instinct of every living creature. An animal without fear will probably become a predator's dinner. Fear is the natural response when our physical safety and psychological well-being are threatened. Rational fears are learned and vital to our survival.⁴

Fear, therefore, has a positive side and can serve as a proper motivation. However, there are such things as irrational fears. These are fears that paralyze and hinder us from doing the things that we must do in order to function in society and to please God. Oftentimes, we refer to these fears as phobias. A phobia is an unreasonable fear regarding some object. The following is a short list of some of the many prevalent phobias:

Acrophobia—a fear of high places
Agoraphobia—fear of marketplaces

Claustrophobia—fear of enclosed places
Gephydophobia—fear of crossing bridges
Hematophobia—fear of blood
Monophobia—fear of being alone
Pathophobia—fear of disease
Toxophobia—fear of being poisoned
Xenophobia—fear of strangers
Zoophobia—fear of animals

Notice how each fear/ phobia has an object. Although there could be legitimate reasons to experience fear in regard to any of these objects, to become afraid at the mere thought of them is irrational. These are the kinds of fears that debilitate and deter growth in every realm of life, including service to God:

Fear is a thief. It erodes our faith, plunders our hope, steals our freedom, and takes away our joy of living the abundant life in Christ. Phobias are the coils of a snake—the more we give in to them, the tighter they squeeze. Tired of fighting, we succumb to the temptation and surrender to our fears. But what seemed like an easy way out becomes, in reality, a prison of unbelief—a fortress of terror that holds us captive.⁵

Worry can be defined as “mental distress or agitation resulting from concern usually for something impending or anticipated.”⁶ Anxiety is a synonym for worry and a cousin of fear, being defined as a “painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill...a fearful concern or interest.”⁷ The following information is helpful in understanding the basics about worry and anxiety:

Anxiety is different from fear in that it lacks an object or adequate cause. People are anxious because they are uncertain about a specific outcome or they don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. It is perfectly normal to be concerned about those things which we value,

which is why we need to distinguish between temporary anxiety and an anxious trait that persists. A state of anxiety exists when concern is shown **before** a specific event. One can be anxious about an examination that is yet to be taken, or the attendance at a planned function, or the threat of an incoming storm. Such concern is normal and moves a person to responsible action. But we also need to remember that the vast majority of our fears and anxieties are never realized.⁸

Although all of us may feel some twinge of anxiety from time to time, chronic anxiety and worry lead to overwhelming stress, panic attacks, and poor health, both physically and spiritually. The Bible has the answer for fear and worry. Those who choose to trust in the Lord can hope to expect comfort and peace:

Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord; And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass (Psm. 37:1-5).

Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved (Psm. 55:22).

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Prov. 3:5-6).

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but her leaf will be green, and will

not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will
cease from yielding fruit (Jer. 17:7-8).

The specific words of Jesus, spoken during His ministry, go a long way in quelling fears and diminishing worry. Let us, therefore, move into the next section of our study.

Jesus' Words Regarding Worry

In Matthew's account of the Gospel, we have what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). This tremendous sermon, spoken by our Lord, has been referred to as the "Manifesto of the King" and the "Magna Carta of Christianity." The sermon looked forward to the coming of the church of Christ or the Kingdom of God (Matt. 16:13-18). The many characteristics that Jesus describes in the sermon are those that every citizen of God's Kingdom should possess. The specific audience of this sermon would be the disciples of Jesus, whereas generally the multitudes that followed Him evidently heard the sermon as well.

In Matthew 6, Jesus instructs His listeners to do their charitable deeds for the purpose of pleasing God rather than men (Matt. 6:1-4). Next, the Lord discusses prayer with His disciples (Matt. 6:5-15) along with fasting, again stressing the need to be motivated by a desire to please God rather than men (Matt. 6:16-18). Then the Lord sets forth the need to lay up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21) and to be singularly focused (Matt. 6:22-24). Finally, Jesus urges those who would follow Him to be a worry-free people:

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your
life, what you will eat or what you will drink;
nor about your body, what you will put on. Is
not life more than food and the body more than

clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matt. 6:25-34).

In this passage, we find perhaps the greatest teaching anywhere in Scripture as it relates to worry. As we consider the passage, we must note what Jesus is both prohibiting and demanding. In regard to prohibition:

It is not ordinary, prudent foresight, such as becomes a man, that Jesus forbids; it is worry...Jesus is not advocating a shiftless, thrifless, reckless, thoughtless, improvident attitude to life; he is forbidding a care-worn, worried fear, which takes all the joy out of life.⁹

Responsible living Jesus demands, but undue worry He forbids.

In these verses we find the Divine remedy for sinful worry and fretfulness. Consider the arguments set forth by our Lord:¹⁰

1. The Life-giver has the ability to provide His own with the things of life (Matt. 6:25). If God gives life, and He does, then He can be trusted to provide His own with the necessary items of life. The words of the Psalmist are apropos in this instance: “I have been young, and now a m old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread” (Psm. 37:25).

2. The birds bear witness (Matt. 6:26). The Lord reminds His hearers that the birds of the air “neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns,” yet the God of heaven supplies all of their needs. In a similar account in Luke, Jesus uses the ravens for his illustration (Luke 12:24):

“Ravens” was a term covering all the crow family, which were abundantly found in Palestine. They foraged for their provisions from day to day, and were provided for...Why then must man make such feverish preparation for the future, as if it all depended on him?¹¹

The birds certainly declare to us God’s providential care.

3. Worry is a waste (Matt. 6:27). Jesus declares that worrying accomplishes nothing. Man, by worrying, cannot “add one cubit to his stature.” Consider the following as it relates to this statement:

Worry and anxiety are related to the length of one’s life in the phrase “add one cubit unto his stature.” A cubit is a measurement of about eighteen inches. However, this reference is probably not to one’s actual height but to the length of his life. The term “stature” may in this place mean “age.” Thus the idea seems to be that a man cannot add the smallest measure to the span of his life by worrying. In fact, modern medicine would tell us that worry actually shortens one’s life. This state of anxiety is related to having little faith.¹²

4. The lilies do not lie (Matt. 6:28-30). Perhaps Jesus had in mind the scarlet poppies that bloomed on

the hillsides of Palestine that, in their short life spans, possessed a beauty that transcended the clothing of kings. God clothed them that way even though they were oftentimes used as fuel for the ovens of Israel. If God cares that much about a short-lived flower that is here today and gone tomorrow, how much more does He care about us? The lilies tell the truth about God's care.

5. Christians should be carefree (Matt. 6:31-32). Jesus said that worry about material things was a mark of the "Gentile" or the unbeliever. The Christian should be characterized by faith (Heb. 11:6). Worry is a demonstration of distrust in God. Christians should be, in essence, carefree. We are children of God (1 John 3:1). We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), and Christians have the promise that He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). The peace that surpasses understanding, for the citizens of God's Kingdom, is only a prayer away (Phil. 4:6-7).

6. Keep first things first (Matt. 6:33). When we keep the main thing the main thing, worries have a way of diminishing. When our minds are fixed on the "one thing" (Psm. 27:4; Mark 10:21; Luke 10:38-42; Phil. 3:13-14), we have little time to fret over the mundane things of life.

7. Live one day at a time (Matt. 6:34). Each day has its own concerns; therefore, there is no reason to dwell upon the hypothetical problems of tomorrow, problems that oftentimes never come to fruition anyway. Therefore, the need is seen to seek God's kingdom first today and leave the concerns of tomorrow in God's hands.

The words of Jesus remind us of the wonderful confidence that we can have in God. We are reminded that He will take care of us as long as we seek first things first (Matt. 6:33; Luke 12:31).

Jesus' Words Regarding Improper Fear

The need for bravery and courage on behalf of the Christian is paramount. Paul reminded Timothy, the young evangelist and his true son in the faith, about this crucial concept when he said, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). Boldness is called for if God is going to be obeyed rather than men (Acts 5:29). If the good fight is going to be fought, and if warfare is going to be waged, then strength of heart is mandatory (1 Tim. 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:12). With these things in mind, it is plain to see that the Christian must abandon irrational fears.

Jesus, in the Gospel accounts, sets forth instruction in regard to both improper and proper fears. We begin our discussion by looking at the irrational or improper aspect of fear.

Jesus Taught His Disciples Not To Fear The Storms Of Life

Even the casual Bible student is familiar with Jesus' demonstration of power over the natural elements, particularly the wind and the waves (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25). For a reminder, we turn our attention to Matthew's account of this miracle:

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (Matt. 8:23-27).

In the passage above, a literal, physical tempest is under consideration. Yet the Lord also describes the various and sundry difficulties of life as “storms.” Consider:

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (Matt. 7:24-29).

As we put these two passages together, we are able to glean some valuable truths about the storms of life. **First**, we learn from these verses that storms are to be expected. Each of us will have our occasions to “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psm. 23:4). Difficulties and trials will be faced by all of us (John 16:33; Jas. 1:2-4).

Second, we learn that Jesus will be with us in the storms. As was the case with the disciples, Jesus sails along with us in the boat of life. He will never leave us nor forsake us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6).

Third, we learn that Jesus can still bring peace to a stressful situation. Shortly before going to the cross, Jesus comforted His distraught disciples with these words, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). When the storms rage around us, our Lord will still say, “Peace be still” (Mark 4:39).

Fourth, we see that, if we build our lives on the sayings of Christ, we equip ourselves for every storm. The Scriptures have the ability to make us “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). The “word of His grace” builds us up and readies us for whatever may come our way (Acts 20:32).

Finally, because of all these things, we note that to be afraid during difficult times is the demonstration of unbelief (Heb. 3:12). True, we may feel the emotion of fear during tough times, yet we should not allow it to become habitual or compulsive. When we are burdened with care, let us cast all of our cares upon Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

Jesus Taught His Disciples Not To Fear Man

The Lord sets forth an interesting discussion along this line in Matthew 10. The discussion of chapter ten “actually begins with the preceding unit on the compassion of Christ (Matt. 9:35-38).”¹³ Because of Jesus’ concern for the lost, He chose His apostles and sent them at the beginning to preach to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:1-4). Mark’s account puts it this way: “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14).

Jesus, in Matthew 10:16-26, explains to them that with preaching the Gospel and living the Christian life comes persecution (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12): “The intensity of persecution is stressed, for families will be divided and the closest family ties will be broken over loyalty to Jesus.”¹⁴ The persecution, Jesus reminds His disciples, will be “for My sake” (Matt. 10:18), or, as He again stressed, “for my name’s sake” (Matt. 10:22). Jesus reminds them that such persecution is the result of becoming more and more like Him:

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household? (Matt. 10:24-25).

With these thoughts in mind, in regard to future persecutors, Jesus says, “Therefore do not fear them” (Matt. 10:26). Jesus’ disciples, as is the case with Christians today, were not to allow the fear of ungodly men to keep them from heralding the message of Christ (Matt. 10:27). With this concept before us, let us consider the final emphasis Jesus puts on the subject:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. “Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:28-31).

Consider these crucial points set forth by our Lord as they relate to the fear of men.

1. Do not fear the persecution of ungodly men, for they can only harm the body but not the soul. Even if the Christian should die for the cause, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them” (Rev. 14:13; cf. Psm. 116:15). Men can kill us physically, but they can never “separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:39).

2. Do not fear the persecution of ungodly men, for God watches over and cares for you. “Two sparrows are sold for a copper coin, an *assarion*, worth about one cent in our money, yet the heavenly Father takes

note of them to the extent of providential care.”¹⁵ No matter the circumstances, we can trust the Heavenly Father to take care of us. He knows us intimately, even the number of hairs upon our heads. He will not allow us to face any more than we can handle.

These thoughts remind us of the words of the writer to the Hebrews when he said:

Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:5-6).

From this we see that Christians should not fear ungodly men. Yet, at the same time, there is a proper fear that should be demonstrated.

Jesus’ Words Regarding Proper Fear

Jesus, in the same passage that He prohibits fearing men, prescribes the need to fear God: “Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt.10:28). The word translated “fear” in Matthew 10:28 is from the Greek word *phobos* and is defined as “fear, dread, terror” or “by metonymy, that which causes fear.”¹⁶ The Scriptures teach that God should be feared, not just by the sinner but also by the saint (Eccl. 12:13). A quick perusal through the Proverbs shows the benefits received when we choose to fear the Lord:

1. The “fear of the Lord” is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7).
2. The “fear of the Lord” will cause one to hate evil (Prov. 8:13).
3. The “fear of the Lord” will prolong life (Prov. 10:27).
4. The “fear of the Lord” provides strong confidence and is a fountain of life (Prov. 14:26-27).

5. The “fear of the Lord” prompts one to depart from evil (Prov. 16:6).
6. The “fear of the Lord” leads to a satisfying life, and spares from much evil (Prov. 19:23).
7. The “fear of the Lord” is the way to riches, honor, and life (Prov. 22:4).

The impenitent sinner should experience the emotions of “fear, dread, and terror” as he contemplates standing before the God of heaven unprepared (2 Cor. 5:10-11). Yet the fear of the Lord experienced by the Christian is a shade different. He is not going to fear God in the same sense as the sinner because he, having obeyed the Gospel, is “in Christ” (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; Mark 16:16). Paul’s words are of great comfort to the Christian when he said, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). The words of John are applicable to the child of God as well when he said:

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:17-19).

While we may not fear God in the same way as the sinner does, we still are obligated to fear Him. The following definition of the “fear of the Lord” as it relates to the Christian is appropriate at this point:

The fear of the Lord means **reverent submission that leads to obedience**, and it is interchangeable with “worship,” “rely on,” “trust,” and “hope in.” Like terror, it includes a clear-eyed knowledge of God’s justice and His anger against sin. But this worship-fear also

knows God's great forgiveness, mercy and love ...It causes us to submit gladly to His Lordship and delight in obedience. This kind of robust fear is the pinnacle of our response to God.¹⁷

For the Christian, "The Fear of the Lord is not the cringing terror of a slave who has displeased a demanding taskmaster. It doesn't drive us away from God; but rather toward Him, in humble obedience and worship."¹⁸ Jesus reminds us in Matthew 10:28 that "our Heavenly Father is the correct object of our fear, for throughout Scripture God alone is sovereign over life and death, temporal and eternal."¹⁹ Amazingly enough, when we possess a healthy respect and reverence for God, we will receive the blessings already mentioned that go along with fearing Him. And when we truly fear Him, in the best of senses, we have nothing else to fear.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the answer to every worry and every fear. In fact, through His perfect life, cruel death, and victorious resurrection, He has once for all provided a remedy for man's greatest fear—death:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14-15).

What a blessing to be able to walk through life knowing that our heavenly Father, by His providence, will take care of our every need (Luke 12:22-34). What a thrill it is to know that, if I fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13), I have nothing else to fear (Luke 12:4-7). What a comfort it is to know that through Jesus I have no need

to fear either physical death (John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 Pet. 1:3-4) or the death that Scripture defines as separation from God (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 6:23). Therefore, with a courageous spirit, a calm heart, and a worry-free mind, we can say with Paul, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).

Endnotes

1 Garland Elkins, “The Sin of Worry,” **The Sermon On The Mount**, eds. Garland Elkins & Thomas B. Warren (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1982), pp. 196-197.

2 All Scripture references from **The Holy Bible**, New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

3 **Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary** (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1977), p. 419.

4 Neil T. Anderson & Rich Miller, **Freedom from Fear: Overcoming Worry & Anxiety** (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), p. 13.

5 Ibid, p. 25.

6 **Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary**, p. 1352.

7 Ibid, p. 51.

8 Anderson & Miller, p. 17.

9 William Barclay, **Barclay’s Daily Study Bible: The Gospel Of Matthew**, Revised edition, Volume 1, Chps. 1-10 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1975).

10 These arguments modified from Barclay.

11 Anthony Lee Ash, **The Gospel According To Luke**, Part 2 (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing, 1973), p. 41.

12 Edward E. Hinson & Michael Kroll Woodrow, general eds., **KJV Bible Commentary**, electronic edition, Logos Library System (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

13 Myron S. Augsburger, **Matthew: The Communicator’s Commentary**, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), p. 132

14 Augsburger, **Matthew, The Communicator’s Commentary**, p. 138.

15 Ibid, p. 139.

16 W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, & William White, **Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary Of Old And New Testament Words**, electronic edition, Logos Library System (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

17 Edward T. Welch, **When People Are Big And God Is Small** (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997), pp. 97-98.

18 Elyse Fitzpatrick, **Overcoming, Fear, Worry, And Anxiety** (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001), p. 145.

19 Augsburg, p. 139.

CHAPTER 24

What Jesus Said About Judging

Wayne Jones

Appreciation

OVER THE PAST YEAR, my love and appreciation for the Southaven church of Christ have grown tremendously. From the outside looking in, it had the appearance of a strong, working church. Now that my family and I have had a year to see it from the “inside,” we realize that it is much stronger and much more active than we could have ever imagined. I deeply love and respect the elders of this congregation for their tireless work in the faith. I count it a great blessing to call B. J. Clarke my friend and fellow laborer in the kingdom. My family and I have made many friendships here at Southaven that will last, Lord willing, throughout all eternity. It is a tremendous blessing to be a part of this good work.

Introduction

Words are very important and very powerful. Words are used to relay thoughts and emotions that otherwise could not be expressed. Even in written form, words are very important. Newspapers, magazines, letters, tracts, periodicals, and bulletins are testimonies to the power and significance of written words. In fact, people have been converted to Christ without even **hearing** the Gospel

preached. The words that turned their hearts to God in repentance, confession, and baptism were not spoken, but rather they were written.

Even so, the spoken word is often the most convincing and weighty. Solomon through inspiration describes “a **word fitly spoken** (emp. mine throughout, WJ)” as “apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Solomon also revealed that “A man hath joy by the **answer of his mouth**: and a **word spoken** in due season, how good is it!” (Prov. 15:23). One cannot deny the power of spoken words when he investigates the very creation of the world. The record of each day of creation begins with God saying something. As a result of those sayings, the world came into existence.

It is often the spoken word, which is later written down, that we truly remember. Take, for instance, the many quips and quotations that are remembered and attributed to Mark Twain. For example, Twain was quoted to have said, “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society.” On another occasion, Twain described a banker as a “fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining and wants it back the minute in begins to rain.” In speaking about writers, Twain said that “most writers regard truth as their most valuable possession, and therefore are most economical in its use.”¹ Perhaps one of the more humorous lines attributed to Twain is the following: “When I was younger I could remember anything, whether it happened or not.”²

Another individual who is often quoted is Abraham Lincoln. He is recorded to have said that “you cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than your income” and that “you cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.”³ Perhaps one of this writer’s favorite expressions ascribed to the former president is his description of a hypocrite: “A hypocrite is like the man who murdered both

his parents and then pleaded for mercy on the grounds that he was an orphan.”⁴ Certainly, we can agree that the words, once having been spoken and then written down, are oftentimes chiseled into our memories.

However, some have appropriately wondered if all of the quotes which are attributed to men like Twain and Lincoln were really spoken by such men. After all, we have uninspired men quoting and recording the words of other uninspired men. It is possible and quite probable that Mark Twain did not say **everything** that men say he said. There is not really any foolproof way of determining whether or not many of these men said the things which are attributed to them.

Yet there is a Man Who is often quoted. His quotes are more profound and thought-provoking than any other man’s quotes. The number of adages and sayings attributed to this Man far outweighs those associated with Lincoln and Twain combined. The good thing about this Man’s sayings is that they can be verified and proven. There is a standard, a Divine standard, that will either confirm or deny the sayings of this Man. This Man, of course, is Jesus Christ. His sayings are verified by the Bible, the precious and infallible Word of God. The words of Jesus are the medium through which God speaks to His people today (Heb. 1:2). The words of Jesus were powerful enough to calm the storms (Mark 4:39), to make the sick whole (Matt. 9:22), and raise the dead (John 11:43-44). The importance of Jesus’ words are seen in the words of the Father at the transfiguration of Christ: “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him**” (Matt. 17:5).

Therefore, anything that Jesus said should be of great importance to those who are trying to live like Him. Consequently, what Jesus said about judging, as verified

by the Word of God, should be of great interest and importance to us. Most would assume that the majority of what Jesus said about judging would relate to passages such as Matthew 7:1-2. However, with a closer look at the Scriptures, we are deeply impressed by the number of different points that Jesus made in His sayings about judging. For the purpose of our study, we have placed the various sayings of Jesus about this subject into four main categories. When Jesus spoken about judging, He helped to explain (1) His relationship to the Father, (2) His relationship to His apostles, (3) Our relationships to one another, and (4) Our relationship to Christ in the judgment.

What Jesus Said About Judging: As It Describes His Relationship To The Father

It is true that power and right to judge (i.e., to distinguish, to conclude, to condemn, to avenge)⁵ belonged to God the Father. This fact is expressed in great detail in the Old Testament Scriptures. It was God Who judged the world worthy of destruction in the days of Noah. Yet it was the same God that judged Noah and his family worthy of salvation during the same time period (Gen. 6:8; Gen 6:22; 1 Pet. 3:20). It was God Who judged Israel worthy of deliverance during the time of Egyptian bondage, but also judged the same generation of Israelites unworthy to enter the Promised Land because of unbelief. It was the same God that judged Joshua's generation worthy of possessing the Promised Land, but also judged the many generations to follow as unworthy to keep it (Josh. 21:43; Josh. 23:16).

It is also true that the right and power to judge was handed down from the Father to the Son, according to many of the passages in the New Testament dealing with this subject. For example, Jesus claimed that God had given to Him "authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man" (John 5:27). On another occasion, Jesus

declared that, upon His return, He would “come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory” as the Judge of all mankind (Matt. 25:31ff). The very idea of God the Father handing authority to the Son is reiterated by the claim of Jesus that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him (Matt. 28:18). Who was the One that could have given Jesus that kind of power? Certainly, it was the Father in heaven. So, in the first place, the relationship that the Father and Son shared was one of delegated authority. It is a similar relationship that Christ had with His apostles, which we will come back to in just short time.

In the second place, when Jesus spoke about judging, He often revealed the unity of aim, purpose, and thought that He shared with the Father. This second point logically follows the first. If the Father was going to entrust the Son with the power and privilege to judge, then He certainly would have made sure that their goals were the same and that they were on the same proverbial page. In the secular world, when a company is handed from one person to another, such as from a father to a son, the father will often have taught the son to make decisions similar to his own so that the company will remain on its current course. When the Father executed judgment unto the Son, He executed judgment to a Being Who would make decisions and judgments similar to His own. Jesus very humbly proclaimed, “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). On another occasion, Jesus closely tied the will of the Father in to this judging: “And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me” (John 8:16). Paul tied both the Father and the Son into the judging process: “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16).

While Jesus said more than this about the type and time of this judgment with which God had entrusted Him, the above will suffice for now. However, before we close the thoughts of this lecture, we will notice many of the particulars of that judgment when we discuss our relationship to Christ in that final day.

What Jesus Said About Judging: As It Describes His Relationship To The Apostles

Just as God had handed down to Christ the authority to judge the world, so would Christ hand down to His apostles the power to judge. Consider the following two passages:

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel...That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

These verses are often misapplied and distorted to the point that some see an earthly, premillennial-like reign of Christ and His apostles. However, nothing could be further from the actual point of these passages.

First, we must consider **when** the apostles were going to judge from their thrones. According to these above-given passages, the apostles would be judging during the same time that Christ would be judging from His throne. This could not be at the end of time, because, according to 1 Corinthians 15:24, when Christ returns (at the end of time), He will cease to reign. Furthermore, according to Peter's sermon (Acts 2:22-36), when Christ ascended to the Father, He also began His reign. This would also explain the term "regeneration" used by Christ to describe when He and

His apostles would reign and judge. The period of regeneration would be the “time between Pentecost and the second coming...the time of the church,”⁶ or the time of the “washing of regeneration” as given in Titus 3:5.⁷ The reign during this time would not be a physical reign, but rather one of a spiritual nature.

Second, we must consider **who** the apostles would be judging. According to the verses listed above, they would be judging the “twelve tribes of Israel.” Just as the reign of the apostles is spiritual, so is the Israel of these verses. In the Old Testament, God’s people were identified by tribes, and they were twelve in number. Thus, to refer to the twelve tribes of Israel would be to refer to God’s people as a whole. So when James writes to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, he is writing to the whole of God’s people (Jas. 1:1). Paul referred to the church as the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). So we can reason that, as the Christian age was being ushered in, the apostles were given the power to judge from their thrones over the spiritual Israel of God—the church of Jesus Christ.

How the apostles were to carry out this responsibility is not addressed in these verses, but it needs to be considered briefly. The delegation of authority from Christ to the apostles was done through the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth (John 16:13), and, when the Spirit did come, they were enabled to speak that truth (Acts 2:4). Looking back at the promise of John 16, we notice that Jesus also promised that the Spirit would “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). Dear reader, the Spirit would not do this in a mysterious, miraculous sort of way, but rather He would do this through the words of the apostles. The very words that He inspired the apostles to speak and write would be used to convict the world of sin and relay the hope in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). It

was through these same words and the authority found within them that the apostles would exercise authority and judge over the church of God.

To sum up what we have just set out to prove concerning what Jesus said about the apostles' judging, as recorded in Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30, we provide the following:

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...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.⁸

What Jesus Said About Judging: As It Describes Our Relationship To One Another

In this section of our lesson, we will discuss those things that this writer and most readers would have first imagined being discussed under this topic. We must begin this discussion by noticing the following passages:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7:1-5).

A parallel passage can be found in Luke 6:37. It would be trite to say that these verses are abused and misused by those who are often looking for a way to justify their own

sinful situation. However, they are not pointless passages, and they do deserve our very serious attention under the banner of this topic.

Within the confines of these passages, Jesus is condemning one attitude and condoning another. Within the confines of these passages, Jesus is attacking one type of action, while He is approving another. These passages are not a blanket disapproval for one man's judging another man. However, there are limitations and restrictions that are placed on the kind and amount of judging that we can do as humans.

The type of judging that Christ is rebuking was harsh, hypocritical judgment. The mote of Matthew 7:3 was probably "the small 'beard' on the head of a barley or wheat plant. It refers to a speck of something light."⁹ On the other hand, the "beam was a great squared piece of building timber."¹⁰ So what Christ is describing is a situation in which one man overlooks his own problem, but beholds a problem in his brother. The word "beholdest" actually means "to stare at from without, as one who does not clearly see; it means to observe with scrutiny."¹¹ This idea would seem to indicate one who goes looking for something in another, rather than remembering that love "thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5). Keep in mind that Christ is not teaching that, simply because one person has faults, he cannot help to correct the faults of another. This is the cry of many members of the church from whom fellowship is withdrawn. Their claim is that, since no one is perfect, then no one has the right to carry out the Divine plan of discipline for the church. How absurd! God gave the command to withdraw knowing that imperfect men would be left to carry it out. Still, there are false teachers and those of the liberal movement who will cry that, since no one is perfect, then we have do not a right to say that anyone is wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, just a few verses after the prohibition of Matthew 7:1, Jesus would instruct His followers to identify and avoid the false teacher (Matt. 7:15-16). The way to identify the false teacher, according to our Lord, is by forming an opinion (i.e., making a judgment) about his fruit. No, dear friend, Christ is not forbidding men to make judgments, but He is, rather, condemning the man who purposefully overlooks his own faults and purposefully seeks out the faults of another. This is the very thing that was practiced by the Pharisees. They would set out to find fault with Jesus, but would refuse to see the glaring faults present in their own lives.

However, once we can see clearly enough to remove the spot from our eye, we are then **instructed** to go and remove the beam from our brother's eye. This instruction falls under our duty to watch and care for our brethren, which is given throughout the New Testament (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). To deny the necessity of helping a brother remove the beam from his eye is to deny the plain teaching of the Spirit through the inspired pen of Paul and James.

Still, another passage which limits our judging also records the words of Christ: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Here in this context, Jesus has been accused of breaking the Sabbath. It was a charge that the enemies of Christ leveled at Him without thinking through the situation or considering all the facts. This type of judging could be identified as superficial or hasty. Man does not have the power or knowledge to make a judgment without proper investigation. Certainly most, if not all, of us have been guilty of this type of judging at one point or another. In fact, one can be very honest when making a judgment based on appearance, but that does not make the judgment right. Not making hasty judgment means giving the benefit of the doubt, thinking the best about someone, and

generally possessing a Christian attitude. Many reputations have been undeservedly destroyed, and many names have been unnecessarily damaged because of one man's appearance-based judgment.

But, once again, on the heels of judgment limitations comes the command to judge correctly. In the same passage that forbids appearance-based judging, Christ commands the listeners to "judge righteous judgements." It is our God-given responsibility to make judgments for the purpose of helping someone in need or lifting someone who is fallen. However, that responsibility comes with limitations and regulations. Understanding and heeding those limitations are the keys to producing the judgments God would have us make.

What Jesus Said About Judging: As It Describes Our Relationship To Christ In Judgment

Although we have detoured somewhat from our first point until now, our lesson has come full circle. For, you see, the power and privilege that the Father gave to the Son will one day be exercised when Christ returns to judge the world. That fact that He will do this should never be in question. The Bible is very clear in establishing this fact. Paul describes Christ as the One Who will "judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1). Furthermore, when Paul is describing that final day, he makes reference to the "judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10), thus indicating that Christ will be the One doing the judging. Now couple those thoughts with the words of Christ in John 5:22, and it should be evident that Christ (by His own claim and the claim of an inspired apostle) is going to be our Judge in that final day.

Not only did Christ identify Himself as this world's final Judge, He also described several other aspects of that

judgment. For instance, Christ revealed the fact that Satan's fate at that judgment has already been determined. According to the words of Christ, "the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). The reason that Satan will already be judged or condemned, and his fate will already be sealed, is because of what is written in John 16:10. The Spirit spoke to the apostles about the righteousness of the Christ Who had gone to the Father, which meant that He had conquered death. In defeating death, Christ crushed Satan's head and forever condemned him to the fires of hell. Therefore, if Satan's place of eternal abode has already been sealed, then we know that, if we live in service to Satan, we, too, will be condemned to that same fiery pit: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

In the second place, Christ revealed through His own words the true standard of judgment:

And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: **the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day** (John 12:47-48).

The judgment will be like a test to which we have the answers, or a riddle for which someone has already revealed the solution. We know, from what Jesus said about judging, that the standard He will use has already been set in stone. There will be no alterations or last-minute additions. While this is comforting, we must take into account that the words of Jesus have often required of men that which they chose not to do. In the case of the rich young ruler, the words of Jesus required him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor, but that was more than the ruler was willing to do (Luke 18:22-23).

The words of Christ require every man to deny himself, crucify himself, and unconditionally follow Him (Luke 9:23). We ought to ask ourselves daily if we have the commitment it takes to heed the words of Christ. If we do not, we will not measure up to the true standard of judgment.

In the third place, Jesus (in His own words) gives various warnings about the judgment of the future:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Matt. 5:21-22).

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Matt. 11:21-24).

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned (Matt. 12:34-37).

The warnings that Jesus made about the coming judgment gave instructions on how we are to treat our brethren, encouraged us to heed the examples of old, and relayed to us the importance of guarding our speech. Dear friends, if Jesus took the time during His ministry to offer warnings about the judgment that He would later pass upon this world, we had better take heed.

Conclusion

If what Jesus had to say was not important, then God would have never spoken from heaven with a command to hear Him (Matt. 17:5). Yes, it is true that the list of topics that Jesus discussed over the course of His life seems endless. That list includes what Jesus said about the home, salvation, the church, Bible authority, and sin. However, these other topics do not, in any way, take away from the significance of what Jesus said about judging.

What Jesus did say about judging helps us to better understand Christ's relationship to the Father, Christ's relationship to His disciples, our relationship to one another, and our relationship to Christ in the judgment.

Endnotes

1 The three previous quotations of Mark Twain are taken from <www.therightside.co.demon.jk/quotes>.

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8 James Burton Coffman, **Commentary On The Gospel Of Matthew** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1968), pp. 298-299.

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CHAPTER 25

What Jesus Said About How To Treat Our Fellow Man

Wayne Cox

Introduction

JANUARY 24, 1848 WAS A significant date in the history of one particular region of our country—the West. On this day, James Wilson Marshall made a discovery at Sutter’s Mill in California that would have a profound effect on men throughout our country and on the region of California itself. As a result of his find, San Francisco grew from a small town to a city of 25,000 in one year’s time. Prices for food and lodging soared. Men and women across the country suffered hardship, disease, hunger, and even death making the trek to California. However, some of those who were able to survive made as much as \$5,000 in three days. As a result of the massive influx to this area, California was admitted to the Union as a state in 1850. The discovery was gold; the event was the California Gold Rush of 1849.¹

The whispered word “gold” has acted on man like a fever since he first learned to cherish this glittering metal. Man has discovered it, indulged in it, treasured it, hoarded it, fought for it, and even died for it. The Egyptians went so far as to identify gold with the “gods,” because it brought

to mind the imperishable sun and its radiant, life-giving qualities.² Thus, to say that man has been fascinated with gold is to highly understate the case!

Christians wish that mankind would relish the Word of God as much as he does gold and other priceless treasures. It is our desire that all would discover, indulge in, fight for, and even die for the grand Book. After all, is not the Word of God a “golden treasure”? To be more specific, there is a teaching of Christ with which man has linked the word “gold”: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

This maxim has been appropriately labeled “The Golden Rule” and “The Everest of Ethics.”³ Why is it so designated? Consider its beauty. It has a splendor that far surpasses that of gold itself. Consider its lucidity. It is a principle that all can comprehend, understand, and apply. Consider the values for which it calls: fairness, justice, equality, and empathy. Consider the influence and power it exerts—even upon the pagan. It has been said that the heathen emperor Alexander Severus greatly admired this rule, had it written on the walls of his closet, quoted it when giving judgment, and honored Christ and favored Christians for the sake of it.⁴

Not only is the Golden Rule taught by true Christianity, but it has also found expression in some form in practically every corrupt and diverse religious sect:

Islam: No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

Taoism: Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.

Judaism: What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.

Buddhism: Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.⁵

Contemplate—if the Golden Rule were applied universally, it alone would revolutionize society. If everyone would adhere to this principle and practice it, there would be no crime, no jails, no prison cells, no gas chambers, and no electric chairs. Discrimination, prejudice, the Ku Klux Klan, and other forms of racial hatred and bigotry would cease. Terrorist attacks, the hijacking of planes, kidnappings, bombings, and other forms of intimidation, provocation and violence would not be reported on the nightly news, but would be reminders of our sordid past—found only on the pages of the annals of history.

Our assignment is to discuss what Jesus said about how to treat our fellow man. The Golden Rule is a succinct summary of that teaching; thus, we will limit our lecture to the precepts taught in that verse. In observing our assigned objectives, we begin by noting the following.

The Conduct Of The World In Contrast To Christ's Teaching

It has been said that there are four rules by which man lives: (1) the iron rule, (2) the brass rule, (3) the silver rule, and (4) the golden rule.⁶ Although our study focuses primarily on the latter, let's briefly discuss the preceding three.

The Iron Rule

The first rule from the standpoint of antiquity and number of followers is the iron rule. It is based on the brutal and satanic principle of "might makes right." Cain was the first to practice the iron rule when he stained his hands with the innocent blood of his brother Abel. Every murder from then until now and every war that has ever been fought have been a direct result of the iron rule

principle. Adolf Hitler was an avid advocate of this philosophy. He attempted to build a super-superior race in which was no place for his concept of the weak, and thus his degenerate culling practice began.

The iron rule also states, “What is yours is mine if I can take it by force.” The Old Testament kings Ahab and David are two prime examples of iron-rule followers: Ahab coveted Naboth’s vineyard and obtained it by force (1 Kings 21), and the otherwise godly David acquired another man’s wife in much the same way (2 Sam. 11).

There are many modern-day, iron-rule advocates; 1998 statistics of the FBI reveal that in this country there were 1,370,978 violent crimes. Of that number, 12,008 were murders, 65,574 were rapes, 318,994 were robberies, 974,402 were aggravated assaults.⁷

It is horrifying to realize that there are people in our society who had just as soon take your life as shake your hand! They have the sordid, iron-rule mentality.

One does not necessarily have to be a thief or a murderer to have an iron rule character. One who hates and/or oppresses his neighbor qualifies (1 John 3:15), as well as do those in the church who have the “Diotrephes complex” [rule or ruin—boss it or bust it (3 John 9-10)].

The Brass Rule

The brass rule is the “get even” philosophy—the rule of retaliation. It says, “Do unto others as they do unto you. I will treat you as you treat me—good for good, evil for evil.” This precept is both defended and practiced by many in the world, as well as by some in the church. The Scriptures clearly denounce such an attitude:

Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not...Recompense to no man evil for evil...Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written,

Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord
(Rom. 12:14; Rom. 12:17; Rom. 12:19).

The Silver Rule

The silver rule is the rule of Confucius, which says, “Do nothing unto others that you would not have them do unto you.” Hillel, the great Jewish rabbi, is reported to have taught the same concept. This is a negative rule that requires no good acts of mankind. This law forbids one’s murdering his neighbor, but it does not require his helping him. One cannot destroy flowers but need not plant any.

Many professed Christians are silver-rule followers; they stay out of mischief, but do no good. Some are like the rich young ruler of Matthew 19: they do not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, etc., but, on the other hand, they perform no good acts to help another. They lift no load; they bear no burden. They, like the priest and Levite, “pass by on the other side,” not willing to inflict pain, but not willing to lend a helping hand, either.

There is obviously no place in Christianity for the iron, silver, or brass rules. As Christ’s followers, we should advocate the golden rule and consistently live by this priceless principle:

Deal with another as you’d have
Another deal with you;
What you’re unwilling to receive,
Be sure you never do.⁸

The Context In Which The Golden Rule Is Found

Consider the background to the text. At the baptism of Jesus, His public ministry began, and He began His work. To carry out His responsibilities, He enlisted men who were His helpers and assistants. These were His apostles, and, in essence, His “right-hand men.” For the apostles’ work to be effective, they needed instruction as

to how they themselves should live and what message they should teach to others. Matthew chapters five through seven, the “Sermon on the Mount,” were an integral part of that instruction.

The Sermon on the Mount was not a lengthy sermon; from start to finish this three-chapter text can be read in only fifteen minutes. Preachers, a word to the wise: a sermon doesn’t have to be long to get the point across!

On November 19, 1863, two men came to Pennsylvania to dedicate a Union cemetery: one, the patriotic orator, Edward Everett, the other, our nation’s sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln. Everett spoke first, and waxed eloquent for one hour and fifteen minutes. Lincoln came to the podium and spoke for a grand total of only two minutes! However, history does not remember much of Everett’s speech, but it will never forget Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.⁹

The same can be said for the Sermon on the Mount. Certainly, longer sermons have been given, but the world will never forget this one. Neither should we! It’s short, it’s simple, it’s sincere, and it’s to the point. The lessons it contains are both superb and sublime. It is filled with beauty, with imagery, and has a power-packed conclusion.

This sermon tells us what it means to be truly righteous. It teaches that one cannot substitute the artificial for the authentic, fiction for fact, and that one cannot be hypocritical as were the scribes and Pharisees. The key to this grand sermon is Matthew 6:8, which in essence says, “Do not be like them!”

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus shifts from our vertical relationship with the Father to our horizontal one with our fellow man: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” To the surprise of some, Jesus was not the first to originate this teaching, but He was the

first to state it in a positive way. As one commentator remarks:

Much has been made by various commentators of the fact that the Golden Rule is found in a similar—but always negative—form elsewhere. Confucious, for example, is credited with having said, “Do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself;” and the Stoics had an almost identical maxim. In the Old Testament Apocrypha we find: “Do not do to anyone what you yourself would hate,” and this it seems, is what the famous Rabbi Hillel quoted in c. 20 BC when asked by a would-be proselyte to teach him the whole law while standing on one leg. His rival Rabbi Shammai had been unable or unwilling to answer, and had driven the enquirer away, but Rabbi Hillel said: “What is hateful to you, do not to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is only commentary.”¹⁰

While others said “Don’t,” Jesus says “Do.” With this positive approach, Jesus focused on activity, saying our lives should be characterized by doing positive, meaningful things to other people.

Having considered the background, now note the meaning of this verse. One must keep this verse, as well as all other verses, in context and consider its relationship to the preceding verses. By the use of “Therefore,” Jesus sums up the lesson of the primary context of Matthew 7:1-11. In consequence of what Christ has just said concerning unjust judgment, judging, and the proper attitude toward others with regard to giving, let the Golden Rule guide you in your daily life.¹¹

For instance, with regards to making judgments, I want to be given the benefit of the doubt. Therefore, since I am guided by the Golden Rule, I’ll give others the benefit of the doubt. I want to be considered innocent until proven guilty; therefore, I’ll consider others innocent until proven guilty. I do not want others jumping to conclusions about

me without having the facts; therefore, I won't jump to conclusions about others without having the facts. In essence, the Golden Rule tells me that, as I want others to have a proper attitude toward me, I'll have the proper attitude toward them.

But, not only is this verse related to the primary context of Matthew 7, it is also related to the overall remote context and tenor of Scripture as a whole. This maxim provides principles so universal that it can be used in virtually every one of life's situations. It causes us to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, to ask ourselves, "If I were him, how would I like to be treated?" Once we answer that question in our minds, we then are to act accordingly.

The Golden Rule is limited by the will of God. Jesus has been teaching God's will; any interpretation of this verse must be in harmony with that will. It would be an abuse of this verse to teach, "I want someone to lie, cheat, and steal for me; therefore, since I am guided by the Golden Rule, I will lie, cheat, and steal for him!" Any interpretation of this verse that would violate God's teachings as recorded elsewhere is a false interpretation; our understanding of this or any other Bible verse must be in harmony with overall Bible teaching.

The Golden Rule is just that—a rule, not a suggestion. It is not an optional matter; it is not a "take-it-or-leave-it" situation. It is a command that is just as vital and binding as any other command: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Thus, if I love Jesus, I'll treat others as I want to be treated (in harmony with His will).

Several years ago, a lady was murdered on a New York City street. The people who lived in the area heard her screams, but ignored them. Her attacker came and left several times, but the neighbors pulled down their windows to avoid hearing her cries. They refused to get involved; they didn't even call the police!¹² Had they been

in her situation, would they not have wanted help? One has to wonder if this poor soul might not be alive today, had her neighbors practiced the Golden Rule.

A similar situation occurred in St. Louis, Missouri. Three young thugs kicked and beat a female bus driver outside Busch Memorial Stadium. Hundreds of fans were leaving the stadium; they heard her screams, but again, no one stopped, no one offered to help her.¹³ Again, they did no personal harm to the lady, but neither did they offer to rescue her.

Jesus has a much higher standard by which He wants His people to be guided; we need a liberal application of the Golden Rule in today's homes, congregations, and in today's society!

Changes Which Would Occur If This Rule Were Applied Universally

In Our World And Nation

Society would be revolutionized; cities would be safe; crime statistics would plummet! Our government scratches its head, wondering how to lower the crime rate. Its answer? Build more prisons, tighten security, and pump millions of dollars into law enforcement agencies and rehabilitation programs. While such might deter crime, it would never solve the problems in the hearts of men as would the Golden Rule.

In Families

Drastic changes need to take place in some families, because many homes are in trouble; such also spells trouble for the nation. After all, "as goes the home, so goes the nation." One reason our country is being undermined is because the home is being undermined; one reason our country is in trouble is because the home is in trouble!

But, if everyone treated each other as they desire to be treated, both our families and nation would be in much better shape. Broken homes would end and mend, the high rate of divorce today would fall tomorrow, and spousal and child abuse would cease, as would countless other evils prevalent in some families. To see improvements in society, we need to see improvements in the home, and Jesus has the prescription for just that.

In The Church

The divisions that plague our brotherhood would cease. If those who claim to be Christians would act like Christians and adhere to this Christ-like principle—“treat others as you want to be treated”—the church would have less division, more unity; less talk, more work; and less cliques, more togetherness.

Since our world, our nation, our cities, our families, and Jesus’ church would be benefited, not only by following this aspect, but every aspect of God’s will, are we to believe the prejudiced propaganda of some who teach that the Bible is irrelevant, outdated, and antiquated? Has not Scripture helped rather than hurt? Yet, there are those who would ban and bar the Bible in this country—what a tragedy!

Our nation is in the sad shape that it is, not because it has followed the Bible, but because it has, to a large degree, ignored it. We cannot be “one nation under God” while running with the devil! Again, if there is to be a change in society, it will occur through those determined to follow God’s will and way—no other will do.

Indeed, if everyone followed the Golden Rule, what a much better world we would have! Someone might say, “Isn’t it unrealistic to think that all would one day abide by this teaching?” Perhaps it is. But, one thing is certain: our world will never adhere to nor apply this precept as

long as it sees Christians not practicing it. Thus, I must consider my life in view of this maxim.

**The Commitment The Golden Rule
Requires Of Me: Will I Conform To And
Comply With The Challenge?**

Will I be considerate of others? To treat others as we would like to be treated calls for this; we need to think how others are affected by our speech and actions. We should ask ourselves: "Would I like to be treated the way that I am treating this individual?" Far too many are like the little girl who was guilty of tattling on her brothers and sisters. When asked if she would like others to tattle on her, she replied, "No, that would be no fun." When asked why she constantly tattled, she answered, "Because that **is** fun!"

Although most can see the immaturity of such an attitude on her part, far too often we as adults and particularly Christians fail to see such immaturity and inconsideration in our own lives. We always want to be given the benefit of the doubt, to be considered innocent until proven guilty, but sometimes we are the very ones who are far too hasty in jumping to conclusions and presuppositions when it comes to the actions and attitudes of others. We want others to be patient with us as we try to overcome faults in our own lives, but do we exhibit that same amount of toleration with others? It is our desire that others come and speak to us directly if we have wronged them or sinned in some way, rather than spreading it throughout the community, but do we act accordingly toward them? Yes, we often expect the best out of everyone else, but do we expect that of ourselves?

Showing consideration toward others would go a long way toward putting a desired halt to evil surmising and suspicions, evil speaking, gossip, backbiting, abuse, harsh

and unjust criticism, and such like. We may also discover that the more considerate we are of others, the more considerate they are of us.

Will I be consistent in my lifestyle? We want others to set good examples; we should do likewise, realizing that Christianity is not limited to the first day of the week! One of the most scathing denunciations ever given by Christ was directed toward the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23). Of them, Jesus said to His disciples, “All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matt. 23:4). The scribes and Pharisees were condemned by Christ—labeled “hypocrites” no less than seven times in one chapter—because they said but did not do; they would not “practice what they preached.” Here were people who were inconsistent and were condemned because of it.

God demands that His people be consistent people. Let us be consistent in the words that we use; we will not praise a person to his face and then “stab him in the back.” Consistency in speech will help eliminate slander and other sins of the tongue. We need to be consistent people in our dress, realizing that God’s people dress decently and modestly regardless of the temperature and season of the year. We should be consistent in every walk of life, at all times and in all places, whether on a Sunday or Saturday, whether at home or in a distant land. May we be as consistent as was the apostle Paul, so that we can say as he did: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Will I confront and combat pride in my life? “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is difficult for the self-centered, conceited, proud egoist. He has a trying

time applying the Golden Rule to his life, since he is all wrapped up in himself. He seldom thinks of others, for his favorite words are **I, me, mine, and myself**.

If I am to be an adherent of the Golden Rule, I must eliminate pride from my life. Mine must be a selfless, not selfish, attitude, and I must have the mind of Christ:

Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:2-5).

How pure is the Golden Rule in your life? Is it solid gold? 18 karat gold? 10 karat gold? Is it simply gold overlay? Or, God forbid, is it just “fool’s gold”? We can purify the Golden Rule in our lives by being considerate of others, consistent in our lifestyle, and by confronting and combating pride in our lives.

Conclusion

Gold is valuable ore—make no mistake about it! It is currently worth several hundred dollars per ounce.¹⁴ However, the Golden Rule is a principle that you can’t begin to put a price tag on. These eighteen words set forth principles that no amount of money can buy: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matt. 7:12).

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 26

What Jesus Said About False Teachers/ False Doctrine

David Brown

Introduction

WHATEVER *JESUS CHRIST* HAS said about anything, mankind should be earnestly desirous to know it and live accordingly. Therefore, when He Who came to this sin-dominated world to save us from our sins has somewhat to say concerning false teachers and their doctrines, we should not hesitate to embrace it, believe it, and apply it in our daily conduct.

In these introductory remarks, I want to emphasize that it is very important to understand that the Devil works with all of his might through false teachers. They are his “change agents.” By the people’s reception of their false doctrines, they are kept from coming to, or are drawn away from, the Christian system (1 Tim. 4:1-7). Through their messages, they deceive, delude, and destroy the precious souls who believe and follow their pernicious ways. Of such people, Jeremiah declared, “I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err” (Jer. 23:13). In the New Testament Paul properly labeled false teachers as he

warned the brethren of them. He wrote, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision” (Phil. 3:2). Preceding this verse Paul let the Philippian brethren know that his warning was “not grievous.” To the contrary it was the “safe” course to follow (Phil. 3:1).

What is, therefore, the best way to deliver souls from the clutches of Satan’s henchmen? It is to reveal their true colors. In examining what Jesus said about false teachers and their false doctrines, we will see that they have certain distinguishing marks setting them apart from those who love, teach, and defend the Truth. Moreover, we will see how those who love the Lord and His Word should scripturally treat them.

Of Sheep And Wolves

This passage is found in the latter part of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had just finished emphasizing that the way to heaven is “strait” and “narrow.” The idea is that the way to heaven is hemmed in on all sides by Christ’s Word, wherein is located His authority (Matt. 28:18; Col. 3:17; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). It is God’s way or no way (John 14:6). Man, therefore, must divest himself of anything and everything that would hinder his walking in the way of God’s Truth—the Gospel (Rom. 1:16; Phil. 3:7).

With the “strait” and “narrow” aspect of the way to heaven entrenched in His hearers’ minds, Jesus brings up the subject of false prophets in Matthew 7:15. The fundamental idea found in the word “prophet” is that such a person is the spokesman of another. God’s prophets are His spokesmen, and Satan’s prophets speak for him—i.e., they are his “mouthpieces.”

Satan’s prophets look like sheep (God’s people), but in reality they teach doctrines that will keep one off, or lead one away from, the straitened way made strict by the

truth of God's authoritative Word (John 8:11; John 8:31-32; John 17:17; John 12:48). Of "sheep's clothing," J. W. McGarvey wrote:

By sheep's clothing we are to understand that they shall bear a gentle, meek and inoffensive outward demeanor; but they use this demeanor as a cloak to hide their real wickedness, and so effectually does it hide it that the false prophets often deceive even themselves.¹

In reality they are not only wolves, but also wolves of the worst kind; they are "ravaging wolves." Their hunger pangs are satisfied only when the sheep are devoured. By their false doctrines, they will tear, rend, and destroy persons in and out of the church. The only proper, permanent, and comprehensive defense against these spiritual bloodsuckers is a strong, steadfast, and obedient faith in God; His Christ; and God's Word, the Bible (Hos. 4:6; Eph. 6:14-18; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12). By a proper knowledge and application of God's Word to one's life, men can see the difference in the genuine article (God's teacher) and the counterfeit (Satan's spokesman).

Men-Pleasers

What we have studied thus far leads us to our **first** identifying mark of false teachers—**they are men-pleasers**. The fact that they pretend to be one of the sheep shows that they want to be accepted as a sheep by the sheep (God's own). Indeed, they must be fully accepted in order to sell their poisonous wares. When someone sells himself to another person, he has opened the door to sell that person just about anything he has. Therefore, false teachers outwardly represent themselves as sheep—they are in sheep's clothing. Their teaching is designed to get them on the good side of the sheep by telling them

what they desire to hear. He wants the sheep to identify with him, and he desires to identify with the sheep.

While the following is not true of all sheep, it is sadly true of many of them. There are those sheep looking for a way to think of themselves as faithful to God, while all the time doing what is not in harmony with the Will of Christ. They want what the false prophet has to offer, for they need to feel good about themselves while they engage in sin. They have “itching ears” that must be scratched (1 Tim. 4:3). Of such people, Isaiah wrote, “Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:10).

With humor and amusement, rather than with godly fear and reverence, false teachers deal with holy things. Thereby Ahab and Herod were destroyed. As Jeremiah declared:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you (Jer. 23:16-17).

Attractive Speeches And Golden Oratory

A **second** distinguishing mark of false teachers is a part of his “sheep’s clothing” ensemble—dangerous and soul-damning **doctrines dressed in attractive speeches and golden oratory**. Paul warned the church at Rome of and commanded them about false teachers. He wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the

doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

Mary Poppins sang, “Just a spoon full of sugar makes the medicine go down.” However, the same sentiment is equally, if not more true, regarding sugar-coated or flavored poison.

Hobby Riders

This brings us to a **third** distinguishing mark of a false teacher—**they strive earnestly to win men over to their hobbies**. To the Jewish leaders of His day, Christ declared, “Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when his is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt. 23:15). A “proselyte” was a Gentile who converted to serve and worship God as the Law of Moses directed. The Pharisees spared no efforts or pains to accomplish their goal. However, the Pharisees, by their false doctrines, turned a Gentile into another Pharisee, not a true servant of God. Of these Gentile converts, McGarvey wrote, “These become worse than their instructors, because each generation drifted further from the law and became more zealously and completely devoted to the traditions.”²

Neglecting The “Weightier” Matters Of The Law

A **fourth** identifying mark of a false teacher grows out of the previous point —**“weightier” matters of the Law are neglected and great emphasis and labor are put on and given to a certain view(s)**. Jesus said:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin,

and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Matt. 23:23).

One does not have to teach a false doctrine to be a false teacher. In his teaching he can neglect to teach all the counsel of God and thereby be guilty of the sin of omission. Some do not think of those who leave part of the Gospel of Christ out of their teaching as false teachers, but we should and must. The reason? Because we have been oriented to dealing with doctrine(s) that is (are) contrary to the Will of heaven, rather than truth left untaught. However, Paul declared to the Ephesian elders, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). Of some preachers and teachers of the first century, Paul wrote to Timothy, saying:

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling. Desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm (1 Tim. 1:5-7).

The sin of omission is seen in the elders who do not want the following things dealt with by the preacher, the members who love to have it so, and the preachers who will not preach on such subjects. Some of them are:

1. The whole truth on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.
2. The qualifications, authority, and work of elders.
3. The qualifications and work of deacons.
4. The sin of not contributing of our means.
5. Dancing is sin.
6. Immodesty of all kinds, including mixed swimming, is sin.

7. The sin of drinking beverage alcohol.
8. Gambling (playing the lottery, etc.) is sin.
9. The error found in secret fraternal orders.
10. Gossip is sin.
11. Tale-bearing is sin.
12. The sin of missing worship assemblies and Bible study.
13. The sin of not practicing church discipline.
14. The sin of not exposing false doctrines.
15. The sin of not naming and marking false teachers and their places of abode (colleges, papers, churches, and other organizations).
16. The sin of mechanical instruments of music.
17. The sin of women exercising dominion over men.
18. The sin of not teaching that the church of Christ is not a denomination.
19. Denominationalism is sin.
20. The sin of believing and teaching that all of life is worship.

On and on I could go listing topics on which certain preachers will not speak; certain elders will not allow the preachers to preach; and worldly, contentious, sectarian, denominational members who will cause all sorts of trouble when such is taught. Therefore, many churches are what they are due to what they have not heard from the pulpit and classrooms, as much as for what they have heard.

When some preachers speak on certain subjects, they are so vague and nebulous in their sermons that, if the audience can figure out what the subject, problem, or issue is, they have no idea of its source(s) and promoters. Please consider the following regarding being understood:

And we are also reminded of Lord Darlington's remark to the duchess in **Lady Windermere's Fan**. The Duchess: "Do, as a concession to my poor wits, Lord Darlington, just explain to me what you really mean." "I think I had better not," answers the lord; "nowadays to be intelligible is to be found out."³

As one church member said of their preacher: “Our preacher is comparable to a big league baseball pitcher—he winds up and throws a curve around the whole congregation.” To compound the problem, many elders are looking for just such a pitcher—I mean, preacher.

How does God view such elders, preachers, and members, as previously noted? Paul revealed God’s attitude toward them when he wrote to Timothy. He declared:

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Indeed, such false teachers are hypocrites of the first order (Rom. 2:21-22).

False Teachers Throw Dirt

A **fifth** identifying mark of false teachers is the fact that **they cast all manner of scorn, reproach, and persecution on faithful church members, elders, and preachers**. The scribes and Pharisees treated Jesus harshly (Matt. 27:63). This was their response to the truth He taught them:

And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:16-18).

However, Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matt. 5:10-12). And Paul told Timothy, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Then he continued saying, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). This is the path down which all false teachers go because they do not love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Remember the charge of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against Moses and Aaron. Of Moses and Aaron, they said, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3). They leveled unfounded charges against Moses and Aaron. God had put Moses and Aaron in their respective places of authority. Thus, to oppose God's men was tantamount to opposing God. These ancient rebels learned the hard way and too late that God is not mocked and that one reaps what he sows (Numbers 16:4ff; Gal. 6:7).

When Micaiah told the truth to Ahab about going to war at Ramoth-gilead, Zedekiah hit the prophet on the cheek. Following more words of truth from Micaiah to Ahab, the king commanded that Micaiah be put "in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace." Micaiah responded by saying that, if Ahab returned in peace, then God had not spoken by him (1 Kings 22:15-28). Of Paul, those false teachers who troubled the church at Corinth said, "For his letters are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). Thus, it is abundantly clear that false teachers will persecute those who love, live, teach, and defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

False Teachers Are Deceptive

A **sixth** identifying mark of false teachers is that **they are never what they seem to be**. In beginning His sermon, wherein He gave the signs that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ told the disciples, “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matt. 24:4). Later in the chapter, He pointed out that, before the destruction of Jerusalem, “there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24). Paul warned:

And no marvel: for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:14-15).

Peter, who was with Jesus on the Mount of Olives when our Lord delivered His discourse of Matthew 24, later wrote to Christians, saying:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways: by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgement now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

Men have the responsibility before God not to allow false teachers to deceive them. Jesus has forewarned us so that we might be forearmed against false teachers. He said:

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:16-21).

When one knows his rightly divided Bible, then he knows the true doctrine of Christ (2 Tim. 2:15; John 8:31-32; John 17:17; 1 John 2:3-5; 1 John 5:2-3; John 12:48). Anything, therefore, no matter its origin, that is contrary to the Truth of God's Word is a counterfeit—it is bad fruit. It is not to be followed. Paul penned, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). We, therefore, must reject all those who teach any false doctrine. Thus, our Lord made fruit inspection a part of faithful Christian living.

Jesus commanded, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:17). How does one engage in "righteous judgment"? Here is the answer. David said that all of God's "commandments are righteousness" (Psm. 119:172). Therefore, in order to judge "righteous judgment," one must discern all things in the light of God's Word. As Paul wrote, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Seven hundred years earlier, Isaiah declared, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). John echoed the great Messianic prophet when he wrote to Christians, saying, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are

gone out into the world” (1 John 4:10). Furthermore, Jesus commended the church at Ephesus when he said, “and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Rev. 2:2). One does not have to be deceived. Before God he has the obligation not to be deceived. And if he is deceived, it is his own fault! God has given us the wherewithal so that we can escape the deception of false teachers.

False Teachers Are Covetous

A **seventh** distinguishing mark of false teachers is that, **through covetousness, they make merchandise of or exploit their followers**. In Luke’s account of our Lord’s teaching about the unjust steward, He concluded, “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). The next verse is quite revealing regarding the Pharisees. It reads, “And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him” (Luke 16:14). If, as the old song goes, “love and marriage goes together like a horse and carriage,” then false teachers and covetousness go together like Ahab and Jezebel, Ananias and Sapphira, or Bill and Hillary. Covetousness is a part of the false teachers’ agenda. It is one of the reasons that they seek to deceive people. I have previously quoted 2 Peter 2:1-3. Therein Peter points out that false teachers say whatever is necessary to swindle their followers out of their money. False teachers are far more interested in one’s goods than one’s good. Of them, Jeremiah wrote: “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness, and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealth falsely” (Jer. 6:13).

False Teachers Conjure Up Their Own Views

The **eighth** and final distinguishing mark of false teachers in this study is that **they conjure up their own views**. As one fellow said to his friend regarding from where a third person's doctrine came, "He got it out of the Bible." The response of the friend to the remark was, "Yes, way out of the Bible." In one of the Sadducees' attempts to trap Jesus, they said:

Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her (Matt. 22:24-28).

The preceding passage of Scripture gives us as good an example of an effort to wrest the Scriptures to support an assumption as one can find in the pages of the Bible. It sets out how far false teachers will go in an attempt to hold on to their false doctrine(s). The Sadducees did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection (Acts 23:8). The previous quote from Matthew of the Sadducees is built upon their assumption that, in the resurrection, marriage as instituted in the Bible and regulated by the Law of Moses would continue. We may be sure that the Sadducees thought that this was a strong argument with which the Lord could not deal. (It causes one to wonder how the Pharisees dealt with it.) Of course, the Lord dispensed with it easily. He said:

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as

touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:29-32).

In eighty-two words (if my count is correct) in the King James Version, the Lord proved the Sadducees wrong regarding spirits, angels, and the resurrection. And in the same economy of words, Jesus made it clear why they were wrong as well as set out the truth on each subject. We are not surprised at the response of the multitude to His answer to the Sadducees—“they were astonished at his doctrine” (Matt. 22:33).

Of the false teachers of his day, Jeremiah declared:

Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart (Jer. 14:14).

Later, of them, he said:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord (Jer. 23:16).

Conclusion

Every person today who claims a direct revelation from God is a liar. They are deluded and filled with fantasies that make Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, and Harry Potter wrapped into one golden fabrication pale into insignificance. From Mormons to Pentecostals to Muslims to Buddhists to Hindus to every denomination, and everything in between, men work hard to avoid the

simplicity of Bible teaching. They seek their own way, a way that will end in destruction (Prov. 14:12).

Lip service is given to the Bible as God's Word and, in many cases, it suffers more at the hands of those who claim to be its friends than from those who are its avowed enemies. Human standards are substituted for the Word of God. And why is this the case? Because, of the many who praise God and Christ, they, by their disobedience to His Will, demonstrate a great lack of love, faith, and respect for the Doctrine of Christ.

Throughout the church of Christ, men are doing in the name of Christ every conceivable thing for which they have no Bible authority. Indeed, they have repudiated the authority of the Bible as well as those of us who call for Bible authority in everything that we believe and practice (Col. 3:17). They know that the apostle John (the apostle of love) wrote:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

However, such false teachers and unfaithful, apostate brethren do not care what such Scriptures teach! Indeed, what do they care that our Lord has said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15)?

Some have bound where God in His Word has not bound, while a greater host have, by their false doctrines, loosed men from what God has bound on them. Of such wicked people, Jude wrote:

Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of

Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever (Jude 11-13).

In our day, Jude's words are describing the Rubel Shelleys, Max Lucados, Steve Flatts, F. LaGard Smiths, and their "kissing kin," along with the various universities operated by the brethren, and their papers, churches, and other productions. A deaf ear is turned to most of us as we continue to sound out the warning. However, as God said to the faithful prophet Ezekiel concerning apostate Israel, even so it is with some of us. God said:

But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house (Ezek. 3:7-9).

Jesus knows how to get us to heaven. He also knows what and who will keep us out, if we allow them to do so. He expects us to weather the storms of life by adhering faithfully to His Word (Rev. 2:10). In view of what our Lord has done for us that we could never do for ourselves, we must listen to Him and apply what he said in all things to our lives, but especially what Jesus said about false teachers and their doctrines (1 Cor. 15:58). As John wrote:

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a

commandment from the Father...And this is love, that we walk after his commandments...For many deceivers are entered into the world (2 John 4ff).

Endnotes

1 J. W. McGarvey & Philip Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing), p. 266.

2 Ibid, p. 608.

3 Lionel Ruby, **The Art of Making Sense** (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1954), p. 57.

CHAPTER 27

What Jesus Said About Evangelism

Jason Roberts

Introduction

EVERY WORD THAT FELL from the lips of our Lord is of paramount importance. What He said and the manner in which He presented it was done with such precision and perfection that it frequently elicited an amazing response within the hearts of His hearers (Matt. 7:28).¹ Some were even astonished beyond “measure” by the things which He spoke (Mark 10:26).

When one compares the brevity of our Lord’s earthly ministry with the tremendous impact His words have had on mankind down through the centuries, there is something to be said about the extreme value of what our Lord spoke. How many people are familiar with the rich truths contained within the beatitudes as our Lord commenced His marvelous Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-12)? Or how many people still treasure the timely truth of practicing the golden rule, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matt. 7:12)? And who among us has not been touched by the sweetness of Christ’s words, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but

have everlasting life” (John 3:16)? Indeed many of the sayings of Jesus have sunk deep into our ears, yea even into our hearts!

Unfortunately not **all** of the sayings of Jesus have sunk deeply into our ears and hearts. It is the purpose of this study to investigate one of these sayings of Jesus—specifically, what He said about evangelism.

A Fundamental Truth

Since the Bible contains the complete and final revelation of God to man (2 Tim. 3:16; Jude 3), it necessarily follows that whatever the Lord said concerning evangelism is sufficient to (1) **convince one to believe that Christ is God’s Son** (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6; John 8:24), (2) **convict one of sin in his life** (Acts 2:37), (3) **challenge one to forsake sin and follow his Master** (Matt. 16:24; Luke 13:3), and (4) **convert one from his past sins** (Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19). Yes, God’s Word “shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11)!

That being the case, one need not consult the latest evangelistic book on the market to determine how to evangelize the lost. Neither does one have to attend a weekend seminar to listen to the “church growth experts” tell us how to evangelize the community. This is not to suggest that there are not any valuable books or seminars available to assist us in our evangelistic efforts. However, if one only had the Bible at his disposal, would he have the necessary information to evangelize his local community as well as the rest of the world? The answer is a resounding yes. Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., has well said:

All attempts to update or modernize the gospel
are NOT the equivalents of New Testament

evangelism. The gospel is perfect as given. It has been adapted to man as God made him. The Maker of men knew what was needed and gave it. Those who are MADE (men) do not know what they need. Man frequently errs; God never fails or falters in the realm of right and true. We do NOT need a new gospel for modern man for modern man is still a sinner and the Jerusalem gospel heard and heeded alone can save him from his sins (Romans 1:16,17).²

May we now turn our attention to the Master Evangelist Himself, Jesus Christ, as we let His sayings on evangelism sink down into our ears (Luke 9:44).

The Great Commission Stated

All four of the Gospel writers say something about the Great Commission. Excluding John's brief statement recorded in John 20:22-23, we will focus primarily on Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's accounts of the Great Commission. Matthew records:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

Mark's account states:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they

shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (Mark 16:15-20).

Luke’s account says:

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high (Luke 24:44-49).

The Great Commission Harmonized

When one combines all three accounts of the Great Commission, one is quickly impressed with how beautifully harmonized they are. The chart below clearly shows this to be the case.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
“Go ye” (v. 19)	“Go ye” (v. 15)	“but tarry ye” (v. 49)
“teach all nations” (v. 19)	“preach the gospel to every creature” (v. 15)	“preached among all nations” (v. 47)
“baptizing them” (v. 19)	“He that believeth and is baptized” (v. 16)	“repentance and remission of sins” (v. 47)
“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (v. 19)	“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name” (v. 17)	“should be preached in his name” (v. 47)
“and, lo, I am with you always” (v. 20)	“the Lord working with them” (v. 20)	“I send the promise of my Father upon you” (v. 49)

The Great Commission Analyzed

Background And Occasion

Jesus had been crucified, buried, and resurrected in accordance with Scripture (Isa. 53:1-12; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Word quickly spread to His distraught disciples that the tomb was now empty. Immediately the devoted Mary and Mary Magdalene were instructed by an angel to tell the disciples to meet the risen Lord in Galilee (Matt. 28:5-10). The disciples followed their instructions: “And when they saw him, they worshipped him: **but some doubted**” (Matt. 28:17, emp. mine throughout, JR). H. Leo Boles comments, “Thomas may have been one of the doubters; at this time all doubts had not been removed. The disciples were slow in comprehending the full significance of his resurrection.”³ Once the doubt had been removed from the eleven disciples’ hearts, they were now ready for the greatest challenge the Lord ever issued—namely the challenge of evangelizing the world!

Why The Great Commission Was Given

The question of why the Great Commission was given can be summed up in one statement. **The world is lost!** John wrote, “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). It is this same wicked world for which Jesus shed His blood and died (John 3:16).

It staggers the mind when one contemplates the current world population, which is estimated to be now over six billion people. Every one of these individuals has housed within their bodies something that is infinitely worth more than the whole world (Matt. 16:26)—a soul. These precious souls will live on long after their bodies die and will reside in one of two places—heaven or hell (Eccl. 12:7; Matt. 25:46). The eternal destiny of these souls is directly tied to the Great Commission—as the church

spreads the seed of the Kingdom as far and wide as possible (Luke 8:11). Since Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25), the apostles were commissioned to carry the life-saving message of the cross to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). The church today has the same vital task of carrying the Gospel to every creature, as did the apostles and early church.

Walter Scott, the esteemed restoration preacher, beautifully captured the very essence of world evangelism, in these illustrious words:

Go is a verb in the imperative mood. It is not simply indicative and declarative. It does not merely state a fact, but enjoins a duty, "Go ye into all the world," to Europe, to Africa, to America, and to all the islands of the sea. Leave your footprints on the snows of frozen north. Trace out your pathways in the flowery pampas of the balmy south. Seek the setting sun, the far west, the wild prairies and the wildest men that inhabit them. Search out the lands of figs and dates, the lands of vines and olives. Tread over the golden sands and along the rivers gleaming with diamonds and gold far, far away. Go to those who water their steeds in the Rhine; to those who bathe in the Nile and the Niger, the sacred Ganges, Indus, Brahamaputra and Irrawaddi. Go to the ends of the earth for your success will be the ratio of your mobility. Words are God's daughters and works are man's sons: to be fruitful they must be married to each other.⁴

Reactions To The Great Commission

The book of Acts chronicles in detailed and thrilling fashion the way that the apostles reacted to the Great Commission. **First, the apostles took the Great Commission to heart.** They obeyed exactly what the Lord commissioned them to do: (1) **they were in the right location—Jerusalem** (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:4; Acts 1:8), (2) **they waited for the right moment—baptism of Holy Spirit** (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), and (3) **they preached the**

right message—repentance, baptism and remission of sins (Luke 24:47; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

Second, the apostles took the heart of the Great Commission to the whole world: “and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Below is a chart which details how the Gospel started in Jerusalem, spread throughout Judaea, reached Samaria and eventually made its way to the uttermost part of the earth—exactly as the Lord had directed.

Jerusalem

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, **and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem**” (Acts 2:14).

Judea

“and they were scattered abroad **throughout the regions of Judea**” (Acts 8:1).

Samaria

“Then Phillip went down to **the city of Samaria** and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5).

Uttermost

“the angel of the Lord spake unto Phillip... Arise and **go toward the south...unto Gaza**” (Acts 8:26).

What Jesus Said About Evangelism Was Divine In Origin

Jesus did not originate His message within Himself. What He spoke came directly from God. Jesus said:

For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life eternal: the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto me, so I speak (John 12:49-50).

Hence, it should come as no surprise to see Matthew’s account of the Great Commission begin in this way: “And

Jesus came to them **and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth**" (Matt. 28:18, ASV). His work and His words were orchestrated by God. Thus Jesus could say, as the shadow of the cross was hovering over His path, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work **which thou gavest me to do**" (John 17:4).

Constantly, when Jesus was engaged in evangelism, He directed His hearers to the origin of the salvation that He was offering them. When Jesus encountered the woman at the well (John 4), He soon directed her attention to "the gift of God" (John 4:10; cf. Rom. 6:23).

On one occasion Jesus cast an unclean spirit out of a man (Mark 1:23-26). Consequently, His fame immediately began to spread abroad (Mark 1:28). Jesus then entered the house of Simon and Andrew, where He healed Simon's wife's mother of a fever (Mark 1:29-31). That evening, multitudes were at the door desiring to be healed of their infirmities (Mark 1:33ff). The next morning, Jesus retired to a solitary place to pray. While He was in the midst of praying, "Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee" (Mark 1:36-37). The response of Jesus is startling and tremendously significant: "And he saith unto them, Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also; **for to this end came I forth**" (Mark 1:38, ASV). In other words Jesus was saying, "My main purpose in life is to preach and save the lost." An interesting question arises. Why did the Lord leave these people who were seeking Him for physical relief? Did He not care about them? Note carefully the following pertinent lessons that should answer these questions: (1) **Jesus never veered from His mission in seeking and saving the lost.** Had Jesus focused primarily on the elimination of physical suffering, His mission would have

been thwarted. It should be noted that the time of selecting the men who would be called the Lord's disciples was drawing near. What kind of impression would He have left in their hearts regarding His mission, if they saw Him focusing primarily on relieving the physical ailments of the people? (2) **Jesus left the physical needs of the people to satisfy the spiritual needs of others.** There is a greater hunger within man, a hunger that can only be satisfied with the Word of God (Matt. 4:4; cf. John 6:27). Unfortunately, twenty-first-century evangelism focuses primarily on satisfying the physical needs of man, while the spiritual needs of man (which are far more important) go untouched. The tragedy is that far too many churches have adopted program after program and gimmick after gimmick whose primary aim is designed to keep up with the entertainment-driven society in which we live. Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., hit the nail on the head when he wrote:

We live in an age where people prefer fun over faith, the lake over the Lord, things over the truth, sports over the Saviour, gadgets over God, gimmicks over the gospel, laughter over the Lord, recreation over redemption and entertainment over edification. Will any deny it? If so, on what grounds? Such warped concepts have entered the church in full force and are being grasped as new saviours among us today. Forty-five minutes for a sermon on salvation or a lesson on the Lord on Sunday morning will quickly stir the ire of many members but three hours of football Sunday afternoon on TV is not really enough and certainly not too much at all for an avid devotee of the game. Going across a county line or even to the next town in one's county to attend a gospel meeting would be unthinkable to many of our members but driving three hundred miles to see one's favorite team play in heat or in snow is fine. And have you noticed that the night air does not bother, that hard bleacher seats bring no complaints and having

to park a mile from the stadium and walk prompt no grumbling at all? The bottom lines of it all are really what we love to do, where we desire to be, really where our hearts are, etc...Love for recreation and entertainment is what is back of church entanglements in family life centers and the like. We have to do it to attract people we are told. And pray tell what will hold them when once attracted? MORE OF THE SAME! And if some other group serves a better hamburger, a better breakfast, has a finer gymnasium or more expensive door prizes and more cash under the lucky seat, they will congregate there with a rapidity that is amazing indeed!⁵

There are several deductions that can be drawn from a recognition of the Divine origin of what our Lord said concerning evangelism. (1) **We have a perfect pattern for evangelism today.** Since God is perfect, and has given us a perfect and complete revelation of His will (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jude 3), we have a precise blueprint for our evangelistic efforts today. (2) **We do not have the authority to alter this perfect pattern for evangelism** (Prov. 30:6; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19).

What Jesus Said About Evangelism Was Authoritative In Nature

Matthew records, "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, **All authority** hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18, ASV). Three truths come to light as we consider the authoritative aspect of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission Contains An Element Of Urgency

Go ye therefore (Matt. 28:19).

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say

not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest (John 4:34-35).

Why is carrying out the Great Commission such an urgent matter from God's viewpoint?

First, precious souls are headed for spiritual destruction. Paul wrote these haunting words:

when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46).

The inspired Jude recognized the urgency behind rescuing those who are lost: "And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 22-23).

Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, Lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.

A preacher named William Booth was once approached by a devout atheist who made this taunting statement, which later rekindled Booth's desire to be evangelistic:

If I believe what you Christians say you believe about a coming judgment, and that impenitent rejectors of Christ will be lost, I would crawl on my bare knees on crushed glass all over London, warning men, night and day, to flee for refuge from the coming day of wrath.⁶

Second, the brevity of life beckons us to be urgent about evangelizing the lost. Jesus frequently stressed the urgency of evangelism by reminding His hearers of the brevity of life: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). Someone has well illustrated the brevity of life with these words: “Man’s body is born for time; his spirit for eternity. The moment he walks through the door marked ‘life’ he immediately begins a hasty exit toward the door marked ‘death.’” Truly, like sand in the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.

The fleeting days of man’s life are vividly described as: (1) **“swifter than a weaver’s shuttle”** (Job 7:6), (2) **a brief story (tale) “that is told”** (Psm. 90:9), (3) **“water spilt on the ground”** (2 Sam. 14:14), (4) **the distance between two steps** (1 Sam. 20:3), (5) **a “shadow that declineth”** (Psm. 102:11), (6) **“grass” and a “flower” in the field** (Psm. 103:15; 1 Pet. 1:24), and (7) **“a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away”** (Jas. 4:14). With these sobering truths in mind, let us put the “Go” back in the Gospel!

Third, the earthly joy of seeing one pass from death to life urges us to be evangelistic. The Psalmist declared:

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him (Psm. 126:5-6).

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them...And there was great joy in that city...But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women...And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the

eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:5; Acts 8:8; Acts 8:12; Acts 8:39).

Nothing can bring greater joy to the human heart than to see someone obey the Gospel of Christ. What parent does not shed tears of rejoicing the moment that their son or daughter rises from a watery grave of baptism? This writer vividly remembers the evening he was baptized and shall never forget what his father said to him as he embraced him: “Satan lost another one.” And may we add to that, “Christ gained another one.” Indeed heaven itself is directly affected whenever a sinner repents: “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:7).

The Great Commission Contains An Element Of Contingency

Mark’s account of the Great Commission reads in part, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). The “shall be saved” is contingent upon one who (1) believes and (2) is baptized. In other words, the person who shall be saved must meet the conditions of believing and being baptized. The esteemed Guy N. Woods constructed the following chart, which he often used in many of his debates:

Water Baptism⁷

1. Stands between the sinner and salvation (Mark 16:16).
2. Stands between the sinner and remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
3. Stands between the sinner and washing (Acts 22:16).
4. Stands between the sinner and calling (Acts 22:16).
5. Stands between the sinner and death of Christ (Rom. 6:3).
6. Stands between the sinner and becoming a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

7. Stands between the sinner and putting on Christ (Gal. 3:27).
8. Stands between the sinner and cleansing (Eph. 5:26).
9. Stands between the sinner and sanctification (Eph. 5:26).
10. Stands between the sinner and putting away sins (Col. 2:11-12).
11. Stands between the sinner and the new life in Christ (Eph. 2:6).
12. Stands between the sinner and quickened with Christ (Eph. 2:5).
13. Stands between the sinner and forgiveness (Col. 1:13).
14. Stands between the sinner and the kingdom (John 3:5).
15. Stands between the sinner and blood of Christ (John 19:34).
16. Stands between the sinner and a good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21).
17. Stands between the sinner and promise through Christ (Acts 2:39).
18. Stands between the sinner and the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).
19. Stands between the sinner and salvation (1 Pet. 3:21).
20. Stands between the sinner and sonship (Gal. 3:26-27).

It is hard to fathom how anyone can examine the above chart and still believe that baptism is not essential to salvation! More so, it is hard to fathom that some among us (who know better) no longer believe in the essentiality of water baptism for the remission of one's sins.

The Great Commission Contains An Element Of Dependency

Matthew's account of the Great Commission states:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and

of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: **and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.** Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

The apostles, to whom this charge was given, were not on their own as they went forth to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. They were dependent upon the providential assistance of Christ Himself. It must have been encouraging to them to know that Christ, though now occupying His position at the right hand of God, was vitally interested in assisting them in their evangelistic endeavors. Remember that, right after the Great Commission was given, the record says, “And they went forth, and preached every where, **the Lord working with them**” (Mark 16:20, emp. added). It is true that the Lord was working with them in a miraculous sense as the Word of God was being confirmed, but He was also with them in a special sense (providentially) as they embarked on the Great Commission.

The apostles’ remembrance of the Lord’s promise to be with them is threaded throughout the book of Acts. For example, after Peter and John healed the lame man (Acts 3:1-12), they were threatened by the council and were

commanded...not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:18-20).

After being threatened again, Peter and John left and reported to their own company what had happened to them (Acts 4:23). The brethren then prayed on behalf of Peter and John. Included in their prayer were these remarkable words showing that God was near to assist them—just as Christ had promised:

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: **and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word...**And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, **and they spake the word of God with boldness** (Acts 4:29; Acts 4:31).

On one occasion, the apostle Paul had been abandoned by his earthly co-worker, Demas (2 Tim. 4:10); Alexander the coppersmith had done him much evil (2 Tim. 4:14); and only Luke was now with him (2 Tim. 4:11). In the midst of his loneliness he wrote:

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me...**Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me**; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

Today, faithful preachers and teachers have the blessed assurance of a God Who is always available to assist them—providentially speaking—as they labor for His cause: “For we are labourers together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9).

What Jesus Said About Evangelism Was Specific In Detail

Mark’s account of the Great Commission reads, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16).

Since Christ has all authority, He has the Divine prerogative to specifically outline the details contained within the Great Commission. A diagram of the details of Mark 16:15-16 is as follows:

(1) the **obligation**—“Go,” (2) the **sphere**—“into all the world,” (3) the **design**—“preach the gospel,” (4) the **extent**—“to every creature,” (5) the **conditions**—belief and baptism, (6) the **blessing**—“shall be saved,” and (7) the **alternative**—“shall be damned.”⁸

Conclusion

What our Lord said about evangelism was: (1) **Divine In Origin**, (2) **Authoritative In Nature**, and (3) **Specific In Detail**. There is to be no **omission** in the **Great Commission**. May the church recognize the awesome task of evangelizing the world in every generation. And may we all be soberly reminded that the world cannot be **evangelized** until the Great Commission is first **internalized**. May we all let these challenging sayings sink down into our ears—yea, our hearts!

Endnotes

1 All Scripture citations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

2 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., “Evangelism: Misconceptions And Conceptions,” **The Evangelistic Church**, ed. Eddie Whitten (Fort Worth, TX: Christian Supply Center, 1984), p. 77.

3 H. Leo Boles, **A Commentary on The Gospel According To Matthew** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989), p. 562.

4 Andrew M. Connally, “The Church—And Its World-Wide Mission,” **The Church—The Beautiful Bride Of Christ**, eds. Garland Elkins & Thomas B. Warren (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian, 1980) p. 37.

5 Taylor, pp. 71-72.

6 Paul Lee Tant, **Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations** (Dallas: Bible Communications, 1998), p. 2692.

7 Guy N. Woods, “Debating Notes on The Design of Water Baptism,” **Shall We Know One Another In Heaven?** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1988), pp. 211-212.

8 Ibid, p. 206.

CHAPTER 28

**What Jesus Said About
Marriage, Divorce,
And Remarriage**

Keith Mosher, Sr.

Preface

M*Y GRATITUDE GOES TO* elders Pierce, Lambert, and Everson for again hosting the Power Lectures and for this **vital** theme. B. J. Clarke showed me a list of topics and asked me to choose one, and I opted for Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. No other subject engenders so much emotion and controversy, and none other engenders more eruptions and, yes, even church splits. Having preached for a local, northeast Mississippi congregation for three and one-half years whose eldership was split on this issue has given me a good insight into the nuances of the errors taught on this issue. A book, penned by one of those Mississippi elders, is used in this essay as a kind of "devil's advocate" to the truth taught in Scripture.¹

May God bless this year's lectureship and brother Clarke's direction. Too, may all who read the Bible and believe what God has said about the home and marriage **never** divorce and **never** defraud their mates.

Introduction

Marriage is Divine in its origin, having been arranged and instituted by God (Gen. 1:26-28; Gen. 2:18-25). Jesus insisted that the original arrangement be maintained:

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan; And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it (Matt. 19:1-12).²

There, marriage is not some experimental project but a **real** relationship which God endorses (Matt. 19:6). This

essay will attempt a Biblical investigation of **God's** laws of marriage, divorce, and remarriage as stated by the Second Person of the Godhead while He was on earth.

The Divine Arrangement

Some ancient Pharisees, interested only in testing Jesus, asked, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matt. 19:3). Jesus insisted that God had already spoken on the matter: "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female?" (Matt. 19:4). The Pharisees had their answer. God intended, from the onset, that **one** man and **one** woman would be wed for their lifetimes and would never rend the union (Matt. 19:6). The vows taken by the two, according to God's plan, could **not** be broken by age nor by the changes in life (Mal. 2:14-16). Since a male or female (not a male and male nor female and female) were wed for **life**, only when one ceased to be a male or female could the other remarry.

There is a moment when a male stops being a male and a female stops being a female—when he or she dies (Matt. 22:30). As Paul wrote it, when a mate dies, the other is free from "the law" of his or her spouse (Rom. 7:1-3). Therefore, a widow or widower is free to remarry, but only according to God's laws of marriage.

To maintain the one male, one female arrangement for life, **two** laws are given by the Christ: (1) one is to **leave** father and mother, and (2) one is to **cleave** to one's spouse (Matt. 19:5). The latter two laws are too often violated in today's world.

Sociologists are convinced that young people today in America are still adolescents even though they have reached their twenties.³ In fact, many young people are returning to Mom's and Dad's home even after college.⁴ Yet God said that the male **and** female must be ready to

leave father and mother in order to be married. God wants **adults** to form the marriage bond, but He does **not** want children to wed.⁵ Since children are to honor their fathers and mothers, especially when the parents are aged and infirm (Mark 7:10-13), leaving the parents must involve a departure **emotionally, financially, and responsibly**.

A male desiring to wed **must** be ready to be the spiritual leader of a new family (Eph. 5:23). He **must** be the provider, protector, and lover of his wife, and not be some kind of married bachelor intent on keeping his boyhood lifestyle of fun and games. A female desiring to wed **must** be ready to follow her husband as his complement, no longer tied to mother's apron strings and no longer dad's "little girl" who runs home every time there is a problem (Eph. 5:22). A new home must be developed by the two **adults** who are working together. Every couple desiring to wed should make sure that there are at least three bridges between them and their in-laws and should burn down two of them!

Not only is there a **leaving** necessary, but also there is a **cleaving** (Matt. 19:5). The two must be **glued** to one another and realize the mutual obligations of marriage (cf. Eph. 5:22-23). Men and women have different ways of processing information and, therefore, different needs. She operates from emotion first, and, therefore, God instructs the male to **love** her (Eph. 5:25). He, however, functions in a more logical world and needs to be revered (Eph. 5:33). The husband, in essence, must continue a lifetime of "dating" his wife, and the wife must continue to "look up" to her husband. In fact she sets the tone in every home as to whether there is respect for the male by her and any children born to the union (Tit. 2:1-5). Sadly, many husbands live in their own boyish worlds and never take the time necessary to nurture the wife, and many wives, emotionally starved, seek someone else to admire or simply

grow cold in the marriage. Jesus' instructions were for a lifetime of **cleaving** to one another so that the two would become one flesh in a sweet and loving relationship (Matt. 19:5).

Marriage occurs legally when a couple obeys the laws of the land and secures the blessing of the state (1 Pet. 2:13). Marriage occurs spiritually when a couple **leaves** home, **cleaves** to each other, and vows before God and the state never to break the bond (Matt. 19:5). No physical union is absolutely necessary to "consummate" the marriage, for when **pronounced** husband and wife, they **are** (Heb. 13:4). God honors such vows and hates any putting away (Mal. 2:14-16).

What Is Divorce?

Webster defines divorce as "a legal dissociation of a marriage, separation; severance."⁶ Wallace wrote that divorce was the "legal dissolution of the marriage bond; a separation that renders null and void the marriage relation."⁷ The Biblical terms are putting away (Mal. 2:16), put away (Ezra 10:3; Matt. 5:31-32; Matt. 19:9; Mark 10:11; 1 Cor. 7:10-12), putteth away (Luke 16:18), put asunder (Matt. 19:6), depart [either legal separation or divorce] (1 Cor. 7:10-11; 1 Cor. 7:15), and leave (1 Cor. 7:13). The Greek terms are the following.⁸ (1) *Apoluo* (release, put away, divorce (Matt. 19:3; Matt. 19:7-9; Matt. 5:31-32; Mark 10:2-4; Mark 10:11-12). The term *apoluo* is used sixty-nine times in the New Testament and, when this departure is applied to marriage, the term indicates a legal divorce. (2) *Apostasion* (divorcement) at Matthew 9:7 and Mark 10:4 and (writing of divorcement) at Matthew 5:31. (3) *Choridzoo* (depart) at 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 7:15 and (put asunder) at Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9. Since *choridzoo* is used at 1 Corinthians 7:10 and is translated "depart," some have wondered if the discussion in this

latter passage only refers to a separation. However, Paul uses *aphiemai* at 1 Corinthians 7:11, and the latter is defined as a “legal divorce.” The careful student will note that the departed one became **unmarried** (1 Cor. 7:11).

Divorce or rending asunder of the marriage bond is **always** the result of **sin** by one or both parties involved (Matt. 19:6). Since **God** joined the two, only God can decide about the separation. As noted above, remarriage can occur if a spouse dies and the remaining partner cares to wed again (Rom. 7:1-4). Divorced folks, however, are **not** free to remarry, except for **one** cause, and those who do divorce need to ask God’s forgiveness for destroying the bond.

The One Exception

When the Pharisees approached Jesus, testing Him, their question was, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” (Matt. 19:3). The “lawful” part of the question refers to Mosaic legislation and the “for a man” also points to that ancient law, for women had no legal avenue to divorce during the Jewish age. [But Jesus, as did Paul, included the woman’s right under New Testament law (Mark 10:12; 1 Cor. 7:10-13).] The phrase “for any cause” seems to refer to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and, according to the Mishnah (codified rabbinic law), the rabbis were divided as to the cause for divorce:

The school of Shammai says, A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written [Deut. 24:1, KM] “Because he hath found in her indecency in anything.” And the school of Hillel says for it is written “Because he hath found in her indecency in anything.” R. Akiba says: Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written [Deut. 24:1, KM] And it shall be if she finds no favor in his eyes (Gitt. 9:10).

The passage at Deuteronomy 24:1-4 reads as follows in the English version:

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

The structure of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 follows the ancient Near Eastern practice for law codes, and such codes were introduced in Hebrew legislation by “if,” “when,” or “whoever.”⁹ That is, Moses was instructed by God to deal with a situation most likely already existing. Men were putting away wives and remarrying, and the put-away wives were also remarrying. Yet, even in Jesus' day, men thought of the Deuteronomic legislation as a **command** to divorce (Matt. 19:7). Jesus corrected such error by stating that such divorces were **permitted** because of the **hardness** of men's hearts (Matt. 19:8). Hardness about what is the question.

If Hillel were right to say that any cause was commanded, then Jesus' teaching that only **one** exception is allowed changes the Mosaic teaching (Matt. 19:9). However, if Shammai understood Moses correctly, then Jesus' teaching simply continues the one and only exception for divorce and remarriage. It is interesting to

note that the Greek word (in Matthew 19:9) translated “and” is *de*. This latter term can mean “but” or “and.”¹⁰ Did Jesus say, “But, I say unto you,” or, “And, I say unto you”? It seems He said “and” for a number of reasons.

First of all, God has always **hated** putting away (Mal. 2:14-16). Why would Jesus agree with Hillel’s idea that any cause was taught by Moses (Deut. 24:1)?

Second, some may have wrongly concluded something from the word “may,” found in Deuteronomy 24:2, which reads, “And when she is departed out of his house she may go and be another man’s wife.” If “may” here means that she has permission to remarry (as a guilty party), then Jesus changed the Mosaic permission (Matt. 19:9). It is possible, however, that what is meant is that this is what this first wife **might** do, thinking she has permission.¹¹ [This may be why Jesus said such women would be **caused** to commit adultery, for she would think she had permission to remarry (Matt. 5:31-32).]

Third, if Jesus changed the Mosaic legislation, why did Moses write that the first wife’s remarriage caused her to be **defiled**? The term “defiled” is from *tama*, which means “to be or to become unclean.”¹² The Old Testament writers used *tama* to speak of a woman who had been defiled by **adultery** (Num. 5:13; Num. 5:20; Num. 5:27-29; Jer. 2:23; Ezek. 23:13). The LXX translated *tama* with *mianthanai* (from *maino*, “to stain, to defile, to pollute”—cf. Tit. 1:15 and Heb. 12:15 for the sense of *maino*).¹³ Bible students are quite familiar with *tama* in other Old Testament contexts as referring to one **unclean** before God because of spiritual or physical misconduct. If Moses gave the “put away for any cause wife” permission to be remarried, how did she become unclean in the second marriage?

Entrance into an **unacceptable** marriage by a Jew would cause the land to become unclean (Lev. 18:25-28;

Lev. 19:29; Num. 5:3; et al). If the woman were defiled by the remarriage, the sense is that, after the putting away, her cohabitation with a second “husband” would be **adultery!** Thus, for the first husband to remarry her would complete the circle and be further adultery (cf. Lev. 18:20; Num. 5:13). Thus, the “land” would be defiled by having unclean Jews living in adultery. Note that nothing is said in the Mosaic legislation about taking back the woman who had not been defiled.

Fourth, if Jesus changed the Mosaic legislation, for what reason would one be allowed to put away a fornicating mate today? Moses permitted a **husband** who had been defrauded by one wife’s sexual infidelity to divorce that woman. Why? Because men’s hearts are terribly hardened by such an act. The husband who could and would forgive could still initiate divorce proceedings because he was not able to live with the memory. The Jews misunderstood and thought they had to divorce such a wife. Jesus said, “**And**, I say unto you” (emp. mine, KM), just as Moses had said that one had **permission** to put away such a wife. Reconciliation is the best route to take when adultery is committed, but some are too hardened.

The only change seemingly made by Jesus in His teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage was to include the woman’s right to divorce. People **divorce** for many reasons. They did so in Moses’ time, and folks do so today. To remarry with God’s blessing, however, requires that the divorce was from a fornicating mate.

The Exception

Taylor wrote:

There is the case of the husband and wife whose marriage did not end upon the grounds of fornication. He was not unfaithful to her; she was not unfaithful to him. Their marriage may

have ended upon such commonly employed grounds as incompatibility, mental cruelty, desertion, failure to provide, imprisonment, habitual drunkenness, mental derangement on the part of one of the marital mates or the new and highly heralded “no fault” system of convenient divorce might have been employed. **But** the passages of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 do not mention any of these...These are just not mentioned as approved causes for divorce and later remarriages.¹⁴

On occasion, those not tainted by some preacher’s peculiar view have been asked to read Matthew 19:9 (or Matthew 5:32) and to interpret the verse. Every time these people answer, they say that Jesus allowed only **one** exception for divorce **and** remarriage. An **innocent** (truly) partner has permission to divorce a **guilty** (fornicating) partner and remarry another who is eligible to marry.

However, Blythe wrote that Jesus was only speaking about two Christians who were married and none other:

When Jesus set forth his **new** (emp. mine, KM—I disproved this above) divorce and remarriage legislation in Matt. 19:9 and related passages in the gospels, he was “speaking to” (legislating for) two Christians in marriage. He was not even legislating for “mixed marriages” much less the marriage of alien sinners. We learn this from the apostle, Paul, writing in 1 Cor. 7:10-15. Paul says that Christ, while on earth was legislating for mixed marriages in 1 Cor. 7:12-15. Neither Paul nor Christ legislated for two alien sinners concerning divorce.¹⁵

The above erroneous view has been entitled “covenant legislation” by some, and purports to teach that no one outside the church today is amenable (subject) to God’s laws of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. When confronted with the **fact** that alien sinners in Corinth had been adulterers and fornicators and thus subject to some law (1 Cor. 6:9-11), Blythe responded by writing:

Since Matt. 19:9 does not apply to an alien sinner, we have no right to bind it upon them. To do so would be to bind where God has not bound. This does not mean there are NO laws regulating marriages of alien sinners. They were under SOME marriage laws prior to and during the time of Christ's ministry on earth and since there is no new law regulating their marriages, aliens today are under the same marriage law that aliens were under just prior to the cross. At that time, both Jews and Gentiles were permitted divorce for causes other than fornication (disproved above, KM) with the right to remarry. They did not have to break up their subsequent marriages in order to become Christians because they were not "living in adultery" in the first place.¹⁶

That God's law **does** apply equally to saint and sinner and that God does **not** have separate laws for saints and sinners is made obvious from a number of Bible passages.

First, **all** men, whether they obey Christ or reject Him, will be judged by His words (John 12:48). Some of Jesus' words are found in Matthew 19:9.

Second, God commands **all** men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). The fact of repentance **presupposes** sin, but sin is a transgression of Divine law (1 John 3:4). All accountable persons have become involved in sin because they **are** subject to divine law; therefore, if God commands all to repent, the Law of Christ extends to all (2 Pet. 3:9).

Third, it is **not** the case that 1 Corinthians 7:10-13 teaches that Matthew 19:9 applies only to Christians. (In a meeting with some "covenant legislation" elders, the accusation was made that faithful brethren **ignore** 1 Corinthians 7 in discussing Matthew 19:9.) "Covenant legislators" try to argue (?) that, since Paul was writing only to Christians at Corinth, and since Paul referred to Matthew 19:9 as from the Lord (1 Cor. 7:12), then Matthew 19:9 at **least** applies to Christians, but Jesus did not say

that “whatsoever Christian” puts away his spouse, but “whosoever” (Matt. 19:9). “Whosoever” implies **universal** application (Rev. 22:17), which would mean that Jesus’ teaching would apply to the Corinthians, but not **just** to them, and thus not **just** to Christians.

A further illustration of the third point above can be seen from John 3:5. Does this latter verse imply that the **only** way one can enter the kingdom of God is by a new birth? If so, any interpretation of **another** passage that would contradict John 3:5 would be erroneous. So any interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:10-13 that would contradict the “whosoever” of Matthew 19:9 would itself be error.

Fourth, if the alien sinner is not subject to God’s law, then, if such a one lies, steals, becomes drunken, commits incest, etc., does he sin? The alien sinner cannot sin against God by any act if that sinner is **not** subject to Divine law (1 John 3:4). The Corinthians, as alien sinners, broke God’s law (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Fulford has written:

1. A Mormon in Utah is married to two women (practicing bigamy). He later learns and obeys the gospel (sic) of Christ. Since as a Mormon he was not a New Testament Christian and was not (as some among us contend) subject to God’s law on marriage, can it be that his baptism into Christ will sanctify his bigamous marriage and he can come into the Lord’s church and continue to live with both women?

2. A man in Africa is married to several women, (practicing polygamy). He hears and obeys the gospel of Christ. Since (according to some) he was not subject to God’s law on marriages before he obeyed the gospel, does his baptism now sanctify his polygamous marriage and can he now come into the church and continue living with all of his wives?

3. A “hippie” in Taos, New Mexico is living in a “group marriage” arrangement—five men are all married to the same five women and all of

them have equal marital privileges. The “hippie” learns the truth, obeys the gospel, and becomes a Christian. Since (as some say) he was not subject to God’s law on marriage before he became a Christian, and since (as some say) he can continue, after baptism, in whatever state he was in before baptism, can he continue to practice a “group marriage” arrangement in the church?

4. Two homosexuals in St. Paul, Minnesota “marry”—two men “make a lifetime commitment to each other.” One of them later learns the truth and obeys it. Can he, after coming into the church, continue his homosexual marriage? If he was not amenable to God’s law on marriage before he obeyed the gospel and if baptism sanctifies the relationship, why couldn’t he continue the homosexual marriage?

5. A man and a woman in Tennessee are living in an adulterous marriage. One or both of them have been married before and divorced from their previous mates for a reason other than fornication (Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9). Thus, according to the Lord, their marriage is an adulterous one. But, they learn and obey the gospel and come into the church. Can they continue their adulterous marriage? Does their baptism now make holy a previously unholy relationship? If baptism will not sanctify a bigamous marriage without repentance, if baptism will not sanctify a polygamous marriage without repentance, if baptism will not sanctify a “group marriage” without repentance, if baptism will not sanctify an adulterous marriage without repentance and if we can see that to repent of the bigamous, polygamous, “group,” and homosexual marriages means getting out of those marriages, why do we have trouble seeing that to repent of an adulterous marriage means getting out of it?¹⁷

Fifth, men can “live in adultery” just as they can **live** in the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 2:1-3). Paul reminded the Colossian brethren that, **before** they became Christians,

they had lived in, among other things, fornication (Col. 3:1-7).

Sixth, to argue that the Jews on Pentecost were not required to break up any adulterous marriages results from a failure to read. The Jews on Pentecost were **devout** men, not adulterers (Acts 2:5). Had they been living in adultery, repentance would have been required, for Peter did require them to repent of the murderous act of crucifying the Christ (Acts 2:39).

There are only **three** persons eligible to be scripturally married: (1) a single person who has never been married, (2) a person whose spouse has died, and (3) a person (innocent of fornication) who has put away his/her spouse because that spouse was guilty of fornication (Matt. 19:9). Jesus' law applies to all men (Matt. 19:9).

Trying to circumvent Jesus' teaching has given rise to a few other erroneous interpretations of Matthew 19:9. Some try to interpret Jesus as referring to fornication on the spouse's part **prior** to marriage, with such deception invalidating the marriage. [Neither Moses nor Jesus legislated on such a matter, but both referred to sexual intercourse between unmarried folks as fornication (Gal. 5:19-20).]

A second such-like interpretation as the one above has Jesus referring only to "false marriages" such as polygamy where no **true** marriage occurred. However, the Pharisees asked about putting away of a real wife (Matt. 19:3). And, in the third place, a few (especially second and third century writers) suggest that fornication allows a separation but never a remarriage, even if the spouse died. Such a view ignores the exception clause.

A fourth interpretation (with as little support as the three above) is that, unless one actually files the papers in a civil court and sues for legal divorce on the grounds of fornication (and no other), one did not put away the mate **for** fornication and cannot remarry. First of all, the

fornication broke the bond, not the civil court (Matt. 19:9). One goes to court because man's law requires such (1 Pet. 2:13). John the baptizer told Herod Antipas it was not **lawful** for that king to marry Herodias (Mark 6:18). The law that the alien sinner Antipas broke was God's, not Rome's, for Rome allowed marriage and remarriage for any reason. (Moses' Law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was then in effect.) Perhaps one is not quick enough to get to a lawyer, or one tries at the last minute to save the marriage and does not "beat" the guilty party to court. Is that one unable to "put away" because of externals? Again, the marriage bond was broken by fornication, not by the court.

Eunuchs For God

A verse of Scripture, spoken by Jesus, that seldom seems to find a place in discussions about what the Christ taught concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage is Matthew 19:12:

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Jesus foregoing response was to a statement from His disciples that, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt. 19:10). The disciples understood that they were not allowed, except for fornication, to remarry and found such a saying hard to accept. Jesus agreed, and added, "All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given" (Matt. 19:11). That is, if a man wants to go to heaven, that man will obey Christ in these matters. And to obey Christ may require becoming a "eunuch" for heaven's sake.

Many are horrified to discover that they are living in adultery and, if they continue, will be lost. The answer

for such a one is celibacy (becoming a eunuch) in order to enter heaven. Those not eligible to marry will find that celibacy is a “hard saying,” but only is it difficult in this life. Becoming a “eunuch” in order to go to heaven is indeed a small price to pay.

Conclusion

This brief essay has certainly not covered everything said by Jesus about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. But, Jesus did insist that one man and one woman stay married until death parted them. The **only** exception allowed concerned a partner guilty of fornication. Those who desire heaven will heed their Master’s voice.

Endnotes

1 Shelton Blythe, **Unbelievers In The Divorce Dilemma** (Lake Cormorant, MS: Shelton Blythe, 1987).

2 **The Holy Bible**, King James Version (World Publishers). All Scripture references in this essay are to this version unless otherwise specified.

3 Class Notes, “Addictive Behavior” (Harding Graduate School of Religion, 1992).

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid. Eighty-nine percent of teenage marriages in America are ending in divorce.

6 **Webster’s Ninth Collegiate Dictionary**.

7 Foy E. Wallace, Sr., **The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State** (Nashville: Wallace Publications, 1967), p. 38.

8 James A. Brooks & Carlton L. Winbery, **Syntax Of New Testament Greek** (Boston: University Press of America, 1979).

9 Clyde Miller, **The World And Literature Of The Old Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1970), p. 195.

10 Brooks & Winbery, p. 98.

11 Gesenius, **Hebrew Lexicon**.

12 Ibid.

13 Liddell Scott, **Greek-English Lexicon** (abridged), p. 446.

14 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., **Jesus Christ: The Hope Of The Home**, p. 49.

15 Blythe, p. 2.

16 Ibid, pp. 2-3.

17 Hugh Fulford, "Is the Alien Sinner Amenable to God's Spiritual Laws," **Shelbyville Road Church Bulletin** (Indianapolis: January 25, 1981).

CHAPTER 29

What Jesus Said About The Father

Don Walker

Introduction

TO DEVOTE THE TIME to study “What Jesus Said” is a magnificent endeavor indeed. Jesus spoke in such a way so as to distinguish Himself, “For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:29). When Jesus spoke, men listened, because, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). The power and force of Jesus’ speaking are illustrated well in the garden where Judas betrayed Him. When the crowd came to take Jesus, He

went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?
They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus
saith unto them, I am he...As soon then as he
had said unto them, I am he, they went
backward, and fell to the ground (John 18:4-6).

What a spectacle this must have been! With one authoritative statement, the crowd began to back up and stumble all over itself. Amazing! “What Jesus Said” is powerful.

The power and import of what Jesus said should be recognized in the affirmation that He Himself makes earlier in John’s account of the Gospel: “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Peter recognized and believed this point, for he proclaimed, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). The magnitude of what Jesus spoke is easily seen in that which He said in John 12:48: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

With this in mind, we commend the Southaven congregation with her elders and preachers. Focusing upon the parables and miracles of Jesus in years past and now upon what He said has been an enriching experience. We also extend a special thank you to B. J. Clarke. Who knows exactly the many hours that he has contributed as the editor of this book and director of the lectureship? I know very well that much time and energy have been spent in preparing such efforts as these. We are indebted, indeed.

What Jesus Said

As we have mentioned earlier, we do well to focus on those things that Jesus said. It is by these words that we shall deliver our souls. It was by the use of words that Jehovah chose to reveal His will and intent to men. In Acts 10:32, Cornelius was told that Peter would “speak unto thee.” In speaking to him, Peter said, “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel...That word, I say, ye know” (Acts 10:36-37). Of Peter, Jehovah told Cornelius, “[He] shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). James also proclaimed the import of the word as far as salvation: “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:21).

However it is not just any words that will save. It is those things that Jesus said (whether personally or through the inspired men of the first century) that will

save our souls. It is in keeping with this great truth that we now turn our focus to “What Jesus Said About The Father.”

During His Temptation

In Matthew 4, we read of Jesus’ temptation by Satan in the wilderness. In each one of His responses to Satan (overcoming him by the Word which was hidden in His heart), Jesus makes an affirmation concerning the Father. Let’s first notice the three verses and then comment on what Jesus said about the Father:

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God (Matt. 4:7).

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:10).

Jesus Taught That Man Lives By The Word Of God

In overcoming the first recorded temptation in this context, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, and makes a powerful statement concerning the Father. It is the Word of God that stands as our authority. No wonder Jesus taught, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). When we learn that all the commandments of Jehovah are righteousness (Psm. 119:172), then we will be in a position to understand how man lives by the Word of God. In Psalm 119:9, we read, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” In this passage we learn that a young man can **be made right** with God by the Word of God. Notice Psalm 119:11: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin

against thee.” Here we can see that a man **remains right** with God by the Word of God. What a power we possess in the Mighty Word of God! It is truly “God’s power to save” (Rom. 1:16). With Jeremiah, we should proclaim, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord” (Jer. 22:29).

Jesus Taught That The Father Should Not Be Tempted

The ASV’s translation of Matthew 4:7 reads, “Jesus said unto him, Again it is written, Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God.” As true as the Devil’s statement may have been, his application was completely wrong. Jesus’ response shows that to be the case. The Father is not to be “tempted” or “made trial of.” The Greek word is *ekpirazo*. In the four verses in which it appears, it is translated “tempt” in the KJV. Here and in Luke 4:12, it speaks of Jesus’ response to Satan during His temptations. In Luke 10:25, “a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” In 1 Corinthians 10:9, Paul exhorts, “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.”

What exactly, though, is the meaning? Jesus’ quote is taken from Deuteronomy 6:16. In the context of Deuteronomy 6, Jehovah recalls events which are recorded in Exodus 17:7, where the people tempted or tested the Lord, saying, “Is Jehovah among us, or not?” These actions were actions of unbelief. God had promised, and they should have known and believed that the Lord was with them, and responded accordingly. Instead, they felt a test was necessary. Jesus’ use of this passage, in essence, proclaims that we should not put ourselves in an unnecessarily dangerous situation to test Jehovah. Those today who seek a sign to indicate the Lord’s presence or His approval are guilty of that which Jesus proclaimed to be wrong.

Jesus Taught That The Father Should Be Worshiped

In His statement, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,” Jesus proclaimed the Father’s worthiness to be praised. This is a truth seen throughout Scripture. In Deuteronomy 6:13 (the passage Jesus quotes), Moses wrote, “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.” Joshua, in his closing speech, would echo this very thought: “Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord” (Josh. 24:14). Truly, our Father in Heaven is worthy of praise. Revelation 4 has as its central nucleus this very thought. Note the closing refrain of this most wonderful chapter:

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:9-11).

God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him (Psm. 89:7).

Truly, “holy and reverend is His Name” (Psm. 111:9). Most definitely, Jesus said that the Father should be worshiped.

**Jesus Taught That The
Father Should Be Served**

True greatness in the kingdom is based upon our willingness to serve. Jesus taught, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt

himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:11-12). Even more impressive was Jesus’ teaching by example: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). In John 13, Jesus would gird Himself with a towel and wash the feet of the disciples. After doing so, He asked His disciples, “Know ye what I have done to you?” (John 13:12). He then continued to teach:

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John 13:13-17).

In Philippians, we learn that Jesus was exalted because He humbled Himself. In that passage, we are encouraged to be like Christ in this way:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth (Phil. 2:5-10).

Yes, Jesus taught that we should serve one another. But He also taught that the Father is worthy of our service. Notice the following passages from John’s account of the

Gospel, which show the single-eyed devotion Christ had toward the service of His Father:

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work (John 4:34).

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise (John 5:19).

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me (John 5:30)

But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me (John 5:36).

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me (John 6:38).

And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (John 8:29).

In each one of these passages, we see a resolve on the part of Jesus to be a perfect and complete servant of the Father. Jesus said that the Father is worthy of our service.

In this time of temptation, Jesus gave us a great example, and He proclaimed great truths concerning the Father. Yet this is not all Christ said about the Father.

The Sermon On The Mount

When Jesus was set upon the mountain, and His disciples came unto him, He taught them concerning the kingdom. In that great sermon, recorded in Matthew 5-7,

He provided the marching orders for His followers. In doing so, He made statements concerning the Father. Let us take time to notice and comment briefly upon five of these great, Divine truths, which relate to our Father in heaven.

Jesus Taught That The Father Is Perfect

In Matthew 5:48, Jesus said, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” The Greek word employed here, which is translated “perfect,” is *teleios*. It means to be complete, mature, or full grown. The English word “perfect,” with its connotations of being without flaw, defect, or omission (even though the Father is all of this and more), is really not the best word to use in translating *teleios*. In the context, the idea that Jesus expresses is God’s genuine and complete love for all of mankind. The Jews had their love and hate capsulated and categorized upon a faulty discernment. Love was extended to neighbors and brethren, or to those that could benefit them, while hate was reserved for enemies, and, at the least, unconcern for the strangers who could not profit them. However, as followers of Christ, we are to love all—even our enemies, because our God loves all. Of course, the perfect example and passage concerning this point is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Father is complete in His love for all men and women who have walked the earth.

In fact, this passage in which Jesus proclaims that the Father is “perfect,” and that we are to strive for perfection, could very well include the whole section, which is characterized by “Ye have heard...But I say unto you.” In that case, the conclusions drawn here would be just as valid and true.

Jesus Taught That The Father Is Glorified By Good Works

When Jesus addressed the import of our example, He said this: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The Bible speaks of many kinds of works. Some of those would be good, and some would be bad. Some would have a part in our salvation, and others would be counter-productive to our salvation. As we turn our attention to this statement that Jesus made about the Father, we would do well to remember that it is God, in His Word, Who has defined what is and what is not a good work.

In Ephesians 2:10, Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Saved by the grace of God through our faith (Eph. 2:8), we are the workmanship of God. The reason that He created us as new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17) in Christ Jesus is so that we can do good works. It should be understood that these good works are certain actions. Taking the Gospel to the lost, building up the Lord's church by preaching and exhortation, or tending to those who are genuinely needy would most definitely qualify as good works. However, we must also notice that, just as important as the work itself is concerned, where we are when we do these works is likewise important. Paul said that we were "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Before a work can be defined as a "good" work which brings glory to our Father, it must be done "in Christ." Mother Teresa, for all the benevolent work she did, was not in Christ Jesus, and therefore performed no good work to the glory of the Father. Jesus knew and taught that the Father was worthy of our glorifying Him by good works. However, we must realize that, for a work to be considered a "good" work, it must be done "in Christ Jesus." Paul wrote, "Unto him [God] be

glory **in the church by Christ Jesus** throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph. 3:21; emp. mine, DW). Thus, we do well to see to it that we are in a position, in Christ Jesus, to perform good works to the glory of the Father.

Jesus Taught That The Father Is To Be Obeyed

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Earlier we noted that Jesus said that the Father should be worshiped and served. This, of course, is true. However, the Father has not left man to his own devices or desires when it comes to worshiping or serving Him. The Father has made His will known and expects man’s obedience in serving Him. When Peter spoke of our being holy as God is holy, he explained just exactly what this would entail. Among other things, a quality of the holy ones is that they will be “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance” (1 Pet. 1:14). Surely we are to be “followers of God, as dear children” (Eph. 5:1). Too many are willing to worship and serve only if it meets their fancy. If it is pleasing to them and panders to the flesh, as most of this entertainment worship faze does, then men are happy and content to follow. But if it is Biblical in its thrust and Scriptural in its foundation, it becomes monotonous and boring to an entertainment-crazed society. Yet Jesus taught that the Father must be obeyed. Concerning the topic of worship of the Father, Jesus said:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

True worship can be contrasted with vain or empty worship (Matt. 15:9). The reason that Jesus gave for their worship

being unpleasing to Him (in Matt. 15:9) was because they had ignored His commandments and accepted the traditions which contradicted God's commandments. Worship in spirit and truth included a proper attitude **and** a following of the proper standard—God's Word. Jehovah must be obeyed.

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). He proclaimed that faithful obedience is necessary, and will allow us to reap blessings immeasurable from our Heavenly Father. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us that the Father is perfect (complete), that He is glorified by good works, and that the Father is to be obeyed. Yet this is not all that Jesus said about the Father in this sermon. Let us continue our study.

Jesus Taught That The Father Knows Our Needs

(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Matt. 6:32).

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him (Matt. 6:8).

The Deist would have us believe that, after God created all things, He simply turned His back on His creation to allow it to carry on its business without His concern. Nothing could be further from the Truth. Jesus said that the Father was aware of what was going on, and very much concerned for His followers. Let's go back to the context of Matthew 6:32, and note exactly what Jesus said about the Father:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall

drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:25-34).

The Christian need not worry as the Gentiles worried, for God is concerned and He is aware.

Not only is God aware, but He is also desirous to bless. If there were ever a fact that is obvious and true concerning the Father, it is the fact that our Father is a benevolent Father. From the smallest provisions of the physical nature to the precious gift of His Son, we learn that our God is a gracious God. He knows what we need and wishes to supply those needs. This leads to our next point.

Jesus Taught That The Father Answers Prayers

Jesus taught that the Father both hears and answers the prayers of His children. In Matthew 6, Jesus spoke of not praying as the hypocrites. He said, “But thou, when

thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:6). In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus provided us the model prayer:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

The reason for providing such a wealth of knowledge was to teach us how to pray to our Father, Who hears and answers our prayers. In three passages recorded by the apostle John, we even learn of Jesus’ teaching that the Father desires to answer our prayers. Notice them now:

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13).

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you (John 15:16).

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you (John 16:23).

This great truth is a comforting one indeed. The apostle John wrote:

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us,

whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him (1 John 5:14-15).

What a wonderful power we possess when, upon our knees in prayer, we approach the “throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16)! No wonder Paul wrote, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Again, he said, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). James recognized the power of prayer when he penned, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jas. 5:16). Jesus said that our Father hears and answers our prayers.

Jesus Taught That The Father Desires To Forgive

Of all the needs man may possess, forgiveness must stand as the most urgent. Understanding this point should cause our hearts to rejoice when we learn that Jesus said that the Father desires to forgive us our sins. In Matthew 6:14, Jesus said, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” We can see God’s desire when we see the price that He was willing to pay for our forgiveness. Jesus taught, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

So many passages in Scripture underscore this fact:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18)

He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19).

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

These are but a few of the multitude of passages that uphold what Jesus taught about the Father and His desire to forgive.

Jesus also taught that forgiveness was extended only when certain conditions were met: “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:15). The fact is that salvation is a free gift, but it is not cheap. Men must meet the prerequisites. When men obey the Father (Matt. 7:21), then forgiveness will be the result.

When Jesus taught the disciples on the mount, He provided a wealth of information concerning the Father. May we ever be grateful for such magnificent truths. Now let us consider one other point that Jesus taught about the Father.

Jesus And The Father Are One

The fact that Jesus and His Father were and are close is undeniable. But what really stirs our interest is what Jesus said about the Father on this topic. In John 10, Jesus opens with a parable. In John 10:6, we learn that the Pharisees who heard Jesus did not understand the parable. In John 10:7-18, Jesus explains the parable to them. In that explanation, Jesus said, “As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15). Afterwards, the Pharisees continue to question Jesus, asking, “If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). Finally, Jesus says, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). One rule in understanding a statement

made in the Bible is to see what those who heard the statement, when it was made, understood it to mean. If there is nothing in the context to indicate a misunderstanding, you have a pretty good idea of what was being said. In this case, they understood Jesus to be making Himself God (John 10:33).

In John 8, we see the same understanding with the same result. Jesus proclaimed:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by (John 8:58-59).

Jesus taught that the Father and He were one.

Earlier in John 8, however, Jesus taught that He was one and the Father was one. Look at John 8:16-18:

And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.

Here is one passage which destroys the “Jesus-only/oneness” movement. Yet, how could Jesus make the statements he makes here in John 8, and then turn around and say that “He and the Father are one” in John 10? Perhaps another passage will help us understand this great truth. In John 14 we find an interesting discussion between Jesus and Philip. Notice John 14:7-11:

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?

he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

In considering the nature of the Godhead, we must understand that there is only One Spiritual Essence. In this way, God the Father and God the Son are one and the same. That is how Jehovah could speak of His shepherd as “my fellow” (Zech. 13:7). Jehovah the Father, Jehovah the Son, and Jehovah the Holy Spirit possess qualities of Deity that **no other creatures possess**. It is these qualities that define them as Jehovah. However, though there is One Spiritual Essence, we must also realize that there is a distinction among persons in the Godhead. It is in this way that Jesus could stand as one, and the Father could stand as one, thus providing the necessary “two witnesses” in John 8.

Jesus provided for us, in reality, the mind of God. When we see Jesus responding to a situation, we can be confident that the Father would respond in identical fashion. The more we become like Christ, the more we become like the Father, for He and the Father are one.

Conclusion

In bringing this chapter to a close, we concur in principle with the great apostle John:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (John 21:25).

There are so many approaches that could have been followed, and so much more material that may have been written. But these are written for your consideration and edification.

It is our hope that, as you consider these truths that Jesus proclaimed about the Father, it would spur you on to even greater study. So, with this in mind, allow us to close by encouraging each one to study their Bibles more and more.

CHAPTER 30

What Jesus Said About Himself: The “I Am” Sayings Of Jesus

David Jones

Commendation

ONCE AGAIN WE ARE grateful to be invited to participate in the **POWER** Lectures. It is a high honor indeed to be associated with the Southaven church. The Lord continues to receive much glory through the godly efforts which go forth from this place. We are thankful for the good leadership which the elders at Southaven provide. Her good preachers are known as men of strength and stability. B. J. and Tish Clarke have been working with you long enough now to truly know the congregation and to be known of the congregation, which provides good opportunities unique to them. B. J. has been a man on the firing line for some time, and we are thankful to labor in an area so close to him. We are especially thankful for the newest preacher, Wayne Jones, and his family. We are thankful that Wayne is our son. Wayne makes his family very proud as he conducts himself in a godly manner. We are thankful for his and Shana Kaye’s good work in the Lord and for the grandchildren which their union has produced.

The subject this year should provide the brotherhood with many great lessons in a day when great lessons are needed. Many in the world claim to be interested in what Jesus said. We know this to be true because many of these try to instruct those of us who stand in the gap and proclaim the Word of God with conviction to listen to what Jesus says and what is said about Him. This lectureship program will provide food for them—food which will save their soul if they truly would have the heart to listen! The things which Jesus said are eternally important, seeing that He is the author of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:8-9). We are especially privileged to speak concerning the things which Jesus said about Himself.

Introduction

Over and over in the days when Jesus lived on earth, inquiries were made into Who Jesus was:

And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? (Luke 5:20-21).

Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead; And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him (Luke 9:7-9).

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him (John 9:35-38).

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? (John 12:31-34).

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13-16).

And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee (Matt. 21:10-11).

When Moses was called by God to deliver His people from bondage, he saw a bush burning and not being consumed:

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you (Exod. 3:13-14).

God spoke from the bush—I AM was His name. When Jesus came to earth, He claimed certain things for Himself, and these things proved His Deity:

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins...Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man,

then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things... Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am (John 8:24; John 8:28; John 8:56-58).

We will notice what Jesus said about Himself. His own descriptions (seven of them) will show just Who He is, what He did for us, and what He expects of us. These sayings of Jesus prove His Deity. The Gospel according to John was written about 90 A.D. to confess the fact to the church that Jesus was the Christ—in the face and against the force of Gnosticism, which said that He was not Deity.

I Am The Bread Of Life

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). The context of John 6 is important to understanding the fullest meaning of this saying. Jesus fed five thousand men plus women and children: “And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand” (John 6:10). They were so thankful for the physical food that they tried to make Him a king:

Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone (John 6:14-15).

Jesus told them that they needed to labor for the food that did not perish:

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed (John 6:26-27).

There was certainly nothing wrong with laboring to feed their families and themselves, but many placed most (if not all) of their efforts and energies here. The same is true today. Many place the most emphasis on this life and are not as concerned about the next life. They then asked what they could do which would work the works of God:

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (John 6:28-29).

At this point, they asked for a sign that they might believe. They claimed that God had sent bread down from heaven, and their fathers believed. Jesus informs them that He is the true bread sent down from heaven:

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:32-35).

So, Who is Jesus? He is the true bread of heaven. Just as bread nourishes our physical body, Jesus nourishes our spiritual body through His Word. He informed the woman at the well of the living water:

Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:13-14).

Jesus gives us what we need to be filled spiritually. Paul wrote it like this:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim 3:16-17).

His bread or Word will last forever:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Pet 1:23-25).

What is the benefit for us? We shall never hunger! Because we have the bread which endures forever, He expects us to take this bread to a starving world. Our responsibility is to take the Gospel to the world—beginning in our homes and expanding from there.

I Am The Light Of The World

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). The context of John 8 reveals that Jesus is in the temple, and there they brought unto Him a woman caught in the act of adultery. However they brought her to tempt Him

(John 8:2; John 8:6). They then quoted the Law of Moses, saying that she should be stoned:

And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death (Lev. 20:10).

If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel. If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you (Deut. 22:22-24).

Jesus then wrote on the ground—and afterwards rose up, looked at them, and told him that was without sin to cast the first stone. The principle to which Jesus refers is found in the Law of Moses:

At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you (Deut. 17:6-7).

Those who brought the woman to Jesus were **not** without sin in that situation because they had been privy to her acts so that they could test or tempt Jesus. When Jesus stooped back down the second time, they all began to leave, from the oldest to the youngest (suggesting that the older

ones had been the masterminds of the plot). Jesus did not overlook her sin, telling her to go and sin **no** more. She had sinned in the act of adultery, but she was not alone. In that vein of thought, He made the declaration that He was the light of the world. He had just proved His Deity by His actions, and now He informs those who will listen that He provides the true light. The religious leaders of the Jews were rejecting the true light, Jesus warns the people, and a debate results (rest of John 8).

His Word provides the light we need:

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psm. 119:105).

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10).

Our responsibility is to be the light of the world today:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice

in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain,
neither laboured in vain (Phil. 2:14-16).

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that
day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the
children of light, and the children of the day: we
are not of the night, nor of darkness (1 Thess. 5:4-5).

Therefore, we are to be different from the world!

I Am The Door Of The Sheep... I Am The Good Shepherd

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I
say unto you, I am the door of the sheep...I am the good
shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”
(John 10:7; John 10:11). The context of John 10 reveals
Jesus speaking, concerning His work of saving man, of
being the good shepherd. The Jews would have been very
familiar with the work of a shepherd. A shepherd provided
leadership for his sheep because he went before the sheep
to seek out pastures and predators who would harm the
flock. A shepherd risked his own life by lying down at the
door of the fold at night and slept there to prevent thieves
from coming and taking away the sheep. A shepherd laid
his hands on his sheep daily to comfort them and show
them his compassion.

Jesus is our good shepherd because He provided the
way of entrance into the fold of God. Jesus spoke of that
fold in John 10:16: “And other sheep I have, which are not
of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear
my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”
He opened the door to the fold by dying in our place and
paying the price for us:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter
into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new
and living way, which he hath consecrated for

us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:19-22).

He laid down His life for us:

No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:18).

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Heb 2:9).

Therefore, we hear His voice and follow Him.

As His sheep, we are to follow His example: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

I Am The True Vine

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1). Jesus is impressing on the hearts and minds of His disciples the need to be faithful to Him and to follow His Word. It is on the eve of His betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. They would need encouragement to be faithful, because they would be discouraged when Jesus left them. He uses a figure which was familiar to them all—the grapevine—to teach them a spiritual lesson on fruit-bearing. In the example, Jesus is the vine because from Him all blessings flow. The disciples understood that life itself was found in the vine physically. To continue the analogy, the Father is the husbandman—the owner of the

vine and of the vineyard. The individual disciples are the branches—they grow in the vine, and those not in the vine are gathered up and burned because they are dead. The Pharisees and other leaders did not want to submit to Christ, so Jesus tried to impress the need to be in the vine, or in submission to Him.

The applications for us today should help us as we live for Christ. First, one must be in the vine in order to enjoy the blessings of Christ, the source of life. When physical branches are severed from the physical vine, the branches die. The vine itself supplies the nutrients which are necessary for the life of the branch. Jesus is the vine and from Him flow all the nutrients which are necessary for us to live and grow spiritually. His Word supplies all things necessary for life and godliness:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

When we sever ourselves from the Word of God, we sever ourselves from the source of our spiritual life.

Second, the necessity of fruit-bearing is emphasized by our Lord. Notice what Jesus said about fruit-bearing: “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). When physical branches cease to produce, the owner will prune the dead limbs so that the living limbs can receive more nourishment. A branch on a grapevine which does not produce grapes is useless to the vine. When we as branches in Christ cease to produce fruit, we cease being of any use.

We are therefore removed from the vine by the Lord. We must bear the fruit of the Spirit in our lives to please the Father. Paul wrote, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23). We can bear the fruit of the Spirit by applying the Word of God to our lives. We do not bear the fruit of the Spirit due to some miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We bear fruit when we correctly obey the Word of God.

Third, the necessity of producing one kind of fruit is taught in this discourse. We do not expect to reap watermelons from a grapevine. We expect to have grapes produced by a grapevine. In the religious world, this principle remains the same. Luke records, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). When a seed is planted, it is governed by God’s law instituted in the beginning of the creation: “And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so” (Gen. 1:11). When the Word of God is planted in the hearts of men, it produces only **one** kind of fruit, a Christian. It cannot violate the law of God. It will not produce a Baptist on one occasion and a Methodist on the other. It will always produce a Christian—a Christian, period!

Fourth, the promise that, if we work to bear fruit, we will be successful is revealed in this text. Many people fail to work because they feel as though they are going to be failures even before they ever attempt the task. We have a promise from God that, if we will work to bear fruit, we will be successful: “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). We must do our part, but God promises to help if we will work. We should not be dismayed or discouraged, but,

rather, we should be encouraged and exhorted to be steadfast. Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Our labor is not in vain if we work according to the will of God.

Fifth, the danger of falling away and being eternally separated and suffering forever is made apparent in this text. Jesus said, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6). The fires of hell await those who will not abide in Christ. This pertains to those who never obey the Gospel: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8). It also applies to those who have been saved and who then return to the world:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

The doctrine of “once saved always saved” is a devilish doctrine and will cause millions, yea, even billions, to lose their souls by deceiving them into a false sense of safety. Many live each day with the erroneous idea that, once they “accepted Jesus into the heart by faith,” there is nothing they can do to lose their soul. First, these have attempted

to obey the wrong plan of salvation. Second, they have ignored the truth or been beguiled by teachers who have missed the truth, espousing their error. The danger of falling away is real and reachable.

I Am The Way, The Truth, And The Life

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Jesus knew that His disciples would need hope and encouragement because His death was near. It is the eve of His betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. He tells them that He is going away but that He will return and get them. He also tells them that they know the way, and then Thomas asks, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5). They actually knew the way; they just did not realize it. Jesus informs them He is the way, the truth, and the life. He also shows the limit to coming to the Father—only through the Christ.

Jesus claims to be the way. The only way to get to the Father is through the Son. This principle goes back to the garden: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). God allowed man fellowship once again—this time through His Son. The way to the Father made the Savior’s cross-bearing a necessity:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:14-18).

The way to the Father makes our cross-bearing a necessity: “And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The way to the Father makes the church a necessity:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body (Eph. 5:23).

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

Jesus is also the truth. Jesus’ Word is the Truth by which we must live because it will be His standard in judgment: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). The Truth sets us free: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The Truth is the Word of God: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). We can know the difference between truth and error: “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). We sometimes feel like Paul did because, when we speak the truth, we make enemies (this keeps some from standing for the truth): “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16).

Jesus is the life. Christ is our life, and that life is hid in Him:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory (Col. 3:1-4).

How is it that Christ is our life? We are made alive in Christ:

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:5-7).

We have this life, when we are baptized for the remission of our sins:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col. 2:11-13).

I Am The Resurrection And The Life

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). We read in John 11 that Lazarus lay sick, and his sisters (Mary and Martha) sent to Jesus, and Jesus replied:

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto

death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby (John 11:3-4).

After two days Jesus said:

Let us go into Judaea again. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? ...These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep...Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him (John 11:7-8; John 11:11; John 11:14-15).

When Jesus arrived, Martha met Him and said that, if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died, but she expressed confidence in the fact that, if Jesus asked for something, He would get it:

Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:23-26).

Jesus imparted unto her a beautiful fact indeed. He is the resurrection and life. Because of Him and through Him we can live forever.

Because of Jesus' resurrection, we have hope of our resurrection:

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy

hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:20-21).

Conclusion

What Jesus said about Himself proves the fact that He is the Son of God. Being the Son of God, He is the fulfillment of God’s wonderful plan to redeem mankind. The sayings which He spoke of Himself emphasize various aspects of His work as our Savior. Studying these ought to cause us to have a greater appreciation for the sacrifice which He made for us. Obeying what He says accesses the benefits of His work and the blessings which those benefits provide. When we examine His saying, we can concur with the centurion who said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54).

CHAPTER 31

What Jesus Said About The Holy Spirit

Gary Grizzell

Introduction

MY SINCERE APPRECIATION TO brother B. J. Clarke for inviting me to speak on the great **POWER** Lectureship and for the effective contributions he continually makes to the advancement of the cause of Christ. To the elders of the church and to all who make this event happen each year, you will never know how much good you are doing for the souls of men until you reach eternity itself.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has been given all authority in matters of salvation, Christianity, and religion (Matt. 28:18). In view of that fact, it is very appropriate, even essential, that He be heard with reference to the subject of the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. While this list does not pretend to be exhaustive, let's note fifteen things Jesus said about the person of the Holy Spirit.

One: Jesus Said That He Cast Out Demons By The Holy Spirit

“But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matt. 12:28; context Matt. 12:22-29). Demon possession was prevalent during the lifetime of Jesus Christ. By casting out demons, Jesus

proved His Deity. Miraculous power was necessary in order to cast out a demon. Demons desired a body and thus would possess a human being when given the opportunity. The power behind the working of demons in humans was Satan, and it took the power of God to free a man of the demon(s) within him. Satan, being evil, sought to afflict human beings with these devils who were under his control.

Jesus affirmed that He cast out demons in order to prove His own genuineness of identity as the Son of God, and thereby establish that men should hear and believe His message that the kingdom (church) was at hand.

Were there any reactions to Jesus' statement? The Jewish religious leaders rejected the significance of the miracle of the casting out of the demon from the man, pretending that it was done by the power of Satan: "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee" (Matt. 12:38). Jesus rebuked them, saying that "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matt. 12:39). They foolishly rejected the miracle and the irrefutable "if-then" logic of the Lord.

The purpose of the recorded miracles of Jesus in the New Testament for men today is to prove the Divinity of Christ, so that we might believe on Him and thus have life through His name (John 20:31).

Note also that the ability to reason properly is good in presenting the truth of God to an unbelieving world. Jesus possessed such ability. The Christian is to prove all things and then hold firm to that which is concluded (1 Thess. 5:21). Jesus did not hesitate to use a three-point "argument" in His debate with the Pharisees (Matt. 12:27ff). Proper reasoning must take place any time one correctly interprets a passage of Scripture or presents a scriptural conclusion to a person today.

Two: Jesus Affirmed That “The Spirit Of The Lord Is Upon Me”

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised (Luke 4:18; context: Luke 4:16-30).

Though Bethlehem was the birthplace of the Lord, Nazareth was where Jesus had grown up. Now as an adult, He entered the synagogue of the Jews and revealed His identity as the Messiah, Who had been prophesied of in the prophets’ writings. Specifically, He pointed to Isaiah’s prophecy from Isaiah 61:1-2 as referring to Himself. This certainly did not sit well with those of His “hometown” who possessed a chosen, fixed misconception of the Lord’s identity. Perceiving of the Lord as only the son of Joseph and thus a carpenter’s son, they considered His application of the messianic prophet’s prophecy, given over 700 years before, to be blasphemy. While attempting to cast Jesus down the cliff upon which the city was built, they were unsuccessful in that Jesus passed through the midst of them and went His way.

Three: Jesus Taught That The Heavenly Father Wishes To Give The Holy Spirit To Those Authorized Ones Who Ask Him

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13; context: Luke 11:9-13). The Jews were looking for the time when the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32 would take place. Representatives of both Jews and Gentiles were to receive

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. When Jesus spoke these words, Joel's prophecy was yet future.

The heavenly Father wants to give the Holy Spirit to those authorized ones who ask Him. The New Testament teaches just who the authorized ones are, in that there are four measures of the Holy Spirit. These are: 1) the Spirit without measure—only Jesus received this (John 3:34); 2) the Holy Spirit baptism, which only two groups received—the apostles and Cornelius and his household (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 9:17; Acts 10:44-47; Acts 11:15-17); 3) the laying on of hands, a portion of power given only by an apostle (Acts 8:17; nine gifts are described in 1 Cor. 12:1-11); and 4) the indwelling of the Spirit representatively through the Word of God today for each Christian (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Luke 11:9-13 appears to be the parallel of the Lord's similar statements in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:7-11). Note that Matthew 7:11 has the expression "good things" for the "Holy Ghost" in Luke 11:13. Allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible, it may be logically deduced as a general application that good things as promised by the Holy Spirit are not withheld by the heavenly Father from those who desire to do His will (His children through Jesus Christ today). In that case, this would be a figure of speech called the metonymy of the cause, where the cause is put when the effect is intended.

The Holy Spirit has given us the New Testament, and the New Testament is made up of facts, commands, and promises. The facts are to be believed, the commands are to be obeyed, and the promises are to be enjoyed. Our heavenly Father desires to give to His children good things, as have been promised by the Holy Spirit as expressed in the written Word. The Holy Spirit through Paul wrote that all spiritual blessings have been given to us in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

Four: Jesus Advocated That One Must Be Born Of The Spirit To Enter The Kingdom Of God

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5; context: John 3:1-12). Jesus once told a Pharisee named Nicodemus that one must be born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God. This was the teaching of the Lord with reference to entrance into the church, which was then still in prophecy. What is the application and meaning of this? By the teaching of the Holy Spirit through His words given through the apostles, believing and penitent men were taught to be baptized in water for the remission of their sins (see Acts 2:38). To be baptized by a burial in water according to the instruction of the Holy Spirit’s Word is not to be confused with the idea of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Today, it is sad and inexcusable when false teachers preach the doctrine of faith only, which corrupt doctrine excludes the necessity of water baptism. God’s inspired Word teaches that water baptism (in having an obedient faith) is absolutely necessary to salvation, and that salvation by faith only is false (see 1 Pet. 3:21; Jas. 2:24). One simply cannot be born again by the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament of Christ separate and apart from baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Paul wrote that, by the teaching of one Spirit, the Corinthians had been taught to be baptized (water baptism) into one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

Five: The Son of God Promised That His Disciples Will Have Bellies Overflowing With Living Waters

“But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not

yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39; context: John 7:37-39). Previous to this statement, Jesus promised a Samaritan woman at a well that He could supply water which would cause her never to thirst again (John 4:13-14). The woman irrationally placed a literal interpretation on the Lord’s figurative statement, as seen in her request for this water so that she would not be forced to return to the well. (Some exhibit the same problem today when seeking to interpret the Bible’s figurative language—see also Isa. 55:1; Isa. 58:11).

Those who thirst for truth from God will not lack when they come to Christ to quench that thirst. Rivers of water of Truth will be provided and available for the truth seeker who looks to Jesus Christ for answers to the important questions of life (John 14:6). Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? How can I be saved? These are questions that Jesus answers in the New Testament. The riddles and puzzles of life with reference to one’s origin, purpose of existence, and eternal destiny will be solved (revealed) in such a full manner that one will be a “source” of answers even for others on life’s way. This then is the meaning of one’s own belly producing an outflowing of living waters. The water (Truth) provided for the disciple of Christ is “living,” and thus one is given abundant life in the present state of existence in Christ and eternal life in heaven (John 10:10; Eph. 1:3; 1 John 5:13).

Six: The Saviour Taught That The World Cannot Receive The Spirit Of Truth

“Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17; context: John 14:16-18). The “world” under discussion by the Lord here is the world (people) in a state of rejection of the will of God. One who is dull of

hearing (which is a condition that is chosen by an individual) simply cannot appropriately receive the plan of salvation in obeying God from the heart. Such a rebellious disposition stands in stark contrast to obeying from the heart and thus receiving the Truth as revealed by the Spirit in the New Testament. When the carnal worldling rejects the teaching of the Gospel which is given by the Holy Spirit, he has, in essence, rejected the Holy Spirit Himself. Those of the world are not of the Father, as proven by their rebellious disposition to the will of God, and it logically follows that they cannot receive the things of the Father (1 John 2:15-17).

The Holy Spirit dwelt in the apostles during the time period of the ministry of the Lord to the extent that they were given certain miraculous powers for certain efforts: “And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits” (Mark 6:7).

However, they were to be given the baptism of the Holy Spirit when the kingdom would come into existence (Mark 9:1; Acts 2:1-4). Let us determine to be lovers of God, and, as such, we will acceptably be receivers of the Word of the Spirit, which words are found in the New Testament.

Seven: The Lord Promised The Apostles That The Holy Spirit Would Be A Comforter To Them

“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26; context: John 14:16-18; John 14:25-26). It saddened the apostles to think of the Lord leaving them. He spoke of going to be with the Father. Peter asked why he could not go with Jesus. The answer was that Peter could come later (John 13:36-37). God’s plan was for Jesus to go to

heaven and prepare a place for His followers (John 14:1-3). They were not to be troubled by His departure. To take His place to be a comfort to them, the Holy Spirit would be sent by the Lord from heaven. Forty days after the resurrection of Christ, the Lord ascended up on high in order to be with His Father. Ten days after this, He sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles as He had promised (Acts 2:1-4). They then could walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost as they went about preaching the good news of salvation (Acts 9:31). Deity had walked with them in the flesh during the three-and-one-half year ministry of Christ, and now the Holy Spirit would be with their spirits (1 John 1:1-3; John 14:9; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Today, the Holy Spirit is not our comforter in exactly the same manner that He was the apostles' comforter—that is, in the sense of having taken the place of Christ in the lives of the apostles. The promises in the written Gospel of Christ comfort the faithful Christian today. These promises were revealed to us through Jesus' New Testament writers, whom the Spirit directed to write (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). May we read these promises and gain comfort from them as we do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21-23).

Eight: According To The Master The Holy Spirit Would Accomplish Two Things In And With The Apostles: Teach And Bring To Remembrance

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). The Spirit would be in the revealing business and in the reminding business, reminding the apostles of things Jesus taught

while He was with them. The Lord said of the Holy Ghost, “he shall testify of me,” and, “he will guide you into all truth” (John 15:26; John 16:13). When would the apostles receive this power? They would receive this power of the Holy Spirit at Jerusalem (Acts 1:5; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 2:33). This power of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit would allow them to preach the inspired message of the Gospel both orally and through the written Word. They would preach publicly and privately.

Today, we have the completed New Testament of Christ, and do not need the direct operation of the Holy Spirit to know the will of God (1 Cor. 13:10; 2 Tim. 2:15). How we should love, honor, and respect the words of the Holy Spirit in the Bible! Behind the giving of this book are the wisdom, power, and love of our creator.

Nine: Jesus Warned That Blasphemy Against The Holy Spirit Shall Not Be Forgiven To Men

“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men” (Matt. 12:31; see also Matt. 12:32 and Luke 12:10). During the ministry of Christ, men might reject Christ, but, after the establishment of the church, if those men rejected the Gospel given by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, they would have neglected their last chance at being forgiven. In the Christian Age, when men reject the message of the Holy Spirit, they indirectly reject the Holy Spirit Himself. To reject the Holy Spirit is tantamount to rejecting salvation in Christ, since salvation from sins is the message of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

To speak **directly** against the Holy Spirit or to speak against the Holy Spirit **indirectly** is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. How may one be said to have spoken against

the Holy Spirit indirectly? By speaking against (or treating with contempt) the Holy Spirit's message with reference to salvation in Christ.

To do so is to put oneself in danger of eternal damnation (Mark 3:29). The sin unto death is the sin of which one will not repent, and constitutes blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:16; Luke 13:3). Sin is the transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). Yet, the law of God is the law given by the Spirit. Let us determine to repent of **all** our sins, refusing to persist in any of these as defined by the Spirit in the New Testament, and we need not worry that we have blasphemed the Holy Spirit (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30-31; 1 John 1:7-9).

**Ten: The One Who Has All Authority
Stated That The Sinner Must Be Baptized
In The Name Of The Holy Spirit
In Order To Become His Disciple**

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). Just prior to Jesus' ascension into heaven, He commissioned His apostles to go, teach, and baptize. This was to begin at the time of the establishment of the church (Acts 2:47). They were to teach those they baptized to go, teach, and baptize. That process was to continue until every accountable soul had heard the Gospel. Three special verses in the New Testament reveal that the early church preached the Gospel to every creature in their day (Col. 1:6; Col. 1:23; Rom. 10:18). They were to baptize by a burial in water in the name of all three persons of the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. When a sinner is baptized for the remission of his sins, he is baptized by the authority of all three persons of the Godhead, and this includes the Holy Spirit. There are three

persons making up the one God. The Holy Spirit is Divine, as are the Father and the Son. Contrary to the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses today, the Holy Spirit is a person and not just a mere force like electricity.

When one is taught properly to be baptized in the name of Christ (and that is by the authority of Christ—Acts 2:38), he will understand that he is to be baptized as Christ authorized. How did Christ authorize the sinner to be baptized? Answer: in the name of the three persons of the Godhead (Matt. 28:19-20). There is no contradiction between Jesus' statements in His Great Commission in Matthew's account and the inspired apostle Peter's words on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:38. Have you been baptized as the Lord authorized? As a sinner, do not let anyone or anything keep you from obeying the Gospel of Christ (Acts 8:36).

Eleven: Jesus Revealed That David Prophesied By The Holy Ghost

“For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Mark 12:36). Jesus spoke to the Jewish religious leaders in the temple area. They professed to respect highly the patriarch David. Yet Jesus pointed out that David, by the Holy Ghost, had prophesied of the correct identity of Christ. His prophecy identified Christ as Lord. Thus, the Jews had no excuse to reject the lordship of Christ.

The challenge as well was to explain how the promised Messiah could be both the son of David and the Lord of David at the same time. The answer simply is that the Christ was the “son” of David in the sense that He was the descendant of (from the loins of) David. He was the “Lord” of David in that He was the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). He was born of the Holy Ghost with a

virgin, crucified for the sins of the world, raised from the dead, and miraculously taken up from the earth to sit at the right hand of God (Matt. 1:23; Acts 1:9; Acts 2:36).

Peter tells us that no Scripture was produced by any private interpretation (by the will of man) by any Old Testament prophet. By contrast, holy men of God (like David) were moved by the Holy Ghost to prophesy of Christ and of salvation to be preached in the Christian Age (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

The inspired text tells us that the common people heard Jesus gladly, which is an indirect indictment of the rebellious, vile, hard-hearted behavior of the religious leaders of the Jews (Mark 12:37). We may have full confidence in the truthfulness of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ.

Twelve: Jesus Revealed And Promised That The Apostles Would Answer Their Critics By The Holy Spirit

But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost (Mark 13:11; see also Luke 12:12).

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Jesus forewarned His apostles what they would experience when they would go forth preaching the Gospel of Christ:

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service...But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them (John 16:1-4).

They would be dragged before synagogues, magistrates, and powers (Luke 12:11). They were not to premeditate on the appropriate answer, but depend upon the direct operation of the Holy Spirit for the content of their answers (Mark 13:11). By so answering their critics, they likewise preached the Gospel to them and before an unbelieving world.

In Jerusalem, Peter, by inspiration, answered the Jewish leaders inasmuch that they marvelled, noting that they (Peter and John) had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). Though these two apostles had not attended the religious colleges of their day designed for the producing of Jewish religious leaders, an unforgettable impression was still made upon the minds of their critics.

No direct operation of the Holy Spirit is available today. We are blessed to have the written Word of God, and we must study to know God's Word and to be prepared to give an answer (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15). The completed, written will of God, the New Testament, is ours today, as that Law by which we will be judged on the last day (1 Cor. 13:10; Jas. 1:25; the Old Testament is inspired and written for our learning—Rom. 15:4).

Thirteen: Jesus Stated That The Reception Of The Holy Spirit By The Apostles Would Make Possible Both The Remitting And The Retaining Of Sins

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained (John 20:22-23; context: John 20:19-23).

The apostles were not Deity, but were certainly the earthen vessels through whom Deity spoke in the first century. The Gospel that they preached instructed how to

receive the remission of sins. This is seen in Acts 2 with the first men to obey the Gospel. When men heard, believed, and obeyed the Gospel invitation, then their sins were **remitted** by God (Acts 2:38; Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47). However, for the many who rejected the Gospel on Pentecost, their sins were **retained** by God. Note that an individual has the choice as to whether or not he will receive the remission of sins. Note that Peter commanded, “Save yourselves” (Acts 2:40). It is by grace through faith that we are saved (Eph. 2:8-9), but we must choose to have an obedient faith to be saved.

Today, we have the apostles’ doctrine by the written New Testament (John 14:26; Acts 2:42; 2 John 9). Thus, when we hear, believe, and obey the same Gospel, we have our sins forgiven by God. If we reject the Gospel invitation, then God withholds forgiveness of our sins. The choice is ours, and the Lord is not wishing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

Fourteen: Jesus Told The Apostles That Upon Receiving The Holy Spirit They Were To Serve As Witnesses Of His Deity

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). A witness is one who has seen that which is to be the essence of his testimony. The apostles were witnesses of the miracles of Christ. John tells his readers of miracles which he saw which Christ did (John 20:30-31). The Holy Spirit guided the apostles’ minds, enabling them to preach about the miracles of Christ which they had seen. The apostles were witnesses of the person of Christ. They experienced being in the presence of Christ, hearing and even touching Him

(1 John 1:1-3). Thus, they could testify of what they saw and heard. One of the qualifications of being an apostle was that of having seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1).

Today, we who believe in Christ are to preach the testimony of the apostles because they were the eyewitnesses. They were the eyewitnesses to the miracles, the person, and the resurrected Christ. We are to **preach** the Gospel to the lost, not **testify** to the lost (Mark 16:15). We may preach the testimony which the Lord Himself gave concerning Himself (John 8:24). However, there is no scriptural or rational way one today may “witness” concerning the Lord as the New Testament uses the word “witness.” There is certainly no Bible authority to use such a term to describe what we are to do today in carrying out the Great Commission. Whatever we do in word (terminology) or deed (practice) is to be done by the authority of Christ, as found in the New Testament (Col. 3:17). Our goal is to see that lost folks hear about Christ, not ourselves: “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5).

Fifteen: Jesus, Through His Servant Ananias, Told The Penitent Saul Of Tarsus That He Was To “Be Filled With The Holy Ghost”

And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 9:17).

Saul of Tarsus, who became known as the apostle Paul after his obedience to the Gospel, was described by the Holy Spirit as an apostle born out of due time (1 Cor. 15:8-9). He was not one of the handpicked apostles chosen

by Christ while the Lord was upon the earth. However, he did become an apostle, though some denied it. “Am I not an apostle?” Paul would ask (1 Cor. 9:1). Paul wrote to Timothy, saying in part, “I am ordained...an apostle...I...lie not” (1 Tim.2:7). Though Timothy did not deny Paul’s apostleship, this writing was to confirm his standing to Timothy and to combat those who denied his apostleship.

As an apostle, he would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as did the other apostles. Saul was told that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As such, he would be able to lay hands on another, and thereby impart a miraculous gift (as he did with Timothy—2 Tim. 1:6). He would be able to preach by inspiration and work miracles, signs, and wonders (2 Cor. 12:12). He would be able to write inspired epistles (for example, note his statement in Gal. 6:11).

No man today should look to be “filled with the Holy Ghost” as was Paul and the other apostles. However, through hearing, believing, and obeying the written Word of God, which effectually works in those who believe (1 Thess. 2:13), one may have sufficient power to live the faithful Christian life.

Respect For The Person Of The Holy Spirit Today

The Bible is the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and completely furnishes us to do every good work which God desires us to do (2 Tim. 3:16-17). May we show Jesus Christ our Lord that we appreciate His sending the Holy Spirit upon the apostles to produce the written New Testament by determining to be diligent students of that testament and doers of that perfect law of liberty (2 Tim. 2:15; Jas. 1:22-25).

CHAPTER 32

What Jesus Said About His Second Coming

Dub McClish

Introduction

SOMEONE HAS PROVIDED THE following simple outline of the Bible: (1) Jesus is coming (Gen.-Mal.); (2) Jesus has come (Matt.-John); (3) Jesus is coming again (Acts-Rev.). While there is an element of truth in this analysis, the Bible student immediately recognizes that the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is not confined to Acts through Revelation. As we will see in the course of our study, it is also a major subject in the Gospel accounts from the Lord's own lips.

The Second Coming of Christ is one of the most regularly appearing themes of the New Testament, beginning with the statements of Jesus Himself. One will do well to remember that the teaching of the inspired writers of the New Testament on this subject (as on all others) is as much the "doctrine of Christ" as is the teaching He did personally. There are two extremes of reaction to the doctrine of the Second Coming: (1) unbelief and denial on the part of humanists, atheists, agnostics, and pagans, and (2) wild speculation about the when, the what, and the why of Jesus' coming. Much of the premillennial and dispensational theological system (it is far more than merely a "doctrine") revolves around gross misconceptions relating to the Second Coming.

Each of the Gospel accounts records various statements that Jesus made concerning His return. When one reads His words of comfort to the apostles, there can be no doubt that He taught the fact of His return:

Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).¹

However, as we shall see, He taught far more than merely the fact of His return. He also taught several details about occurrences that relate to that grand event.

What Will Jesus Find In Mankind At His Coming?

When He Comes, Everyone Will Be Surprised

Almost ever since He began promising His return, there have been pseudo-prophets and time-guessers who have predicted a certain time for the Second Coming. Some lying scribe, apparently pretending to be Paul, wrote to the church in Thessalonica, declaring the imminent coming of the Lord:

Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise (2 Thess. 2:1-3).

Paul wasted no time denying that he wrote the letter and correcting the false teaching it contained.

There have been many in more recent times who have ventured to predict the time of the Lord's coming, all of whom have been left with theological egg all over their faces. William Miller, upon whose teachings the Seventh Day Adventist sect is built, first predicted the Lord's second "advent" (hence the "Adventist" name) in 1843. He so successfully deceived his followers that they gave their possessions away, donned white robes, and took to the hills to meet the Lord when He came. When his predictions failed, Miller said he missed his date by one year, so they did the same thing a year later, with the same sorry result. Charles Taze Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witness cult, issued more than one such prediction. He finally sought to cover his tracks by saying that the Lord came secretly in 1914 only to a few.

Over the past century, almost every war, international skirmish, and earthquake has provoked a new round of speculations that the coming of Christ is imminent. More recently, men such as Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, and Tim LaHaye have made fortunes from their books and other materials that appeal to human curiosity relating to this subject and that take advantage of general Biblical illiteracy. LaHaye has especially scored big with his series of **Left Behind** books and other media.

They all make the same fatal mistake of applying the signs that Jesus gave for the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:4-35) to His return.² All such folk would do very well to attend carefully to the words with which the Lord began this section of Scripture: "Take heed that no man lead you astray... And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray" (Matt. 24:4; Matt. 24:11). For failure to do so, multiplied millions—the vast majority of Protestants—have been led astray concerning the Second Coming of the Lord.

Matthew 24 (with parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21) begins with unnamed disciples marveling over the majesty of Herod's temple (Matt. 24:1). Jesus apparently shocked them by stating that it would some day be utterly leveled (Matt. 24:2). Mark tells us that they had crossed Kidron and were gazing across the valley at the Temple from the Mount of Olives. In the company of Peter, James, John, and Andrew, one of them asked him for details about His startling statement (Mark 13:3). It is apparent that they identified any event sufficiently cataclysmic to level the Temple with His return and the end of the world:

And as he sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matt. 24:3).

However, in His answers, Jesus clearly separated their **three** questions into **two** separate issues: (1) the destruction of the temple (i.e., Jerusalem) and (2) His return and the end of the world, answering them in turn. He immediately proceeded to answer their first question by (1) telling them some things that would occur before Jerusalem's fall (Matt. 24:5-14) and then (2) giving them the one sign of its impending doom—"the abomination of desolation...standing in the holy place" [Matt. 24:15; Luke is not cryptic, but literal in his description: "Jerusalem compassed with armies" (Luke 21:20)]. Upon seeing this development, they were to cease what they were doing, abandon all property, and flee to the mountains for their lives from the conflagration about to be visited upon the city (Matt. 24:16-28). (Premillennialists blithely apply this to the Second Coming, conveniently ignoring the fact that it will be futile to attempt to flee anywhere when the Lord returns.)

The judgment upon Jerusalem and corrupt Judaism would be (and was) so awful and complete that the Lord likened it unto “the coming of the Son of man” (Matt. 24:27). He further described the ensuing destruction in apocalyptic terms used elsewhere by inspired writers to relate the utter overthrow of God’s enemies (Matt. 24:29-31; cf. Isa. 13:6-10; Ezek. 32:7-8). While this was a “coming” of the Lord (Matt. 24:27; Matt. 24:30; Matt. 24:33), it was not **the** Second Coming. It was rather a “coming” in judgment upon fleshly Israel that would occur in the lifetime of those to whom He spoke: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished” (Matt. 24:34). If those terrible events have not yet occurred (as adamantly argued by the dispensational speculators), then Jesus was a false prophet. They most certainly occurred in AD 70 when the four Roman Legions under General Titus overwhelmed Jerusalem, utterly razed it, slew tens of thousands of its residents, and took the remainder of them into slavery.

After discussing the signs by which His disciples might be able to recognize the impending doom of Jerusalem, Jesus then turned to the second issue of their questions—His Second Coming and the end of the world, which discussion runs from Matthew 24:36 through 25:46. Matthew 24:36 is the “transition verse” by which the Lord changes the subject: “But of **that** day and hour **knoweth no one**, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only” (Matt. 24:36; emp. mine throughout, DM). With these words He turns to an obviously different event from that which He had been discussing, which He styles “that day,” the time of which neither man, angel, nor even He Himself knows. He quickly identifies that event and “day” as “the coming of the Son of man” (Matt. 24:37; cf. Matt. 24:39; Matt. 24:42; Matt. 24:44; Matt. 24:50; Matt. 25:6; Matt. 25:19; Matt. 25:31). Whereas the former

event (the destruction of Jerusalem in their lifetimes) could be anticipated and recognized before it occurred because of certain signs, it would not be so with the “day” that He is now describing.

He promptly reiterated man’s inability to know the time of His coming: “Watch therefore: for **ye know not on what day your Lord cometh**” (Matt. 24:42). He was still not through with His emphasis on man’s utter inability to know the time of His return: “Therefore be ye also ready; for **in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh**” (Matt. 24:44). The Lord’s repetition almost seems to anticipate man’s stubbornness in refusing to hear what He says. What part of the phrase “knoweth no one,” relating to His return, do people not understand?

Those who predict the time of the Lord’s return, and those who believe the predictors, are either (1) abysmally ignorant of the Scriptures (in which case they should do some more studying before they pretend to be Bible scholars) or (2) they know what the Bible teaches, but they value their Dispensational Premillennial Theology above the Word of the Son of God.

The work of the time-guessers in their date-setting would be downright comedic were it not so tragic in its consequences. They know no more about the time of the Lord’s return than a newborn baby. Only fools would dare continue to proclaim, “We know,” after the Lord so plainly and repeatedly said, “Ye know not.” There are no “signs” by which one can determine when He will return. Rather, it will be “business as usual” in the affairs of men, as it was in the days of Noah before the flood (Matt. 24:37-42). The Lord’s appearance will be at a time when men are not expecting it, as a thief chooses the hour when he is least expected to commit his crime (Matt. 24:43). Paul (1 Thess. 5:2-3) and Peter (2 Pet. 3:10) both use the same figure in discussing this subject.

***When He Comes, Most Will Not Be Ready
And Will Mourn***

The practical point of our inability to determine the time of Jesus' return is that we must be ever watchful and ready: "Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44). He immediately tells two parables to enforce the need for perpetual preparedness. The faithful servant is watchful and ready for the return of his master, while the unfaithful one acts wickedly on the assumption that his master's coming is yet far off (Matt. 24:45-51). The wise virgins prepare for the coming of the bridegroom, whether soon or late, while the foolish ones make only momentary preparation and are not ready when he comes (Matt. 25:1-13).

Jesus was indirectly teaching concerning the lack of readiness for His Second Coming in Matthew 7:13: "Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby." When the Lord appears in the clouds (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7), most will not be prepared because they will not have entered through the "narrow gate" of obedience to the Truth (John 8:32). All such will mourn at their hopeless condition and eternal destiny of destruction (Rev. 1:7).

Infidels who denied and agnostics who doubted His existence will suddenly (but to no avail) become believers. Then "every tongue shall confess to God" (Rom. 14:11). (Madelyn Murray O'Hair and Carl Sagan were once atheists, but no more.) False teachers will be speechless, and they, with their blind followers, will meet their doom: "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit" (Matt. 15:13-14).

Those who had intended to prepare by obeying the Gospel will beg for one more minute of time, but in vain. Christ will then render

vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

Saints who once followed the Lord, but who became too busy or who felt too restricted by His Word to continue will never be bothered by another plea for their return: “Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

For all who were not watching and were not prepared for the return of the Lord, Mercy’s door will be closed, never to reopen, by Him Who “shutteth and none openeth” (Rev. 3:7).

When He Comes, A Few Will Be Ready And Will Rejoice

In contrast to the “many” above who will be unprepared, few will have prepared by entering the narrow gate and straitened way that leads to life (Matt. 7:14). These will comprise the faithful saints who have listened to the Lord’s sober warnings and will be ready and watching because they have lovingly anticipated His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). Their attitude is typified by John’s words: “Amen: come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:2b). They know what awaits them:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive,

that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

We should carefully heed the words of John in anticipation of the Lord's appearance: "And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28). When the Lord returns, it will be a time of sweet fulfillment and consummation for those who are prepared. We will at last realize that for which we have hoped and striven. Whatever we have suffered for the Lord's sake will then seem utterly insignificant compared to our glorious reward: "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

What Events Will Transpire At His Coming?

He Will Raise All Of The Dead

Jesus taught concerning the resurrection of the dead in very unambiguous terms:

Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29).

Note the following: (1) all of the dead will come forth—be resurrected—from the tombs, (2) "all" includes both good and evil, (3) all will come forth when they hear "His voice"—the voice of the Son of God (John 5:25), (4) all will be raised when "the hour cometh"—thus all will be raised at the same time, and (5) the righteous will be saved eternally, while the evil will be eternally damned. He does not here

specify that which will mark or precipitate the grand resurrection, except by implication: He will call them from their Hadean resting places by His voice, meaning that He will have returned to call them forth as He did His friend Lazarus (John 11:43-44).

That which the Christ implies in this regard, Paul teaches explicitly in two passages: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ’s, at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:22-23). Note that the Lord was first raised as the “firstfruits” of the resurrected dead, then will follow the resurrection of those who belong to Him **at His coming**.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16).³ Clearly, the time of the resurrection will be at the Lord’s descent from Heaven.

Jesus thus teaches that all of the dead who have ever lived, good and evil alike, will be raised on the same occasion (John 5:28-29). His inspired apostle tells us unmistakably that the **time** of the resurrection will be at the Lord’s return.

He Will Prepare All For The Immortal Realm

At the coming of the Lord the dead will be raised with a spiritual body that is incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42-44; 1 Cor. 15:52). But what of those who are alive when the Lord returns? Since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50), what are they to do? The Lord will instantaneously transform their corruptible, fleshy bodies into incorruptible, spiritual bodies at the same moment that He raises the saints in their spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15:51–53).

While we are naturally curious about this spiritual body that the Lord will provide for our Heavenly existence, the Bible does not tell us much about it. Paul tells us that the Savior for Whom we wait will

fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself (Phil. 3:20-21).

John adds that, while the Lord has not plainly revealed what we shall be like, “We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is” (1 John 3:2). Our glorious bodies will apparently not be susceptible to the disease, decay, injury, aging, pain, and death to which the human body has been subject since Adam and Eve sinned (Rev. 21:4-7; Rev. 22:1-5).

He Will Gather All Mankind For Judgment

Jesus declared that the Father has given the authority of judgment to Him (John 5:22; John 5:27). After telling the two parables on watchfulness and readiness for His return, the Lord next tells the parable of the talents, which emphasizes the Judgment of all men that will occur when the Lord returns (Matt. 25:14-30). He follows this figurative teaching of the Judgment with the description, in very literal terms, of the Final Judgment that He will execute upon His return (Matt. 25:31-46). According to this description, the Judgment will be a time when the righteous and the evil will be given their respective eternal sentences. Millions of husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and dear friends will be separated on that day, never to be reunited. The Judgment Day will be a time of supreme joy for the saved, but of unutterable dread and terror for the unredeemed.

The Lord referred to the Judgment as “that day” near the close of the Sermon on the Mount:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

Paul taught that God has

appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

Any attempt to escape the Judgment will be futile:

For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

When the Lord returns in Judgment, it will be too late to call upon Him for mercy and grace. At His first appearance, He “came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47). He came then to provide salvation through the sacrifice of Himself, and, as long as He delays His return, men will have an opportunity to be saved. However, at His Second Coming, He will come, not to bring salvation to the world, but to judge it. He will not force men to obey Him; He allows men to reject Him and His Word. However, those who do so will be judged by that very Word when He comes: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

He Will Dissolve The Material Universe

With the eternal sentence of all humanity now passed and sealed, this material universe will have served its purpose in the plan of God. There will no further purpose for it, so the Lord will cause it to exist no longer:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

The God Who had the power to speak this material system into existence from nothing (Gen. 1:1-31; Psm. 33:6; Psm. 33:9) can, by the same awesome power, speak it from existence into non-existence.

There can be no doubt that “the day of the Lord” refers to the day on which Christ will return. As earlier noted, the Lord used this same figure of the coming of a thief to teach that the time of His coming would be when men were not expecting Him (Matt. 24:43-44). Paul also referred to the Second Coming as “the day of the Lord” and said that it would come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 4:15-18; 1 Thess. 5:1-3).

Peter’s words hardly describe a secret coming, as alleged by the “Rapture” advocates. There will be no thousand years between the Lord’s return and this great conflagration. Thus there will be no earth on which a millennial kingdom could exist and no time for it, the premillennial adherents notwithstanding. They have it all wrong. He is not coming the second time to establish a political domain upon the earth; He never conceived of such an earthly kingdom.⁴ Rather, He declared:

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

He established that kingdom at His first coming (Matt. 16:18-19; Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1). The only kingdom He has is His church, which He will save eternally at His coming (Eph. 5:23-27). Upon His return, He will not **set** up His kingdom, but He will **deliver** up His kingdom (the church) that began on Pentecost to the Father, that it may be at home with God in heaven forever (1 Cor. 15:24). Nor will there be any “renovation” of the earth into an eternal utopia, as asserted by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

No one will fail to see, hear, or otherwise miss the Second Coming! We can scarcely imagine the sound and fury of the galactic upheavals and planetary collisions that will apparently characterize that occasion. The heat will be so intense that the very base elements of which the Lord constructed the universe will melt, dissolve, disintegrate, and be atomized without even any ashes remaining. The combination of all of the most spectacular fireworks displays that have ever been built will be but a tiny flicker compared to that Day’s display.

Then, if not before, men will forget their mad strivings for carnal pleasures and for fulfillment of fleshly lusts. They will then realize—too late—that the pleasures of sin are but “for a season” (Heb. 11:25). The vanity of the headlong pursuit of mere material baubles and treasures will then be perfectly evident as they are all rendered forever useless by their utter destruction. Then will all men finally see that the only riches that matter—and that ever mattered—are those treasures that one has sent on ahead to the bank of Heaven (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:7; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). As all things material disappear, it will at last be apparent, even to the worst reprobate and the most dedicated hedonist, that this world was only a rapidly passing, temporary realm—that the “real world” is that realm of spiritual and eternal verities from which they will be eternally excluded.

Conclusion

When the Lord returns, our hope will not rest in our own righteousness, although He demands righteousness of His people. Peter reasoned with fellow-citizens in the kingdom, as he discussed the Lord's return:

Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (2 Pet. 3:11–12).

Where one is spiritually when the Christ comes is where one will be at the Judgment and for eternity, with no further opportunity to repent of unbelief, rebellion, and disobedience:

And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is (Rev. 22:10-12).

Those alone will have hope who have been washed—and have continued to be washed—of sin by the sinless blood of Him Who has come in Judgment:

Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie (Rev. 22:14-15).

The only essential aim of our lives here must be to stand at last on the Lord's right hand and to hear the

welcome words, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). If we fail at this aim, we will have failed utterly and irreparably, regardless of earthly acclaim, fame, success, and fortune we may have achieved.

Each of us can know with certainty whether or not we are ready for His coming and the Judgment by giving heed to His Word. The Gospel is God’s powerful message of salvation (Rom. 1:16). It teaches us that our sins are washed away in the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5) when we are baptized into Christ (Acts 22:16). For this reason Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16). As long as we live according to His Word as His faithful servants, confessing our momentary lapses into sin, His blood that once cleansed us continues to do so (1 John 1:7). We will only thus be able to stand before Him at His coming and the Judgment, redeemed by His blood.

The words of the old Fanny J. Crosby hymn should be a serious meditation for one and all:

Blessed are those whom the Lord finds watching,
In His glory they shall share;
If He shall come at the dawn or midnight,
Will He find us watching there?
O can we say, we are ready, brother?
Ready for the soul’s bright home?
Say will He find you and me still watching,
Waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come?

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

2 The second verse of the song “Jesus Is Coming Soon,” by R. E. Winsett, that is in most of the song books we use in worship, contains the following words that reflect this fatal error: “Love of so many cold, losing their home of gold, This in God’s Word is told, evils abound. When these signs come to pass,

nearing the end at last, it will come very fast, trumpets will sound.” We should be as unwilling to sing this false doctrine as we are to teach it.

3 This is perhaps the principal “sugar-stick” passage of those who advocate the “Rapture,” a key element of dispensational premillennial dogma. Allegedly, before the “final” Second Coming, the Lord will appear above the earth, will raise all of (and only) the righteous dead, whom He will “rapture” up to be with Him in a holding pattern in the sky for seven years. All of this will allegedly be done secretly and silently as far as sinners are concerned. Therefore, when this occurs, there will be great confusion, calamity, and mystery on earth as airliners are suddenly and inexplicably without pilots, cars and trucks are driverless, and family members are nowhere to be found. This seven-year period will be one of indescribable “tribulation” on earth.

At the end of the seven years, the Lord, with those who were with Him in the “Rapture,” will supposedly “land” on the earth (on the Mount of Olives). He will then march triumphantly into Jerusalem, restore the old Davidic monarchy and kingdom, reinstate the Law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, and reign over a political domain for a literal one thousand years. This reign will be followed by the “Battle of Armageddon,” after which the unrighteous dead will be raised, and the Judgment will occur. LaHaye’s **Left Behind** fairy tales are based upon this egregiously erroneous concept of “Rapture.”

The “Rapture” doctrine (and its accompaniments) cannot be true if the Bible is true, for the following reasons.

a. Jesus taught one final resurrection of both good and evil **at the same hour**, but the “Rapture” doctrine requires several resurrections of the righteous separate from that of the unrighteous, which allegedly is to occur 1,007 years after the “Rapture” resurrection.

b. Jesus speaks of only one final, actual, Second Coming, but the “Rapture” doctrine requires a first “Second Coming” (the “Rapture” coming), followed by a second “Second Coming” (the “Kingdom” coming).

c. Jesus said that, at the resurrection, **all**—good and evil—will **hear His voice**. The resurrection will occur upon His

return (1 Cor. 15:22–23; 1 Thess. 4:16). Therefore, His coming will not be silent or secret, as the “Rapture” theorists advocate. Rather than silent, Paul says that the Lord’s return will be noisy (“with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,” 1 Thess. 4:16). John says that it will be universally evident (“every eye shall see him,” Rev. 1:7) rather than secret.

But, if good and evil are to be raised simultaneously, why does Paul not mention the resurrection of the evil (1 Cor. 15:23)? It was not within the purview of his purpose and argument concerning the fact of the resurrection [which some of the Corinthians were denying (1 Cor. 15:12)] to mention every detail about the subject. To mention the resurrection of Christians does not exclude the resurrection of sinners. As previously noted, Jesus specifically placed both good and evil in the one and only resurrection of which the New Testament speaks. Therefore, whenever the resurrection of God’s people is mentioned, the resurrection of those who belong to Satan is thereby implied, whether or not they are specifically mentioned.

What of Paul’s statement that “the dead in Christ shall rise first”? Does not this teach that only Christians will be in the resurrection mentioned in this context and that those outside of Christ will be raised later? The answer hinges on that to which “first” refers. If Paul is saying that those in Christ will be raised first in relation to those **not** in Christ, then the “Rapture” devotees might have a point. However, the context supports no such meaning. Paul used “first,” not in relation to the dead outside of Christ, but in relation to the order of events that would occur at the Lord’s coming. The Thessalonians were concerned that their brethren who died (“them that fall asleep”) would somehow not be able to enter into glory when the Lord returned (1 Thess. 4:13). Rather, Paul taught that, when the Lord comes, He will bring those dead saints with Him by raising them from the dead, so that those living at the time of the Second Coming would not precede their dead brethren in joining Christ in glory (1 Thess. 4:14–15). The Lord would raise them to life first (1 Thess. 4:16); then, both those living when Christ returned and those whom He had raised would together be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord and be with Him forever (1 Thess. 4:17).

Again, as mentioned above, if both good and evil will be in the same resurrection, as Jesus taught (John 5:28-29), then whenever the resurrection of one class is mentioned, both classes are implied.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 we see a further refutation of the “Rapture” nonsense in the very context that its adherents like to claim as their own. To fit their doctrine, the passage would need to say that the righteous will be caught up in the air to be with the Lord for seven years. Unfortunately for them, Paul says we will be caught up to be with the Lord “forever.” This passage is describing our entering into eternal, heavenly glory at last. It is comparable to Paul’s statement, in the context of His return and the resurrection, that this ushers in the end “when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father” (1 Cor. 15:24).

There is yet one other passage that the Rapturists try to claim for their “separate resurrections” doctrine. Revelation 20:5 refers to some event as “the first resurrection.” First, we should bear in mind that this is one of the most highly figurative chapters in the most highly figurative book in the Bible. As are some nineteen other things mentioned in this chapter (e.g., a key, a great chain, 1,000 years, et al.), this resurrection is likewise figurative. It refers to the “resurrection” of the souls (not bodies) of those who had been martyred for Christ. Apparently in honor of their sacrifice for the Lord, their souls were in Heaven where they “lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (i.e., till the end of time and the general resurrection) (Rev. 20:4).

Neither this nor any other passage lends any credence or support to a “Rapture.” Neither the word nor the concept is found in the Bible.

4 Premillennialists cannot even get the location of the Lord at His return right. Their system demands that Jesus must come back to the earth in order to set up His Kingdom. However, the New Testament never places the Lord on earth when He comes again. Rather, Paul says that He will “descend from heaven” and, instead of coming on down to earth, will take His people up in the clouds to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The “Jesus on earth” error relative to the Second Coming is

SECOND COMING

found in verse four of the song, “Living by Faith”: “Our Lord will return to this earth some sweet day, Our troubles will then all be o’er.” Interestingly, this verse was written by W. E. Winsett, the same writer who wrote the premillennial song “Jesus Is Coming Soon,” discussed above. He is obviously a devotee of the premillennial system. As with that song, we should not sing the error in this song.

Ladies' Classes

What Jesus
Said To
And About
Women

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CHAPTER 33

What Jesus Said About Mary Anointing Him With Spikenard

Jan Beard

Introduction

SHE HATH DONE WHAT she could.” What an awesome thing this would be for the Lord to say about us! Wouldn’t it be great for the Lord to say that we had done everything that we could to please Him? The Lord said this about Mary, who had done such a wonderful work for Him. We still remember what she did, and His praise for her, even though it was two thousand years ago.

Jesus and the disciples had come to the house of Simon in Bethany, where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. They sat down to eat, and Martha, as was typical of her personality, served the meal. Mary, anticipating the death of her Savior, took some precious ointment, and anointed the Lord’s head and feet. She poured it over the Lord’s head. She wiped his feet with her hair. The ointment filled the room with its fragrance. The disciples, especially Judas, were very angry and displeased with what Mary was doing. They thought that the ointment was being wasted. This was a valuable ointment, and the disciples thought they had a better idea for how this expensive gift should be used, and so they criticized her harshly. This must have

hurt Mary deeply, but the Lord took her defense and praised her for what she did. Jesus' words were very comforting to Mary, and very humbling to the disciples. Jesus was teaching them a lesson they needed to learn. From Jesus' sayings we can learn some valuable lessons about our service to the Lord. Let's examine what Jesus said about Mary's work of care, what He said about the disciples' word of criticism, and His word of commendation for Mary.

What Jesus Said About Her Work Of Care

Gratitude and love motivated Mary's actions; she cared a great deal for the Lord. In anointing Him prior to His death, she showed Him complete love and devotion. Her gift honored Him. She gave to Him willingly while He was still living, instead of waiting for His death. Nicodemus cared for Jesus in a similar way by preparing His body for burial: "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight" (John 19:39).¹ It is interesting that Jesus received expensive gifts both at the beginning and end of His life on earth. After Jesus was born, the wise men brought him gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11). Nicodemus and the wise men gave to Jesus not so much out of love, but more out of practicality. Nicodemus did love Jesus, but he was not financially responsible for taking care of Jesus' burial. He loved Jesus enough to be the one to prepare His body. However, it was not just love that motivated him; there was also a practical need to prepare Jesus' body for burial, and that need also motivated him. The wise men came to give gifts and honor a new King that had been born. They had no personal knowledge of Who Jesus really was, and, therefore, were not motivated out of a deep personal love like Mary was. Mary's gift was given strictly out of her deep love and devotion for the Lord.

Mary's love was also sacrificial. Jenkins said, "Unless this family was immensely wealthy, she was giving to Jesus a gift she withheld from her own brother when he died (John 11:14)."² If they were a wealthy family, she possibly had ointment for both Lazarus and Jesus, but, whether they were wealthy or not, it was still a precious gift. The cost of this ointment was about three hundred pence (John 12:5). The average day's wage was a penny a day (Matt. 20:2), so this would have been close to a year's wages. That would have been a large sacrifice on her part. Her sacrifice proves just how much she loved the Lord. Sacrifice proves love, just as God's sacrifice proved His love for us: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).³ God showed His love for us in that He gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins.

The disciples did not see Mary's actions the same way Jesus did. Jenkins suggests, "Since it was customary to distribute gifts to the poor during the Passover, the disciples mistakenly saw this 'wasted' ointment as a lost opportunity to do good."⁴ The disciples saw Mary's act as a waste, but the Lord knew what was in Mary's heart. He recognized immediately just how much of a sacrifice it was, seeing it as a supreme gift of love. He told the disciples, "She hath wrought a good work on me" (Mark 14:6). Mary was not wasting the ointment. She was symbolically preparing Jesus' body for His burial, and in doing so showed Him the highest admiration. Mary's actions were right and good. When we do something for the Lord, it is not a waste; it is a good work. Mary has given us a great example to follow.

We need to be doing things for the Lord every day, as Paul told the Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not

in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Every day provides opportunities to do good. It is important that we take advantage of every opportunity that is given to us, because each day brings a new one. We simply have to recognize those opportunities. Paul said, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). So many times we do not recognize and take advantage of an opportunity, and then it may never come our way again. Recognize an opportunity and act upon it, just as Mary did. This poem by an unknown author illustrates the point well:

“I Shall Not Pass This Way Again”

Thru this toilsome world, alas!
Once and only once I pass.
If some kindness I may show,
If a good deed I may do
To a suffering fellow man,
Let me do it while I can.
No delay, for it is plain,
I shall not pass this way again.

The next thing Jesus said about Mary was, “She hath done what she could.” Mary was using what was available to her to demonstrate her love for the Lord. She recognized what she had, saw an opportunity, and acted upon it. We need to find out what we can do and do it. Too many times we talk about what others are not doing, instead of concentrating on what we need to be doing ourselves. It doesn’t have to be an extravagant gift as Mary’s was. The value of the sacrifice is not as important as how we give it. Jesus praised the widow who put just two mites into the treasury (Mark 12:43-44), and Jesus praised Mary for using a very extravagant alabaster jar of ointment. Both gifts were very important to the Lord. The Lord’s attitude toward the two was basically the same: to Him both were priceless and acceptable. This possibly had confused the disciples, who criticized Mary for what she had done. To

the disciples, the widow's mites seemed to be too small, and Mary's ointment seemed to be too much! We ought to take this as a warning not to judge things by the world's standards. God had to remind Samuel of this when he went to anoint David as the next king of Israel. Samuel first wanted to anoint Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, but God said:

Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

The world judges us by our outward appearance—for example, our physical beauty, the cost of things, and how impressive they are compared to lesser things. But God judges us according to the attitude of the heart of the one who gives. We cannot begin to know what is in someone else's heart.

God wants us to use what we have to do His work. Each one of us has something that we can do for the Lord. We don't all have the same abilities, but there is something that everyone can do. The church is the body of Christ, made up of many members with different abilities, yet their contribution together makes up the whole body (Rom. 12:4-5). There is a children's song that talks about all the gifts that the Lord has given to us. It talks about how He made each of us special and gave us capabilities, and how we can share these with each other. Part of the song goes like this:

I'm a great big bundle of so many gifts that the Lord has given to me.
I'm a great big bundle of so many gifts but I don't know what they will be.
I believe it when He says He made me special and has given me some capability.
As I'm learning to grow, as I'm learning to know,
I will share these gifts with you.

I might be used in Sunday School to teach and
maybe pray.
Or I could use the gifts I have to help some other
way.
So I will learn to use my life, my gifts and talents
too,
And I will learn to serve the Lord in everything
I do!

What Jesus Said About The Disciples' Word Of Criticism

It was the Lord's own disciples who objected to Mary's actions, and selfishness and greed motivated their criticism. They could not believe what she was doing. Matthew and Mark say that the disciples had indignation (Matt. 26:8; Mark 14:4). Vine says, about the word translated "indignation," that it "primarily meant 'to feel a violent irritation, physically.'"⁵ Mark said that they murmured against her (Mark 14:5). Robertson says that this word ("murmured") was used of the snorting of horses.⁶ It seems that the disciples were very angry at the situation. John specifically mentions Judas Iscariot as the one who objected to Mary's actions (John 12:4). Judas' concern was not genuine because he did not care for the poor. His concern was for himself; he was a thief, and he had been stealing from the treasury (John 12:6). He may have thought that the money the ointment would bring could have been added to the moneybag he kept as treasurer, thus giving him more from which to steal. Judas was so angered by this whole incident that he went directly to the chief priests and said, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver" (Matt. 26:14-15). Dorris states, "It was Judas who valued money so highly—he considered fifteen dollars a fair equivalent for betraying Jesus and the loss of his own soul."⁷ At this point, Judas was angry enough to plot to betray his own Lord.

The disciples' harsh words regarding Mary must have stung and hurt her deeply. They openly became furious at her actions. There she sat with love in her heart, and immediately she heard the anger and the cruel accusations from Jesus' own disciples. Imagine how she must have felt! The Lord saw how troubled Mary was and took her defense. He spoke to the disciples very harshly and told them, "Let her alone; why trouble ye her" (Mark 14:6). Imagine how we have felt at times when others have humiliated us. It can be a horrible feeling to know you are trying to do a good work, and then to hear harsh and unjust words of criticism. May we never allow criticism to stop our good works. On another occasion, Jesus was visiting in Mary and Martha's home. Mary was listening to Jesus' teaching while Martha was "cumbered about much serving." Martha, frustrated with her sister, criticized Mary for not helping, and tried to persuade Jesus to get Mary's help with the meal. Jesus told her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42). We tell our kids to choose what is the right thing to do, and Mary was choosing that right thing. The Lord was not going to allow Martha to discourage her, and would not allow it to be taken away from her.

Jesus was not downplaying the importance of doing good for the poor by rebuking the disciples. Jenkins said, "Jesus' concern for the poor was real and he urged His followers to remember them (Matt. 19:21; Gal. 2:10)."⁸ Jesus told the disciples, "For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always" (Mark 14:7). Jesus wanted the disciples to remember the poor, but He also wanted the disciples to look at their priorities and ask themselves which was more important—to do good to Jesus while they

could, or to give to the poor, which they could do any time? He wanted the disciples to realize that there would always be poor people to take care of, but that He would not be there with them all the time. His time on earth was limited, and giving to Him while He was still living was the more important thing. He never intended for us to neglect the poor, but giving of ourselves to the Lord is our first priority. Greedy or selfish people see works for Christ as a waste, but, if it is given to our Lord, it is never wasted.

Jesus' Word Of Commendation

The Lord recognizes and respects all work that is done for Him. He recognized Mary's work as a good work. Whatever good works we do are as if we do them to the Lord Himself. We are told that, when Jesus returns, all nations will be gathered before His throne. The good will be on the right, separated from the bad on the left. Jesus said the good had fed the hungry, given them drink, visited the sick, taken in strangers, given clothes, etc. He said that everything they did for others was just like doing it for Him: "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). He told those on the left they had **not** done these things for others, and that was the same as **not** doing it for the Lord.

Jesus said people all over the world would remember what Mary had done. Not only would it be remembered, but also men would speak about it when the Gospel is preached everywhere. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:9). What we do for the Lord will not only be remembered by others, but, more importantly, it will be remembered by the Lord. This ought

to be a daily encouragement for us to do things for the Lord because He notices everything we do, whether it is big or small. Dorcas was remembered for her good works. She made clothes for the widows, and they remembered her (Acts 9:36-39). But do people always notice the “insignificant” things of our daily good works? You may take food to a sick one, care for someone’s home while they are in the hospital, or you may feel unappreciated as a Bible class teacher, but knowing that the Lord will remember everything you do can encourage you to continue in your work.

Those who die in the Lord will be blessed because they will rest from their labors and their works will follow them (Rev. 14:13). The Lord will not forget our good works; He will remember them on the Day of Judgment. Sometimes we can get weary working so hard, and wonder why we are not appreciated more. We do not have to worry about whether others notice our work; what is most important is that the Lord always sees. We are told to “lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-20). Our good works can be like making deposits in a heavenly bank account. Rather than concentrating on saving as much as we can, we ought to think about what our lives are doing toward our home in heaven. Are we working to be seen of men, or are we working to please our Heavenly Father? We need to stay encouraged, doing great works for the Lord.

We need to be sure that it is love that motivates us to do good deeds. Jenkins said of Mary, “Her memorial to Jesus was her loving kindness that has inspired countless others to follow her example.”⁹ Cole said, “Ultimately, the Lord looks, not at the human wisdom of our acts, but at the love to Him which prompts them.”¹⁰ We do not need to do good deeds just so we can be recognized. This should never be the motivating factor. Love should always be the reason for our good deeds.

We are told not to do good deeds just to be seen of men. Jesus told us to let them be done in secret, and He will reward us openly (Matt. 6:1-4). If we do good deeds to be seen of men, we will have no reward from the Father. Doing good deeds to be seen of men brings the only kind of reward that person seeks: the praise of men. We were not put on the earth to please man, but to please the Lord. This passage does not condemn doing good deeds in such a way that others know of our good works. Our good works will at times be known, simply because of the nature of them. Jesus also tells us, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). We simply should not do them just so that others will notice. If we will focus on serving and pleasing God, we will not be concerned with how well we are pleasing others. We are to love the Lord, and serve only Him (Matt. 4:10). The Lord knows and sees what is in our hearts and will act upon that accordingly.

Conclusion

What a wonderful example Mary set for all of us to follow. We need to be sure we give to the Lord because we love Him. This love should be a sacrificial love. We should be willing to give everything we have to the Lord, even the best of what we have. Mary gave her best to Jesus. She did not have to be asked or told. She did it because she wanted to and loved Him. Our giving needs to be done with a willing attitude just as Mary had. We need to be a cheerful giver, not a careful one. We should never complain or begrudge doing the Lord's work. When we give with a cheerful heart, we have faith that the Lord does see us, and will reward us. If we have the right attitude, we will want to do things for Him. The greatest blessings come from giving, not receiving (Acts 20:35). The Lord knows what is in our hearts, whether we have a good attitude, or a bad attitude.

We need to fill our lives with doing good works for the Lord every day. Opportunities come along all the time. We need to recognize these opportunities and act upon them, using all the resources that we have available to us. Everyone has different abilities, but everyone can do something for the Lord. We each have a “job” to do, and, when each “job” is done, the puzzle is complete. Some people will be able to do certain things better than others, but there is something each can do.

We need to remember as we do these good works not to be critical of others. Only God knows what is in our hearts. We should not judge others. He will be the ultimate judge someday. The Lord remembers all of our good deeds. He is the One keeping the record, and for those who have fulfilled His will, there will be rest and reward.

“She Has Done What She Could Do”

There are so many ways
in which we can give
As we serve our Lord
through the life we live.

Whether it’s a covered dish
or just a friendly smile,
As we’re doing for others,
we serve our Lord all the while.

God gave His very best
when He gave His Son.
God’s Son gave His best
when His life was done.

How can we be content
to do any less?
God wants each of us
To give our very best!

Nothing is too good,
too big or too small,
When we do what we should
and in service give our all.

So, let's do what we can,
our whole life through,
Then it can be said of us,
"She has done what she could do."
Sarah Richey

Endnotes

1 **Holy Bible**, King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1972). All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

2 Ancil Jenkins, **A Commentary On The Gospel of Mark** (Abilene, TX: Quality Publications, 1999), p. 149.

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5 W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, & William White, **Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary Of Old And New Testament Words**, Logos Library System, electronic edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

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9 Ibid.

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CHAPTER 34

What Jesus Said About The Poor Widow

Teah McWhorter

Introduction

AS HAS BEEN OFTEN stated, every word spoken by our Lord was not without purpose. In this lesson we are taking special note of what Jesus said as He observed the crowds dropping their gifts into the temple treasury. As He watched, one lone figure drew His attention. The Lord called His disciples and focused their attention on the actions of a poor widow. She had given “more than all the others.” The impact of these words is just as important to us today, as we strive to give with the same spirit as this poor widow.

The Passover Week

It was Tuesday of the week in which Jesus was crucified. Many had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover, as the Law commanded, and were assembled at the temple to bring their gifts:

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread [Passover, TM], and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee (Deut. 16:16-17).

The Temple

There are two words that are translated “temple” in the New Testament. *Hieron*, the word used here, refers to the entire precinct of the temple.¹ The temple proper, *naos*, defined as the inner sanctuary into which only the priests could lawfully enter, sat within a series of courtyards.² The inner courtyard, or Court of the Priests, had an adjacent courtyard, the Court of Israel. It was accessible only to the men and had a short inner wall allowing for observance of the offering of sacrifices. It was fifteen steps above the Court of the Women, where all Jews, male or female, could assemble. This was the location of the Treasury (from *gaza*, the Persian word for treasure, and the Greek *phulake*, guard, so safe for gifts to be deposited).³ Edersheim says this area was a common place of worship.⁴ John 8:20 records another occasion when Jesus was teaching here.

The Treasury housed thirteen chests or upside-down-trumpet-shaped vessels for the collection of religious and benevolent offerings (Deut. 26:12). Each vessel was marked for its specific purpose. Trumpets one and two were for the half-shekel temple tax (Matt. 17:24). Three and four were for monies to purchase the two turtledoves or young pigeons required for a woman’s purification. Such must have been Mary’s offering after the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:22-24). Trumpet five was for wood and others were similarly designated to cover various temple needs. Numbers nine through thirteen were for freewill offerings (Deut. 23:23).

The Battles (Debates With The Religious Leaders)

Our Lord was here in the temple teaching, as He had done daily since His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Sunday (Luke 19:47; Luke 20:1). First, the religious leaders challenged His authority to teach in the temple. In

response, He asked them about the authority of the baptism of John. When they did not answer His question, He did not reply to theirs. He used several parables—the two sons, the vineyard and the husbandmen, and the wedding feast—to show how the kingdom of heaven would be reserved for **obedient** servants and not for those who rejected the Son of God. He was bombarded by waves of questions that He answered or turned back against those asking. He spoke to them of the greatest commandment. When they could not answer His question about Christ’s relationship with David, they finally retreated. Matthew 22:46 records, “And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.” Then, still in the audience of all the people, he warned his disciples to **beware** of those leaders, pronouncing woe after woe against them and their hypocrisies.

The Observation

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance [ASV—superfluity]; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living (Mark 12:41-44).

Robertson says, “the Sanhedrin had slunk away in sheer defeat.”⁵ Now Jesus found a place to sit down in the treasury to watch those who were passing by the chests and leaving their offerings. Mark uses the word *etheorei* (“behold”) to denote Jesus’ deliberate, careful scrutiny of

the people.⁶ He saw how the rich gave much. Were they conspicuous with their giving? In this instance, the Scripture does not say. Some had been known to “sound a trumpet” when they gave (Matt. 6:2). Could this have reference to the loud sound of the coins being thrown into the trumpet-shaped vessels of the treasury? Here it simply says, “They gave much.” They fulfilled their physical obligation. The Lord did not openly condemn their gift but said only that they gave of their abundance, of that which they did not need.

The important observation made by our Lord was the gift brought by a poor widow. There is a sharp contrast, not only between the rich givers and the poor widow, but also between the scribes who “devour widow’s houses” (Luke 20:47) and the widow who freely gave her all (Luke 21:4). She is described by the words “conspicuously poor” and “destitute.”⁷ And yet she came to give her offering. The same word is said of Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:9: “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

The Value Of The Gift

The widow gave a proportionately small amount compared to the other gifts. A mite (*lepta*) was the smallest Jewish coin and worth only a small fraction of our modern penny. Compare that to a denarius, one day’s wages for a man, with a value of approximately twenty cents. Mark and Luke both tell us that her two mites were all that she had to live on. Yet she was willing to give it all to God and begin again. She truly understood sacrificial giving. Jesus said, “This poor widow hath cast in more than they all.” By her very attitude, she raised the value of those two mites. Some rightly say that there are two ways for determining the value of a gift—the value to the receiver

and the cost to the giver. The significance was not in what she gave, but in what she did not keep.

We find in Jesus' words that no gift is too small if given with the right heart. We also can take note that no one is too poor to give to the Saviour. Her gift was hardly worth counting by most standards. And yet it was all she had. Yes, she was "conspicuously poor," but that did not stop her from bringing her gift. She gave as we are commanded in 2 Corinthians 8:12: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." She gave "not grudgingly, or of necessity" but with a "cheerful" heart (2 Cor. 9:7).

She was not embarrassed because it was a small gift. It was what she had earned with her own hands, and she was bringing it to God. The word *penichros*, translated "poor" in Luke 21:2, means "one who labors for her own bread."⁸ This widow worked for her support, rather than depending on the welfare of the Jews to feed her and whatever family she may have had. Some would belittle her for her foolishness because, after all, now she had nothing to live on. But Jesus did not say she gave too much. He complimented her for giving her all. Tomorrow would be another day. Today, she showed her love for God and her faith in Him by giving all she had to Him.

Like the faithful Abraham who gave his son, the son of promise, as a sacrifice to God (Gen. 22:1-14), this widow gave a precious gift—all that she had to live on. Do we have this much faith? Do we trust the Lord to take care of us when we use what we have to His glory? Hebrews 11:6 promises a reward to those who in faith diligently seek Him.

This poor widow reminds us of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:12-16. She had only "a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse," which she

expected to prepare and eat and then die. But when Elijah told her to make a cake for him first, her faith caused her to give the last she had for him. God rewarded her accordingly. From that time on, her barrel of meal was never empty, and neither was her cruse of oil. Will you share your “barrel of meal” and your “cruse of oil” with someone who needs it? Though He will not do so miraculously, God is just as able to provide for us today: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory” (Eph. 3:20-21).

Where Is Your Treasure?

In Luke 18, we read of a rich man who did not love God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength (Mark 12:30). Because Jesus knew his heart, He told him to sell all that he had, distribute to the poor, and follow Jesus. But he was not willing to put God first (Matt. 6:33). He trusted in his riches rather than in God: “Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:24). He let his love of riches keep him from the treasures of heaven (Luke 18:25). However, this widow was a good example for that greatest commandment. She gave voluntarily what this rich young man would not give even by command.

The rich fool of Luke 12 is another example of an improper heart. He refused to do even as much as Jesus said the rich in the temple did and give of his surplus. Rather, he stored it up in bigger and bigger barns. Because of his greed, he lost all that he had, including his soul: “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). He was like the Laodiceans of Revelation 3:17, who had said, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” but did not know that they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and

blind, and naked.” When we are concerned only with “me” and “I,” and we do not glorify God for what He has given to us by using it in His service, we will pay the price.

Is it a sin to be rich? The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 6:9-10:

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

But it also tells us of Abraham, Joseph, and Job, who were very rich and very righteous. God is not concerned with how much we have, but in where we focus our attention:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

Where is your treasure?

The Privilege Of Giving

In contrast to the church at Laodicea is the church at Smyrna. Of them it was said, “I know thy works and tribulation and poverty, (but thou art rich)” (Rev. 2:9). The same was said of the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:2: “How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.” They are described as being in the same state of poverty as the destitute widow. And yet they insisted that their gift be accepted among the collections

being taken for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, that they be allowed the privilege of this grace also (2 Cor. 8:7). The chapter continues:

For to their power [ability, TM], I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints (2 Cor. 8:3-4).

Why were they so anxious for Paul to accept their gift? 2 Corinthians 8:5 tells us they “first gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God.” 2 Corinthians 8:8 and 2 Corinthians 8:24 speak of the sincerity and the proof of their love. Can this be said of us? Our physical giving can never be called in question if we have first given ourselves to God, if we have the proper love for God and our fellowman.

In Malachi 3, God challenged the Israelites to come back to the Lord, to be a righteous offering. He said they had robbed Him by their pathetic excuse for giving:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Mal. 3:10).

Are we like the Israelites? Do we want the blessings first, and then we give to God of the sick, blind, or maimed of our stock, the leftover that we can spare? The challenge came first. We must give to Him, first our lives, then our possessions, and He will reward us more than we can measure:

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake

thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

God does not ask for more than we are able to give. He asks us to give as we have prospered (1 Cor. 16:2). The Old Testament commands for giving were flanked with “if he be not able” provisions (Lev. 5:7; Lev. 5:11; Lev. 12:8). He does expect us, however, to be good stewards of what we have. In 1 Corinthians 4:2, Paul tells us, “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” If we are careful with the money and time and talents that God has given us, we will be able to give. Even if we could truly say we have no money, we still have time and talent.

Records show that women spend approximately 80% of all money spent in the United States.⁹ Whether we actually bring home the pay or share our husband’s paycheck, we do make decisions on how money is spent. Therefore, we must give account. If we feel that we do not have money to give, maybe we need to be more frugal housewives. If we can have money to buy groceries, then we can figure out how to have money to give to the Lord. Maybe we should make a list of all the ways we spend our money and consider the worth of each item on the list. Do we have to have new furniture and costly vacations or buy our kids the hottest clothes, the newest CDs, and the biggest toys? Must we put steak on the table when we could be full and healthy with something less costly? Do we spend more on “us” than we are willing to give to Him? Even young people who have not yet begun bringing home a paycheck should consider how they are blessed every day and find a way to give to God, whether it be monetarily or in service efforts. Do we teach our children, by example and words, how to give? Or do we teach them to be greedy husbandmen (Luke 20:9-14), always wanting more and never enjoying the privilege of proper giving?

Yes, giving is a privilege that we can all enjoy in some form. Mark 9:41 tells us that even a cup of cold water given in His name shall receive its reward. How great a loss if we never know the privilege of giving! Who would deprive the poor widow of the gift of her Savior's praise? Would you take away the abundance of joy that describes the Macedonians, who begged that their gift be accepted?

It is an unquestioned fact that those who are less able to give are the most generous givers in the Lord's kingdom. They have learned what it is to depend on God from day to day while the man of affluence with a big bank account and much goods laid up for many years finds it hard to pray for his daily bread.¹⁰

Christ Is Watching Us

Just as He watched the givers in the temple, Christ is watching us with our giving also. He pays deliberate attention to what we give and the spirit in which we give it. Do we give out of our abundance, out of what is left when we have spent all we choose to spend? Do we honor Him with our gift, or simply pay our "temple tax"? We must be willing to sacrifice, to deny ourselves a few comforts, that the kingdom might be furthered, that the needy might be fed. Do we see giving as a privilege, truly a blessing in our lives? Our Lord said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). What is the Master saying about our gifts?

Endnotes

1 James Strong, **The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of Bible**, Comfort Print Edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995).

2 W. E. Vine, **Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 1127.

3 A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, Volume 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 371.

4 Alfred Edersheim, **The Temple** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 48.

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6 Paul Butler, **Bible Study Textbook Series—Luke** (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981), p. 467.

7 Vine, p. 864.

8 Roy Lanier, Jr., **A Little Contribution** (Wichita Falls, TX: Western Christian, 1992), p. 53.

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CHAPTER 35

What Jesus Said To Martha

Martha Bentley

Introduction

F*RST OF ALL, MAY* I express my humble gratitude to B. J. and the elders of Southaven for their confidence in me and their invitation to appear on this prestigious lectureship. It is well known for its scriptural soundness and firm stand for the Truth and is respected throughout the brotherhood. Also my thanks for the subject assigned to me. It has given me a new insight and appreciation for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and their love and kindness toward our Lord.

The Text

Would you read along with me as I read Luke 10:38-42 from the King James Version?

Now it came to pass as they went, that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered with much serving and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.

But one thing is needful and Mary hath chosen
that good part which shall not be taken away
from her.

The Background

Let us first get some geographical background for our lesson. Bethany was a little village of some twenty families situated on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives and a short distance from Bethpage. It was approximately one and one-half miles from the city of Jerusalem (fifteen furlongs according to John 11:18). Thus, it was not too far to walk to the temple in Jerusalem. It was either beside or very near the road from Jericho southwest to Jerusalem.

We have very little Scripture about Bethany, other than its close association with Christ in the last days before His agony on the cross. Being so near to Jerusalem, it was convenient for Him to go there often for His time of brief rest away from the crowds that constantly followed Him. The home of Martha and Mary is often mentioned (John 11:18-35; John 12:1), and His close friendship with them was well known.

On the occasion with which we are concerned, Jesus had stopped in the house which Martha owned (Luke 10:38), and where she resided with her sister Mary, and their younger brother, Lazarus. Not being told how Martha came to own the house, we can only surmise that she was either a widow or an heir of parental ownership. At any rate, she was the household authority. She must have been a very practical and organized person who was the mother figure to Mary and Lazarus. She evidently strove for perfection in her home and was an attentive and affectionate hostess. They, as a family, loved Jesus and were always eager for Him to visit. They were evidently deeply religious, but, while they recognized and respected Jesus

as One Who had supernatural powers, they did not realize that He was Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah of prophecy. In this they were not alone, for even the apostles were not convinced (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11). Jesus was loved for His humanity, and He was One Who could teach them in a manner easily understood.

We can learn from them the value of hospitality. Their home was open to lodging strangers as well as friends. It is obvious that they were pleased to have Jesus whenever He could be there. Being near to Jerusalem, we can assume that they lodged some who came for the Jewish feasts each year. Don't ever begrudge offering hospitality (Heb. 13:1-2), for we can gain much from it, much more than we give. Keeping missionaries in our home has been one of the greatest blessings and a valuable experience for our children. Some of our fondest memories are of lectureship guest speakers staying overnight in our home.

One of the qualifications for the office of elders is that of loving hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). Also, the widows who are eligible to be enrolled for continuing support from the church are those who "have lodged strangers, washed the saints' feet," along with other good works (1 Tim. 5:10). Our homes should be used to the glory of God.

We learn also that friendship should always come before perfection. Jesus was a close friend to Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (John 11:5; John 11:35-36). As such, he was welcomed often into their home. His rebuke to Martha was not just as the Master Teacher, but out of His love as a friend. Do your friends expect "special" treatment when they visit? Should we not treat them as a part of our family? Perfection is not required, and food is not the object of the visit.

We need also to recognize that preachers are regular people. Jesus was very special, and, had it been our house,

we, too, would have made elaborate preparation for His comfort. However, Martha and Mary did not have the same knowledge that we have of Him today. His Deity was not at the forefront for them, as was His humanity. Yet He was a great teacher, and they recognized the importance of His words.

Do you love to have preachers into your home? If not, why not? How about your local preacher? Is he a friend who often just drops by to chat, or are all of his visits those of the scheduled type? If only the scheduled ones, then you are missing some of the best fellowship and teaching you will ever receive. Treat preachers just as you would a family member. You may find they like sandwiches and chips, too!

Why, then, are this particular visit by Jesus, and its specific story, included in the Holy Scriptures, since there are other times that Jesus had visited in Martha's house? Romans 15:4 tells us, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." Therefore, we can know that there must be lessons for us in this record.

The Lessons

Christ said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." Why was Martha rebuked? Was Christ saying that she should not have prepared any food? Was it to uphold Mary in idleness? Neither of these applies. He was teaching the importance of our setting priorities. We have no record of further conversation with them, but we can be assured, since both women knew that the rebuke was made out of love, that they took it to heart and profited by it.

Why, then, was Martha rebuked? There are some general principles which may not apply directly to Martha, but to which we can relate in our own day and time.

(1) We can over-emphasize meal preparation. Had Martha prepared a simple meal, with help from Mary, there would have been no cause for additional help. If preparing a meal becomes so time-consuming that we cannot enjoy the finished product, then it becomes necessary to reevaluate the meal. Do we overwork to the point of exhaustion just for one meal? Why?

(2) Martha was engaging in a bit of self-pity. She, too, loved to sit at Jesus' feet and absorb His teaching and was somewhat resentful that Mary was enjoying that privilege. If we sometimes feel that our efforts are not appreciated, maybe we should stop and thank God we have a meal to prepare. Many people of the world do not have that privilege, since many are so impoverished they have little food of any kind. We should count our blessings.

(3) Martha didn't think before she spoke. It is obvious that she did not think about her words as a rebuke to Jesus. While she didn't realize it, she was actually blaming Jesus for her bad attitude, and that before Mary. Are we careful not to embarrass our children in the presence of visitors, even though we may be right in what we say? This is especially important with teens in the presence of their peers.

(4) Martha was too obsessed with time. While it is true that we like to serve a hot meal while it is hot, and hot rolls grown cold are not as good, the world won't cease to be if things don't go as planned. If you have a group of men (especially preachers) who are often deeply engrossed in a serious Bible discussion, is it such a tragedy if they are late to the table? Do you get upset, or do you "go with the flow" and enjoy their discussion? Being a silent listener in such company can be very enjoyable and very educational. Be flexible with your time.

Choosing The Good Part

Having noted these lessons, let us remember that Jesus also said, "Mary hath chosen that good part." Her

actions reflected a choice. We, too, must make choices and must be willing to choose the “good part.” What are some of these choices?

(1) Our choice first and foremost should be that we honor the Scriptures as the plenary, verbally inspired, all-sufficient Word of God (2 Pet. 1:21). It should be our standard of authority and our pattern for living. David said, “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee” (Psm. 119:11).

To make the proper choices, then, we will need a good knowledge of the Scriptures in order to be able to recognize and refute false teachers (Jude 3; 2 John 10-11; Gal. 1:8-9). We are to turn away from those who are evil (2 Tim. 3:1-7). Many are already turning away from hearing the Truth (2 Tim. 4:3-4), and the “change agents” among us, within the Lord’s church, are wreaking havoc among weak members.

(2) We should choose a pure mind over a spotless house. We are admonished to study that we may be approved in the sight of God and be able to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

We are commanded to teach our children (Deut. 6:6-9). This is a principle which still applies today. How can we teach that which we do not know? TV will not point the way to heaven. We must remember that dust on the Bible is far worse than dust on the furniture.

(3) We must choose worship time over meal-time. Let us suppose that, during a Gospel meeting, you have scheduled the local minister and the visiting evangelist for the Sunday meal after morning worship services. Do you spend so much time in meal planning and preparation that you have no time to pray for the meeting? Are you too tired to participate in the Bible study? There have actually been those who have missed the morning worship services in order to prepare a meal! Their “excuse” is that they can

wait and worship at the evening service. Suppose God does not allow the earth to stand until evening! Is that worship acceptable? Our worship at the scheduled times is of vital importance (Heb. 10:25). It is not just a religious exercise that we can accomplish in one hour each week. If the morning service causes one or more to obey the Gospel, do we leave before they complete their obedience in baptism? Could not dinner wait a few more minutes? Priorities??? Do we leave food cooking in the oven, thinking that the worship will always be completed in an hour? Or is our meal such that we can enjoy the Bible teaching and worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24)? Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6), or are we more concerned with serving our physical hunger? God's kingdom is not meat and drink (Rom. 14:17).

(4) Do we plan our vacation time to include a place for sound worship, or do we think maybe that we can find a place after we arrive? This may take some prior research, for not all churches with a correct name over the door are true churches according to the pattern (1 Tim. 1:16; Heb. 8:5). We cannot fellowship false teaching and be acceptable in God's sight (2 John 9-11; Eph. 5:11). Along this same thought, do you pack your Bible first, and do you see that your children take theirs as well? What kind of example are you setting? Too many who claim to be Christians think nothing of going on a vacation trip and saying, in effect, "Goodbye, God, I'll be back in a week or two."

(5) In choosing "that good part," do we set aside a time each day for prayer and Bible study? Do we really study, or do we just read a little from the Word every day? Do we make time to get our Bible lessons, and do we insist our children do the same? Children need to learn that they cannot wait until Sunday morning to prepare and be ready to worship. If that is the kind of example you set, then

they will certainly follow in your footsteps, and, may I say, both will be lost!

(6) What of choosing sports over worship? Do you let your children miss services to attend ball games, etc., or are they taught that God comes first? Super Bowl Sunday is a “sacred cow” in some congregations today. Many even replace evening worship with parties in order to watch the game. Where does this put God in such an arrangement? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” is a plain commandment from Christ (Matt. 6:33).

(7) How often do we choose to pray and for what? We should be ready at any time to talk to God (1 Thess. 5:17). We must choose a proper lifestyle in order to be heard. We must be in fellowship with God on a continuing basis (1 John 1:7-10). God hears the righteous (1 Pet. 3:12), the obedient (1 John 3:2), the pure (1 Tim. 2:8), and those worshipers who are doing His will (John 9:31). We must pray not only for ourselves, for forgiveness of our sins, but for our fellow Christians (Col. 4:2), and civil leaders (1 Tim. 2:1). Prayers are not just requests, as though God were a “service station,” but we should always give God our thanks and praise for our blessings which we receive in abundance (1 Thess. 5:18): “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jas. 5:16).

(8) What kind of lifestyle do you choose? We need to read Galatians 5:19-25 often, maybe every day. Better, still, commit it to memory.

Another special verse to store in our hearts is Philippians 4:6-7, which commands us, “Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” We don’t often think of worry as being contrary to God’s will, but this verse is a command just as much as, “Repent and be baptized.”

(9) Do we choose to study the Old Testament Scriptures, or do we write them off as out of date? Since they are written for our learning (Rom. 15:4), we must take heed to their lessons. Through them we learn how God dealt with His children, the Israelites, in olden times when they sinned. Do we expect to fare better than they?

If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him.

These words are from Hebrews 2:2-3.

(10) Do our choices reflect our obedience to our elders (Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 5:17-19)? Give them a pat on the back now and then. They have a very heavy responsibility and are troubled over many things of which we are unaware. Since they watch for our souls, should we not give them the honor due? Pray for them often and also for their wives, for they stand by them in good times and bad.

(11) How do we choose to consider the elderly in our congregation? Often, they are the neglected, and many are home-bound. We need to teach our children to pay respect to them. Have you ever chosen to take your young children to visit in a nursing home? You may find it a very rewarding experience. Children can be a blessing to those who are aged, and the visits can also give those children a good insight into old age. How often have you observed children who are allowed to be disrespectful to those who are old and cannot move quickly? Teach them to open doors, to offer a steadying hand, help them to their car, etc. Teach those children also to pray for the aged, realizing they, too, may be in that position some day.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us consider that, one day, we must meet God in the Day of Judgment. There, we will each give account to God (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Will we then remember that we were “careful and troubled about many things,” or will we have chosen “the one thing needful that cannot be taken away”? We need to think seriously on these things.

CHAPTER 36

What Women Can Do For Jesus

Tanya Cox

Commendation

WHAT A PRIVILEGE IT is to speak on such a powerful lectureship as this! I am very honored to be a part of this edifying and uplifting work. A special thanks is extended to the elders, brother Clarke, and the entire Southaven congregation for all they do to further the cause of the Lord in efforts like this.

Our assigned topic for this lecture is “What Women Can Do For Jesus.” Our text contains subject material exclusive to Luke’s account of the Gospel:

And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance (Luke 8:1-3).

Introduction

Godly women have been praised in both the Old and New Testaments. Through their wonderful examples, we gain perspective on what God wants us to be as Christian

women—the passage cited above is a case in point. As the Lord continued His ministry, He was assisted by His disciples and supported by godly women.¹ In the background of Luke 8:2-3, we know that these particular women were healed of their infirmities by our Lord. Many opinions have been given concerning the seven devils that were cast out of Mary Magdalene. Setting aside those speculations, we do know without doubt that Jesus healed her, and she, in turn, faithfully followed the Lord. It was Mary Magdalene who was at the foot of the cross, saw the resurrected Lord, and told the disciples that He had indeed risen.

We read of Mary standing at the tomb and weeping because she did not see the body of Jesus. Instead, she saw two angels in white, one at the head and the other at the feet of where they had laid the Savior. When the angels asked Mary why she was crying, she told them that she could not find the Lord's body. I wonder: would we have been like Mary in that we would have tried to search for the body of Jesus? Perhaps she spent several sleepless hours waiting for the moment she could go to the tomb and once again care for her Lord.

Note the following encounter and conversation Mary had with the resurrected Christ:

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master (John 20:14-16).

Are we not moved by Mary's display of emotions—especially when she realized that the Person to Whom she was speaking was not the gardener, but the risen Lord

Himself? I am sure that, when Jesus told her to go and tell the others the good news, she never hesitated for a moment. There would have been nothing else more important than telling those disciples that Jesus had been resurrected.

Thus, what a list of faithful acts are given to Mary's credit! But, what about us? Are we as eager to tell others about Jesus as Mary was to tell what she had witnessed? Do we put things of this world above telling others what to do about the importance of salvation?

Joanna,² who is mentioned only twice in the book of Luke, was the wife of Chuza, one of Herod Antipas's³ stewards. Jesus had also healed her along with Susanna. No doubt her loyalty to Jesus caused much havoc in her life, as she sought to serve the Lord. However, it seems that pressure from others never discouraged her nor kept her from doing that which was right.

Very little is known about Susanna; in fact, our text is the only time she is mentioned in all of Scripture. However, she is cited in good company, and what a compliment to be one who, in a special way, ministered to Christ!

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna set before us marvelous models of serving Jesus. Joy and thankfulness for what our Lord has done should motivate us to take up our cross and follow Him. They sacrificed time, money, and energy to fulfill their commitment to help the Lord. What about us? What can we do? Women today have a significant role in the Lord's church. We can and must be contributors to the kingdom of God. Before we begin our journey with Christ, we must be righteous; the women in our text were cleansed of evil sicknesses. To draw a parallel, we must be cleansed from our sins by becoming children of God. God's plan of salvation to make us right is very simple. We must hear the Word of God (Acts 2:37).

We must believe and confess that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 10:9-10), turn away from evil and repent of our sins (Acts 2:38), be buried with our Lord in baptism (Mark 16:15-16), and live a faithful life (Jas. 1:12).

In this study, we would like to consider a few ways that we, like these women mentioned in this passage, can minister unto Jesus. Although we are not in the personal presence of the Lord, as these women were, we do walk with the Lord nonetheless in a spiritual sense.

A Woman's Contribution In Benevolence

How often has it been said, and how true, "Nobody cares how much you know—until they know how much you care."⁴ How imperative that we demonstrate compassionate Christianity to an often cold and cruel world! In fact, ministering to people who are in need, such as those who are sick or imprisoned, is a service rendered unto the Lord Himself: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). The Bible tells us that our religion must be "pure and undefiled before God," and we are to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (Jas. 1:27). Christian women are to be zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14). We should never become idle in performing noble deeds simply because we do not lead in a public role as do men. On the Day of Judgment, we will give an account of every work, whether it be good or bad (Eccl. 12:14): "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17). We should also encourage others to do good works (Heb. 10:24). Involving others in the work of the church can and will help all of us remain faithful and steadfast.

Women bring a sense of grace and beauty to the benevolent work of the church. We add special touches in preparing meals, caring for the elderly, and assisting young

mothers who bring their newborns home. Our hearts are often filled with emotions and compassion that are second nature to us. Making clothes, baby-sitting, and cooking are skills that are usually done by women.

Once a month our congregation goes to the nursing home to sing with the patients. During a particular visit, I saw a sister in Christ from another congregation visiting with one of the residents. This Christian lady was applying lotion to a woman who could not do for herself. When the good sister left, the elderly lady just kept rubbing over her hands and arms while talking to herself. It was obvious how much that small amount of time and lotion meant to her! That sister in Christ might have considered hers to have been a small and insignificant deed; however, it meant so much to the person that received that warm display of genuine kindness.

We may open our homes with hospitality as did Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). This can be a great asset to visitation programs, youth meetings, and meals during Gospel meetings, or just simply fellowshiping with one another.

It is usually the women who gather food for the needy or sick in both the home and in the hospitals. Our local hospital allows area churches to distribute snacks and personal care items to the Intensive Care waiting room, where family members have gathered in time of crisis—usually not wanting to leave their loved one's side. Women in the church can make up such necessity packets and, at the same time, provide good spiritual tracts for reading. This small amount of aid provided can go a long way in helping people cope with such stressful situations, and just might influence one to obey Christ!

A wonderful example of benevolence is that of Dorcas; in fact, selflessly devoting her life to helping others is the way we remember her. Dorcas realized her need to help

the widows and orphans in Joppa. Realizing that she could not prophesy as others or miraculously heal the sick, Dorcas concentrated on the talent and ability with which she had been blessed. However, Dorcas became ill and died. How heartbroken were those whom she had helped and loved during her life! At the time of her death, Peter was in Lydda, not far from Joppa; he was summoned and told not to delay. He came to mourn with the people in Joppa who were weeping and showing the garments which Dorcas had lovingly made with her sweet, generous hands. Peter asked the people to leave the room, and then knelt down to pray:

But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, "Tabitha (Dorcas), arise." And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord (Acts 9:40-42).

What wonderful results the life of Dorcas produced! Because she used her abilities to serve others, she also served the Lord. Could such be said of us today? Do we influence those around us in ways that would win them to Christ? People won't hear our words until they see Christ's love demonstrated by our good works. May we realize that any work that a woman does in the area of benevolence is a powerful contribution to the work and reputation of the kingdom of God, and that we should take advantage of every available opportunity to do just that.

A Woman's Contribution In Edification

Edification is an essential work in building up the body of Christ. We are to "Bear one another's burdens, and

so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Christians are to “Comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11). We are to “Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak” (1 Thess. 5:14). There is no doubt that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others heard and witnessed discouraging times while traveling with the Lord and the twelve men with Him. At times they may have been called upon to be listeners and offer encouraging words.

Women can do so much to edify the church. In Romans 16, Paul lists a number of women who helped to build up the kingdom. Phoebe was simply a servant whom Paul sent to deliver a letter to the church in Rome. Even though she made a difficult journey, she was eager and willing to be an ambassador for Paul. Phoebe knew and understood that, by assisting Paul, she would indeed be ministering unto Jesus to further His Word. We also read of Priscilla, who risked her own life to help Paul in his mission to further the Gospel. Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and the beloved Persis were among those who labored with Paul. These women realized that they could make a difference and what wonderful examples they provide for us!

Teaching is another way that women can edify in the kingdom of God; every sister in Christ should be able to tell others how she became a child of God. No matter our gender, we are all teachers, since people in general teach others by the example they live everyday, whether it be good or bad. We are not limited in opportunities to instruct in such a manner. When we study the godly woman in Proverbs 31, we see teaching in everything she did. Women do not have to be in a Bible class setting to teach. It is commanded by God that we as parents train our children so that we can raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Grandmothers and mothers can educate children, as Lois and Eunice taught Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:14-15), who went on to become

a gifted herald of Truth. Indeed, Gospel preachers have often given credit to godly mothers who have helped influence them to become faithful preachers and encouraged them in their work.

Older women are to teach younger women:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (Tit. 2:3-5).

There are those who become Christians without having had the influence of Christian mothers and grandmothers. Godly sisters in Christ can do so much to encourage and build up these precious souls. It has been said that men are natural producers, and women are natural nurturers. With so many dysfunctional families and emotional problems today, the gift of encouragement and nurturing is a vital way that women can minister unto Jesus. What better homes children would have if mothers took the responsibility of teaching them more seriously—some children are starving for this type of instruction!

The church of our Lord needs more dedicated teachers in Vacation Bible Schools, Bible classes, ladies' classes, and home Bible studies. Students in these classes need teachers that are prepared, on time, and realize the importance of this great work. As a mother of two young children, I want my children to have dedicated and faithful Bible class teachers. I found the following article very appropriate for all who are teaching and those who desire to teach a Bible class:

Wanted: Teachers

Who believe in the truths of the Bible. Who have a vision of the future and are willing to help

build it in the character of children. Who have convictions and not impressions only. Teachers who realize the urgent need of the young in their fight for culture and character, and will engage, with them, in the battle. Who can smile under criticism, who can carry on when others fail, who can look beyond and wait. Who are willing to make sacrifices of their time and their inclinations that others may be benefited; who are thus willing to repay part of the debt they owe others who taught them in years gone by. For such service what shall be the reward? Hard work? Lack of appreciation? Hours of discouragement? Unmerited criticism? Yes, all these and more, but in the end victory, and for every honest effort the Master's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"⁵

Let us remember, however, that Bible class teachers are no substitute for parents in the home. While children learn so much from dedicated Bible class teachers who take their responsibility very seriously, we as parents are commanded to teach our children diligently (Deut. 6:7). Children deserve to be taught Christian principles; an excellent way to do so is by having regular family devotionals in the home. How true it is, "The family that stays together, prays together."⁶

A Woman's Contribution In Evangelism

The Great Commission was given by our Lord to go and teach all nations about salvation (Matt. 28:19-20). Therefore, evangelizing the world is an imperative work! The Gospel is God's power to save, so it must be shared with everyone (Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16). Even though woman was never given the authority to "preach" as would a Gospel preacher, she still can be an effective servant in leading people to Jesus.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, as well as others, contributed a great amount of support while Christ was preaching the kingdom. Another example of aiding

the Gospel cause is Lydia's providing hospitality to Paul and Silas while in Thyatira, and yet another is that of the Samaritan woman who was instrumental in converting many people to Christ—she chose to tell others about the Gospel (John 4:28-31; John 4:39-42).

Priscilla is another classic example of a woman contributing in the realm of evangelism. She and her husband, Aquila, provided a place for Paul to stay during his ministry at Corinth (Acts 18:1-4); both hosted congregations in their home (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5). Priscilla was instrumental in helping to gently correct Apollos at Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26). Indeed, many souls have been saved, and congregations started, through the evangelistic efforts of godly women.

To prove a point, consider the following wonderful tribute given by brother Flavil Nichols:

“The Influence of...Only One”

During the War Between the States, a young woman learned the truth and obeyed the Gospel. Her sweetheart, J. H. Halbbrook, was a Confederate soldier. He was captured by the Union Army and kept a prisoner in Michigan until the war was over. He was given a ticket to Nashville and \$2.50; and from there he returned to Centerville and found what was left of his home and family. He was reunited with his girlfriend, and they were married.

Mr. Halbbrook's new wife studied the Bible with him, and he soon became a Christian. He thought the truth was so good and so simple that he began to teach and baptize many of his friends and neighbors. Then he began to preach, but he recognized his need for more training, so he enrolled in Mars Hill Bible School and was taught by T. B. Larimore.

Upon completing his studies at Mars Hill, Mr. Halbbrook and his wife chose to move farther south rather than going back to Tennessee, and they went into the counties of Walker, Marion, Fayette, and Lamar counties in Alabama. Of his

many converts were Charley Alexander Wheeler and his wife. Mr. Wheeler, after obeying the Gospel, soon began preaching to others. He started more than 100 congregations, and he baptized more than 6,000 people.

But wait—the story does not end here! One of those 6,000 baptisms was my father, the late Gus Nichols. And under my father’s preaching 12,000 people were baptized!

And how many of those 12,000 began to preach “the glorious Gospel of Christ”? No one can know the exact number, but I personally know several who did. I am **one** whom he baptized and whom he encouraged to preach the Gospel. And under my preaching about 3,000 have been baptized. Among that number a few have gone on to preach the Gospel.

Only eternity will reveal the total results of the conversion of **that one** girl during the War Between the States nearly 150 years ago. But at least 21,000 people have already become Christians through this single thread in the fabric of her influence.⁷

This example should motivate each of us to teach others. What a profound effect just one person can have in the kingdom of God! But again, what about us? Are we truly committed in going about our Father’s business? Remember our Lord gave the ultimate price in doing the will of the Father. What are we sacrificing? What are we contributing? Whom are we teaching?

Conclusion

There are so many things we as women can do for Jesus. Praying for the opportunity to serve God faithfully in all things should be our ultimate goal. Whatever we do day-by-day—in the home, at work, or in the world—should always bring glory to God. Christian women need to be involved in benevolence, edifying the spiritual, restoring the unfaithful, and taking an active part in evangelizing the world.

When godly women are active in the service of the Lord, using their unique talents and opportunities that are given to them, souls are saved, strengthened, and cared for in times of need. Because of this, the Lord's church is stronger, and the kingdom of God is expanded throughout the world. Too often, it has been said there isn't much a woman can do—perish the thought!

If we as Christian women fulfill all the responsibilities that God has given us, we won't have time for anything else. May there always be women in the church like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. May God help us as Christian women today to study these great examples from the past and live our lives accordingly!

Endnotes

1 Warren W. Wiersbe, **The Bible Exposition Commentary**, Volume 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), p. 199.

2 A succinct summary of what is known of Joanna and her devotion to Christ is found in a chapter written by Linda Brumley, "Joanna: A Gutsy Follower," **She Shall Be Called Woman** (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1998), pp. 80-89.

3 Herod Antipas was a powerful enemy of Jesus and His followers; through the conniving of his adulterous wife Herodias, John the Baptist was put to death (Matt. 14), and, if Herod had had his way, Jesus would have met the same fate (Luke 13:31).

4 Jess Moody, as quoted in **Quotable Quotations**, ed. Lloyd Cory (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 76.

5 Hallie Adams Kellogg, **The Woman Of God** (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation, 1962), p. 143.

6 E. C. McKenzie, **14,000 Quips & Quotes** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), p. 414.

7 Flavil Nichols, "The Influence of...Only One," as quoted in **The Gospel Light**, Volume 31 (Blue Springs, MS: Antioch church of Christ, June 14, 2000).

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